

"AVOIDING THE TEN MOST COMMON COLLEGE ADMISSION MISTAKES"

by Frank Burtnett, Ed. D.

Dr. Frank Burtnett, veteran counselor and educational consultant, has written extensively on the mistakes made by college-bound students in the exploration, decision-making and application process. Following are the errors that savvy admission professionals tell Frank are commonly made, ones that should be avoided at all cost:

Mistake # 1 - You miss the boat academically.

The single most importance factor in gaining admission to the college of one's choice is how well one performs in the most challenging college preparatory curriculum. Simple translation: Take tough subjects---do well in them!

Mistake # 2 - You ignore great resources.

In this age of the Internet and the information explosion, too many students still fail to "zero in" on the resources and information that can help them the most. Counselors, librarians teachers and even outside advisors can guide a student toward these resources. Seek their guidance.

Mistake # 3 - You follow the pack.

A student should explore colleges, make application and eventually enroll at the college that is best for him or her---not the one that their friends are considering. It's all about comfort and fit and the college you select should be the one that meets the student's personal criteria.

Mistake # 4 - You don't take the college for a test drive.

It is amazing how many college-bound students pursue their interest in a college or university without even looking at it "up close and personal." In order to take the pulse of an institution, one needs to go there, sit in on a class or two, eat in the cafeteria, attend a concert or athletic event ---even stay overnight in a dorm room if possible.

Mistake # 5 - You decide there is only one "right" college.

The last time I checked there were more than 3,500 two and four year colleges in the United States. So don't be upset if I don't buy into your idea that there is only "one" right one for you. Create an exploration list, followed by an application list of those schools that match up with your personal criteria. Take the broad view of your options before you begin to narrow your selection. It's amazing what you will learn.

Mistake # 6 - You make price your priority.

It's hard to look at colleges and not look at the price tag associated with each, but recognize a couple of things as you do. First, at some institutions upwards of two thirds of enrolled students are using financial aid in order to attend. Also, you don't really know the final cost until you exhaust all of the forms of financial assistance---many of which will bring down the final price.

Mistake # 7 - Your essay or interview "bomb".

If a college asks you to write an essay or sit for an admission interview, they are going to factor what you give them into their admission decision. The key here is to be yourself. Write about a subject that is close to you or you know something about. Be poised and curious in your interview and don't try to give answers you think the interviewer wants to hear.

Mistake # 8 - You let the dog eat your application.

Your application and supporting materials are all the admission staff or committee have to examine once the evaluation process begins. The application is your voice. Make certain it is complete, accurate and neatly prepared.

Mistake # 9 - You fail to manage time.

The college exploration, decision-making and application process are time consuming and come at a time when you have a lot of work to do in high school and many non-school things (i.e., concerts, athletic events, ski weekends, etc.) that can siphon away your time. Create a list of things that need to be done and a timetable for their accomplishment. Then practice good time management.

Mistake # 10 - You ignore the very allies that can help you.

Counselors and college admission and financial aid officers can be your greatest allies during this period. Use them, but remember you are not the only student they are helping. They are very good at what they do and you can benefit from having their expertise and understanding on your side.

If you have conducted a smart search and avoided the mistakes mentioned here, there is a strong likelihood that a letter of acceptance will find its way to your mailbox.