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ABSTRACT

The participants conducted a survey of more than 200 four-year colleges and universities, asking Directors of Admissions to rank in order of importance 12 selected factors in the college admissions/evaluation process. The factors included, among others: rank-in-class, high school average, extracurricular activities, college interview and the counselor's letter of recommendation. A sample of high school students also ranked the order of importance of these factors. Eighty-two percent of the schools returned the completed ballot (165/202 schools). The results indicated that the most important element in the college admissions decision was the student's achievement in high school, followed by SAT scores. The students impressions of the importance of the factors were generally accurate in reflecting the rank order established by the college admissions personnel. The participants feel that the order of priorities of the college admissions personnel is misplaced: counselors opinions as "evaluators" of students are taken as more relevant than the direct evidence of scholarship and motivation that students themselves can present in interviews and in essays on college applications. It is recommended that counselors stop evaluating students and begin to help students to learn to evaluate themselves. (Author)



COUNSELING DEPARTMENT MAMARONECK HICH SCHOOL MAMARONECK, NEW YORK

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS 1975:

SURVEY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Alfred S. Greenberg John S. O'Brien



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COLLEGE ADMISSIONS 1975: SURVEY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This reports the results of a survey conducted this spring among college admissions personnel and students at Mamaroneck High School to determine: a) the order of importance of twelve (12) selected factors in the admissions process at the four-year colleges and universities surveyed, and b) our students' impressions of the order of importance of these factors in the admissions decisions made by four-year schools. Comparisons are made between the colleges' responses and the students' responses to the survey and recommendations are made based on the implications of the information gathered in the survey.

MAJOR FINDINGS

1. Responses from the colleges surveyed confirm that the most important element in the admissions decision continues to be the academic achievement of the student applicant in high school, based on the interrelated factors of high school average, courses taken in high school and rank-in-class. After achievement, aptitude test (SAT, ACT and RSE) scores rank next in importance for most four-year schools, followed by counselor and teacher recommendations, the applicant's extracurricular activities, the college interview, achievement test scores, student essay, alumni interview and "other" factors.



- 2. Colleges are generally consistent in their ranking of the order of importance of the selected admissions criteria whether the schools are considered to be very highly selective or less than highly selective in accepting students for admission.

 Appendix A summarizes the college responses according to the admissions selectivity of the schools surveyed.
- 3. The overall impressions of the MHS students surveyed are accurate in reflecting the order of importance assigned to the selected admissions criteria by the college admissions personnel responding to the survey. As might be expected, the impressions of the 11th and 12th graders surveyed are more in line with the admissions criteria priorities set by the colleges than are those of the 9th and 10th graders who are generally less actively involved in the college investigation/selection process than the upper class students. Appendix B summarizes the student responses according to the grade level of the students surveyed.



Table 1 compares the total student (Grades 9-12) and total college admissions personnel criteria rankings:

TABLE I
COLLEGE ADMISSIONS SURVEY

COMPARISON OF STUDENTS' RANKINGS AND COLLEGE ADMISSIONS PERSONNEL RANKINGS OF THE ORDER OF IMPORTANCE OF 12 SELECTED ADMISSIONS CRITERIA

RANK ORDER	TOTAL STUDENT RANKINGS	TOTAL COLLEGE RANKINGS
1	High School Average	High School Average
2	Courses Taken in H.S.	Courses Taken in H.S.
3	Aptitude Test Scores	Rank-in-Class
4	Rank-in-Class	Aptitude Test Scores
5	Teacher Recommendations	Counselor Recommendation
6	College Interview	Teacher Recommendations
7	Counselor Recommendation	Extracurricular Activ
8	Achievement Test Scores	College Interview
9	Student Essay	Achievement Test Scores
10	Extracurricular Activ	Student Essay
11	Alumni Interview	Alumni Interview
12	Other	Other

OTHER FINDINGS

1. The rank order of importance of the selected admissions criteria for some of the colleges surveyed reflect individual differences in emphasis from the total rankings. Appendix C contains the rank ordering of the selected admissions criteria made by each of the schools responding to the survey.



