

10 Myths About College

Myth 1

It's better to get good grades than take challenging courses.

Sure, grades are important. However, colleges seek out students who challenge themselves academically and demonstrate intellectual curiosity. They don't want applicants content with taking the easy route. Admissions officers appreciate drive and determination. Applicants who display even moderate success in advanced classes will likely prove that they are ready to tackle college level courses.

Myth 2

Standardized tests (SAT, ACT, etc.) are more important than your grades.

While admissions officers certainly consider SAT and/or ACT scores, standardized tests don't typically hold more weight than your GPA. Colleges realize that grades are a better predictor of how you'll fare in the classroom. In fact, there are a growing number of test optional schools. The one caveat: some larger state institutions rely on quantitative data to determine an applicant's eligibility.

Myth 3

If you do poorly in ninth and/or tenth grades, you won't be able to get into a selective college.

Fear not; a poor showing early on in high school will not automatically land you in the rejection pile. Indeed, colleges can be sympathetic when it comes to rough starts. Students can overcome bad grades if they show marked improvement throughout their high school tenures. However, don't wait until senior year to start hitting those books. By then it'll be too late!

Myth 4

Extracurricular activities will compensate for poor grades.

Colleges certainly want well-rounded students. After all, they recognize that plenty of life and learning takes place outside the confines of a classroom. And they definitely look for candidates who will help contribute to a vibrant campus. That being said, academics are still a top priority. All the club memberships in the world won't excuse a low GPA.

Myth 5

You must decide on a career/major before you select a college.

College is all about exploration – both academic and personal. While it's good to have an idea of the disciplines and industries that interest you, there's absolutely no need to commit to anything before you even enroll. Aside from a small percentage of undergrads, most students don't usually declare a major until their sophomore years. And, even then, they are liable to change their minds.

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Myth 6

You should attend the most prestigious college that accepts you.

Don't make the mistake of equating "prestige" with "best." The highest rated university in the country might not actually prove to be a good fit for you. Instead, when you research colleges, look beyond mere rankings and ratings. Ask yourself important questions such as whether or not there are programs that interest you. Are there a lot of core and/or distribution requirements? Do those hold appeal? What's the teaching style like at a particular school? How competitive are the students? The happier you are at a college, the more likely you'll succeed.

Myth 7

You have a better chance of getting into graduate/professional school if you attend a university that offers that particular degree.

Simply attending a university that also has law, medical, etc. schools does not guarantee acceptance. In fact, most graduate programs do not give preferential treatment to applicants who received a bachelor's degree from the institution at large. If you think you might ultimately want to attend grad school, your best bet is to earn great grades (especially within your major) and take a challenging curriculum.

Myth 8

Liberal arts colleges do not have good science programs.

Contrary to the name, liberal arts colleges frequently offer robust science programs. While the number of science majors and available classes might be lower than a large university, undergrads can definitely receive a strong science education. And though more research might be conducted at a bigger school, small class sizes (at a liberal arts college) help to ensure lots of hands-on time in the lab and close professor relationships.

Myth 9

Only the best students receive financial aid.

Colleges strive to be affordable for all of their accepted students, no matter where you fall within the pack. After all, they've granted you admission so it stands to reason that they'd like you to be able to enroll. The only time academic success comes into play is when students apply for merit-based scholarships. In those situations, grades and intellectual achievements will definitely be considered.

Myth 10

State schools provide more financial aid than private colleges.

Public schools receive subsidies from their respective state governments and this allows them to maintain a lower sticker price. However, this doesn't necessarily translate to larger aid packages as well. In actuality, many state institutions are more likely to offer only loans to undergraduates who do not demonstrate a high need. Really, when it comes down to it, it's difficult to predict the kind of financial aid you'll receive. Sometimes the best option will come from a state university and sometimes it will come from a private college.