

Extracurricular Activities

Life Outside the Classroom

Sure, life in school is pretty interesting. You've got algebraic equations, Bunsen burners and vocabulary lists. But chances are you've got commitments outside school, too. Maybe you play on a sports team, perform in a band, do volunteer work or hold a part-time job.

Colleges Care

The good news is that colleges pay attention to your life both inside and outside the classroom. Yes, your academics come first, but your activities reveal a great deal about you. In addition to demonstrating your interests, they can show that you are able to:

- Make a meaningful contribution to something.
- Maintain a long-term commitment.
- Manage your time and priorities.

Maintaining a Balance

Colleges are not necessarily interested in students who do everything. "We're looking for a commitment to and a passion for an activity outside of the academic setting — we're looking for depth rather than breadth," explains Nanci Tessier, a college admission director.

Colleges don't have a checklist of requirements when it comes to extracurricular activities; they want to see your individuality — and your consistent commitment.

Haven't Gotten Involved Yet?

Many school, community and religious organizations give you chances to explore your interests and talents. There are lots of opportunities to try different things.

If you've got multiple interests, and have the time, try activities in more than one area. For example, write for the school paper as well as volunteering at the animal shelter.

School Activities

It's easy to find out about activities available at school. The challenge may be figuring out how much to do. Here are some quick tips:

- When you find something you like to do, stick with it.
- Don't worry about being president of the club, or captain of the team. The key is whether you've done something significant — center stage or behind the scenes.
- Give your all to each activity, and, most importantly, to your schoolwork.

Work Experience

Work experience — paid or volunteer, year-round or summer — can help you identify career interests and goals, gain skills, and apply classroom learning to the real world. It's also a great way to earn money for college. Consider arranging for an internship or to shadow some people at their workplaces.

Community Service

You can also gain skills and experience through volunteer work, such as by tutoring elementary school kids or spending time at a local hospital. Some schools even offer academic credit for volunteer work.