- 2. The four-year State University of New York (SUNY) colleges rely primarily on the student's high school average, rank-in-class and Regents Scholarship Examination (RSE) score in reaching an admissions decision although the other selected admissions criteria are used as supplementary data in some individual cases. One of the SUNY colleges commented: "We will use average and test score for bulk of admittees. In 10% discretionary we'll look to recommendations, essay and activities."
- 3. Student responses to the survey indicate a continuing apprehension and, to some extent, a concomitant overemphasis of the importance of aptitude test--primarily SAT--scores in college admissions evaluations. 9th, 11th and 12th graders rank SAT/ACT test results third and 10th graders vote them second place among the selected admissions criteria although the colleges themselves rank them fourth in importance. Across all grades, the students rank aptitude test scores ahead of rank-in-class, indicating both a lack of awareness of the colleges' priority of achievement over aptitude and a lack of knowledge of the dependent nature of this variable.
- 4. Students rank the college interview sixth in order of importance versus the colleges' 8th-place ranking of this admissions criteria. This disparity may reflect the students' concern with the personal exposure called for in the interview situation. It may also reflect the students' expectation

that this face-to-face encounter should have a greater bearing on the admissions decision than some of the other factors.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SURVEY

The ballot reproduced below was mailed in April of this year, along with a covering letter and a pre-addressed, stamped return envelope, to the Director of Admissions at each of the 202 four-year colleges and universities to which MHS seniors had applied as of February 3, 1975. The ballot was also distributed to students in randomly selected 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grade Home Rooms in April and May where, at the same time, additional copies of the ballot, with an explanatory note, were given to students to take home for their parents to complete.

SAMPLE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS SURVEY BALLOT

GUIDANCE DEPARTMENT MAMARONECK HIGH SCHOOL Mamaroneck, New York

From your viewpoint, please rank, in order, the importance of the following twelve (12) factors in determining acceptance to a four-year college: (1 is the most important factor, 2 the second most important, 12 the least important). Alumni Interview SAT or ACT Scores Courses taken in High School Student Essay . ___Counselor Recommendation ____Rank in Class Teacher Recommendations Achievement Scores High School Average Extracurricular Activities College Interview Other

Comments:



Responses were received from 176 of the 202 (87%) colleges contacted, with 165 of the schools (82%) returning the completed ballot as requested. A total of 200 student ballots were used in tabulating the survey results -- 50 from each of the four grade levels. No compilation of the ballots provided to parents was made since less than one dozen of these were returned. Rank order votes were weighted (12 points for a 1st place vote, 11 points for 2nd, 10 points for 3rd, etc.) and final rankings are based on these tabulations.

LIMITATIONS OF THE SURVEY

From the colleges' point of view, the principal limitation of the survey was the "forced choice" nature of the voting for the twelve (12) selected admissions criteria. Because of the interrelatedness of the admissions factors, eleven (11) of the colleges contacted found it impossible to provide a precise ranking of the criteria. This response from the Director of Admissions of a most selective eastern university is representative:

Our selection committees take into consideration all admissions credentials and make their final decision on the basis of every available piece of information.

Rank, credits, interviews, scores, honors, prizes,
letters of recommendation, activities, special talents and opportunities, in sum, all of these things help us to make what we hope is a judicious decision. While the admissions committee has very clearly defined criteria, it always treats every folder individually.



Among those schools who completed the ballot, many included cautionary comments along with their rankings: "This is a very difficult task because of the interrelationship of these factors;" "We do not use such a mechanical formula in our decisions;" "The above is very tentative;" "The first 9 of the items above are vital, and no decision on admission...is made without considering each of them very closely;" "It is difficult to say that 2 always ranks over 3, etc. We 'read' applications and attempt to decide on the basis of total information." The final comment of another admissions officer at the bottom of his completed ballot, seemed to sum up these reservations: "Roughly this!"

