

TRANSFERRING

You are no longer the same person you were when you first applied to college the year before. You are indeed someone else, someone new and improved.

The transfer process is almost more intriguing than the regular admissions process. It too requires understanding the demands of each college, but this time the balance of components is shifted, with different weight and consideration given to the same criteria. For example, the SAT scores which were so important the first time around, counting for as much as 40% of the total package, were now anywhere between 0 and 15%. Why the change? Because the college transcript takes on greater importance. It shows what the SAT scores try to predict: how well a student does with his or her college academic work.

The two most important parts of the transfer applicant's admission package are the college transcript and the essay(s) or personal statement. Besides indicating grades and course load, the transcript shows if the candidate can indeed do the academic work demanded by the new college.

But of all the components in an application package, it is the essays that take on greater importance. In the earlier rounds, the essays can tip the balance for or against a candidate, but in the transfer process, the essays are key to showing how the candidate has matured and grown since high school. And they are usually read by at least three members of the transfer admissions committee.

While the reasons why the new school would be preferable to the old one are part of the questions to be answered, it is the strength of the main essay or personal statement which will have the greatest impact on the admissions committee.

Each college and university sets forth its own criteria for admissions, both during the regular freshman process as well as the transfer process. They give different weight, consideration and importance to the various parts of the transfer application, depending on what they deem will fit their needs and will meet their standards.

It also carries an almost ironic twist in its identification of those

requirements since colleges will now look for other things about the candidate than those components that were so important the first time. Applying as a freshman to college, the candidate has to have enormous strengths in certain areas and display little if any weakness in others. With transfers, it's almost as though the applicant should reflect how those earlier weaknesses have now become strengths and assets.

Depending on the college or university, the weight of the elements for a successful transfer application will vary. Although the total could exceed 100%, transfer criteria are generally as follows:

- College GPA gets 30-50% of the total, depending on the school. That will include 10% for the difficulty of the course load and 10% for the reputation of the current college.
- High school GPA will average 20%, but it will vary in significance. If it's a freshman transfer applying as a sophomore, it will have greater weight, usually between 25-30%; if as a sophomore transfer applying as a junior, between 10-20%.
- Interview (but only if it is evaluated) will range between 15-20%.
- Extracurricular activities will be about 10% of the total. If they are continued in college from high school, they will be given greater weight. They should also emphasize leadership and career interest.
- Recommendations, especially from college professors or deans, will be 10-20%. The recommendation should attest to the candidate's intellectual curiosity.
- The essays will be 20-30% of the assessment. If they are outstanding, they can jump in value to beyond 30%. Exceptional and well-written essays should show whom the candidate is beyond the other information found in the application.
- SAT and other standardized test scores are worth 0-15%.
- Geographic, racial and/or other diversity factors as well as demonstrated interest in the college are worth 10-15% of the total.

In addition to the above criteria, there are a few other factors which can add as much as 25% in "extra credit" to the final assessment. These elements can include research papers done in college, special creative or academic projects, career-related work or intern experience and/or other such supplemental (but appropriate) expertise and/or recognition.

Adding all of the percentage parts together can go well past 100%, but applicants are encouraged to go those extra distances because of the low rate of transfer acceptances at most colleges and universities, especially at the

Top Tier level. Because most colleges and universities know that transfers are looking to transfer “up,” the reputation of the current school can factor into decisions. Subsequently, as candidates research possible colleges to transfer into, they should look closely at the transfer acceptance rate.

If the applicant is looking to move “up,” a transfer rate of at least 30% or better can help place the outcome between probable and possible. If the candidate has a particular college in mind, the applicant should develop a relationship with the person(s) in charge of transfers in the admissions office and/or the transfer counselor who is the one to field all questions. At schools where the transfer rate is below 30%, applicants had better be at the top of their game at their current colleges, preferably those looking to transfer “sideways” to a comparable school instead of “up.”

And there is one more important thing about transferring: financial aid. It comes with a caveat. Financial aid is easier to obtain during the regular admissions process and will not be transferred to the new college. Transfer students almost always will not be awarded financial aid at their new schools, except in the rare case. Subsequently, when applying as a transfer student, candidates should think twice about even requesting it since it can jeopardize their chances of being accepted. Whether it is right or not, financial aid students usually have to remain at their schools for all four years of college.

For those candidates who are re-applying to colleges where they were either waitlisted or denied admission, these same schools will look at them with fresh eyes. Admissions committees know that he or she is not the same person as in high school, but they’ll want to see growth and maturity and will not usually refer to the earlier application in most cases.

However, they want winners -- and if the candidate does not come across as one, then they’ll reconfirm their earlier assessment and deny him or her a second time. While there may be a certain prejudice against a transfer applicant who seeks to right a perceived wrong from an earlier rejection, a fair and open admissions committee will disregard such bias.

What is also interesting is that transfers are often reviewed by an entirely different group of assessors, ones who look for different criteria than do those reviewing incoming freshmen. For example, faculty can often be represented more strongly in transfer decisions, playing a more active role in reviewing and assessing candidates than for first-years where they defer to the wisdom of the admissions committee to fill their classes. Often, a candidate’s chances increase with transferring, provided that he or she has shown they are worthy of being reconsidered in a more positive light. But,

as in the first round of applications, it can still be a “crapshoot” for transfers.

Overall, the transfer applicant must emphasize his or her strong academic reasons for transferring. Just because a student isn't happy at his or her present college is not “just cause” to transfer; not getting a bid from a sorority, breaking up with a girlfriend, having roommate problems or being benched by the coach, while all valid, are not reasons enough. For example, a change in one's major concentration from economics to journalism or a preference for a smaller college campus as opposed to a large university setting would indicate strong needs to transfer.