



Summer Activities to Strengthen Your College Application

College admissions officers will tell you that a “productive summer” can enhance your opportunities for admission. Interesting and meaningful experiences are definitely among the best ways to stand out in the crowd.

On many college applications, in addition to an activity sheet, there is a space to either list or briefly describe your summer activities. College admissions counselors want to know that you have spent your summers productively.

You don't have to travel or spend a lot of money to have an impact.

- You can show initiative by tutoring, mentoring, starting a business, organizing a club or community service initiative, or learning a new skill.
- You can demonstrate your intellectual side with an internship, research project, advanced coursework, or by writing for a periodical or a website such as Teen Ink, or a journal such as the Concord Review. You can even write your own book or play.

EMPLOYMENT: Many college admissions officers place a high value on work experiences. Students often learn important lessons on-the-job that make their way into interesting college application essays. In addition to learning how to be a good employee, and how to answer to someone else, students often gain valuable leadership experience through a part-time or summer job. Supervising other teens at the sub shop can be more significant and impressive than traveling to the Galapagos Islands. Some students find a job in an area of personal interest. For example, if your passion is playing soccer, then you may wish to find a job coaching or refereeing soccer, or working in the soccer department of a sports store.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP: Becoming an entrepreneur is another option. Some students launch their own website or computer-related businesses. Others teach music, tutor, or start their own service business such as: dog walking, pet sitting, house cleaning, home maintenance or video production. Aspiring entrepreneurs can learn valuable management and marketing skills.

INTERNSHIPS: Internships are wonderful opportunities for students to gain valuable experience and explore potential careers. Students interested in science or medicine may seek out research opportunities as a volunteer or intern at a local university, hospital or private lab. There are many types of internships: business, law, medicine, veterinary, fashion, psychology, media, photography, technology, teaching, theatre, politics, government and writing, to name a few. For those considering a government or legal career, some members of congress and state attorneys allow student interns to volunteer in their offices.

An unusual internship or job can make you memorable to an admissions officer. One student worked on a farm. Another organized a community gardening project with a diverse group of participants. A third student turned his love for magic into high-paying gigs as a close-up magician.

SUMMER CAMP: Working or volunteering, as a camp counselor, swim instructor or a CIT during the summer can be a worthwhile summer experience. The challenges of successfully interacting with staff and campers can be good material for college admission essays.

COMMUNITY SERVICE: Many community service opportunities can be pursued during the summer months. Some students become skilled at carpentry through volunteer work at Habitat for Humanity. Others develop marketing, management and communications skills by organizing charitable events or pursuing special projects such as developing a web site for a not-for-profit. For those living in South Florida, I suggest checking out: Teen Link (<http://www.southflorida.com/specialsection/teenlink/>) and VolunTeens (<http://www.volunteens.com/>)

ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT: There are many opportunities to take courses during the summer months. Some students learn on-line by taking a web-based class such as “Florida Virtual”. Others study at a local college through a high school dual enrollment program. Some students attend summer school at college or university. Enrichment Alley (<http://enrichmentalley.com/>) has an excellent summer guide listing many programs. You can also find information about course offerings in your area through your high school guidance office or by checking out websites for high schools in your area. Some high school websites have very comprehensive summer guides. Although many summer programs held on college campuses come with high price tags, keep in mind that some programs offer need-based financial aid. Dual enrollment classes taken at the nearest community college are often provided free to high school students.

MATH / SCIENCE / ENGINEERING: For students interested in studying science and math, there are many strong programs. The MIT admissions website (<http://www.mitadmissions.org>) has an excellent list. Some states have strong programs for their residents, such as the Young Scholars Program (<http://www.bio.fsu.edu/ysp/>) at FSU. There are numerous other programs to consider including: Cal Tech’s Young Engineering and Science Scholars program, the MITE program at the University of Texas, the ASM Materials Camp, the Bridge Program in Math & Science at Sewanee, the Summer Institute for Mathematics at the University of Washington and the Duke TIP, just to name a few.

MINORITIES: Black Excel (<http://www.blackexcel.org/summer-progs.htm>) has a list of programs in various locations.

ENVIRONMENTAL ENTHUSIASTS: Check out the American Hiking Society’s Volunteer Vacations and programs offered by the Student Conservation Corps.

TEEN TOURS AND TRAVEL: While some of these trips include a community service component, keep in mind that the experience will generally need to be special and transforming to make a difference for college admissions.

COLLEGE PREP: In addition to other worthwhile activities, summer is a great time to visit college campuses, refine your college list, make a spreadsheet with application components and deadlines, develop your resume and activity list, brainstorm essay prompts, write essays and prep for standardized tests.

How you choose to spend your vacation can have a definite impact on whether or not you are admitted to the colleges of your choice.

Good luck!

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