Appendix C illustrates the method that some admissions personnel used to deal with the dilemna of making choices: in some cases, several items are ranked "1" or "2"; in others, only a few criteria are ranked at all and the remaining items are left blank. The effect of such voting patterns on the final tabulations, which accepted the exact votes made by the schools even if this meant counting more than one "first place" vote, should be kept in mind when considering the rank order of the summary results.

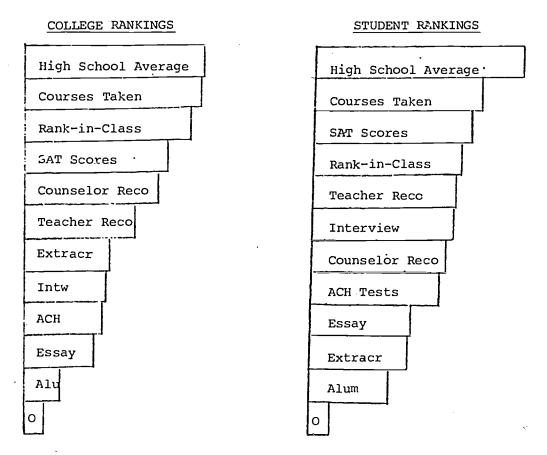
A second limiting factor in interpreting the survey results is the uneven variation in the weighted vote tallies which, in some cases, means that the number of points separating the 5th, 6th and 7th place items is not as great as the margin between



the first and second place items. The graph below illustrates the relative standing of the admissions criteria in the final computed rankings:

TABLE II
COLLEGE ADMISSIONS SURVEY

GRAPHED COMPARISON OF WEIGHTED VOTE RANKINGS OF STUDENTS AND COLLEGE ADMISSIONS PERSONNEL OF ORDER OF IMPORTANCE OF 12 SELECTED ADMISSIONS CRITERIA





Third, it should be noted that the rankings provided on the college ballots often represent a consensus among the admissions office personnel at a particular school. This summary vote may or may not reflect the individual priorities of each member of the admissions committee who reads an application. One Director of Admissions commented: "It is difficult to be helpful about this since there are faculty members of the Board of Admission who might rank these qualities differently." One might also It is easy to imagine how the rank order of admissions priorities might be shifted substantially if the candidate happened to have the qualifications to fill a Music Department's need for a cellist for the school orchestra or the football coach's requirement for a speedy end. Indeed, similar examples of such special situations were provided by several of the admissions personnel responding to the survey. Finally, it should be pointed out that although the twelve (12) admissions factors selected for inclusion on the ballot seemed to cover the major criteria used in the admissions process (only 17 of the 165 schools completing ballots added a specified "other" item to the form), the selection of these factors was made a priori without a pre-test sampling to determine their comprehensiveness and validity. Perhaps, for example, if "Academic Calibre of High School" had been one of the items included on the ballot it might have outranked one of the other factors listed.



DISCUSSION

In designing and executing this survey, a key motivation was the desire to clarify the actual significance to college admissions personnel of what might be considered the secondary factors in the admissions evaluation process. We had assumed, as the survey confirmed, that the achievement factors of high school average, courses taken in high school and rank-in-class were the most important factors in the college admissions decision, followed by aptitude/SAT results. The area of uncertainty concerned the relative standing of the secondary factors: How important are a student's extracurricular (At a meeting of tenth-grade parents this spring, activities? several mothers supported the suggestion that the school should require their children to join school clubs and activities since they felt that such participation was so important in gaining admission to "good" colleges); How important is the letter of recommendation from the counselor? (Do we really "get" kids into colleges?), and so on.

The results of the survey reveal facts concerning some of these secondary factors that we find rather disturbing. The survey indicates, for example, that the counselor's recommendation is not a minor factor at all but is an important element in the admissions decision-making process. For colleges in general, the counselor's letter is outranked in importance only by the three interrelated achievement factors and SAT scores; for the



"most selective" schools, the counselor's recommendation is tied with SAT scores for fourth place. The college interview, student essay and alumni interview, on the other hand, are ranked 8th, 10th and 11th respectively among the twelve selected admissions criteria.

As counselors, we find these results disturbing since we feel that the criteria used to evaluate a student for admission to a particular college should be those which provide the most direct evidence of the student's potential for a successful college experience. While counselors can sometimes provide helpful and even insightful thoughts on a particular candidate, it seems inappropriate both in terms of a logical admissions decision and in terms of the non-judgemental nature of the professional counselor's role, to weigh our opinions more heavily than the direct evidence of scholarship and motivation that students can provide in their private college interviews and in their personal essays on college applications. Some explanation for this apparent reversal of priorities was provided in a telephone call from a college Dean of Admissions that was stimulated by the receipt of our survey letter. discussing the order of importance he assigned to the counselor's letter of recommendation, he pointed out that the main reason why his highly selective school ranked the counselor's essay higher than that submitted by the student applicant was the poor



quality of most students' essays.

"Some of our most able candidates, in terms of grades and board scores," he commented, "can't seem to write a decent paragraph. If we were to judge students on their writing alone, we'd turn away half of our strongest candidates." Indeed, since he felt that the quality of students' essays on applications was deteriorating, the Dean predicted that counselors' letters would become even more important in admissions decisions in the future. He indicated that he wished it were otherwise: certainly a well thought out statement written by the candidate is much more relevant and useful than a letter from a second party, such as the counselor, where the admissions decision might be influenced more by the literary skill of the counselor than by that of the student applicant. In the absence of quality writing by students, however, he felt there was no choice but to rely on the evaluations of others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We feel that our primary role as counselors is to work with students to help them to understand themselves, to accept themselves and to accept responsibility for the decisions and outcomes of their lives. In college counseling, we can carry out this role by helping students to become more aware of their interests, abilities and values, to formulate an educational/vocational life plan and to select an institution of higher learning that they feel will prepare them to meet the needs of their life plan.



In order to achieve these goals, we feel it will be necessary to revise the manner in which high schools and colleges deal with student admissions. Specifically, we recommend that more attention should be paid at both the secon by and post-secondary levels to introducing, developing and evaluating the kind of life-coping skills that will enable structures to maximize their academic and vocational potential. Fundamental to this approach is the belief that counselors should not evaluate students but should help students to evaluate themselves.

In high schools, counselors should work with students to help them to develop the self-knowledge and self-awareness that is the prerequisite for successfully dealing with the demands of college selection and admission. Various individual and group counseling modalities could be utilized to help the student to confront the challenges of self-insight, values clarification, decision-making and qoal-o_iented personal planning. The benefits of such personal growth experiences, combined with the increased self-confidence and composure that can result from the use of techniques such as role-playing, should be evident in improving the efficiency of the student's selection of a college and in strengthening the effectiveness of the student's handling of the college visits, interviews and alumni encounters which influence admissions decisions. In dealing with the essays and other written responses called for on college applications, we propose that secondary school counselors work closely with academic .



departments within their schools, such as the English Department, to develop an interdisciplinary program that would help students to translate the greater self-awareness gained from their counseling experiences into a lucid, and grammatically acceptable, writing style.

In colleges, we recommend that admissions officers make greater use of the opportunities provided in college and alumni interviews to get to know students in a meaningful way. Such a shift in emphasis might necessitate a re-training of admissions and alumni personnel in the listening and communications skills that make for an effective interviewer. The benefits to be gained from more effective student selection would seem to make such an investment in time and effort more than worthwhile, however. Additionally, if the high schools are doing their job, colleges should be receiving more student visitors who po. ss the skills to participate in a meaningful interpersonal exchange. symbiotic benefits should result from the work done at the secondary level in preparing students to write more effective applications, thus permitting colleges to review essays and other written exercises that should be more representative of the true ability of the students submitting them.

In summary, we are suggesting that colleges and high schools take a new look at the total admissions procedure and consider a new approach that would focus a greater emphasis on the individual student, with counselors, in high school guidance and in college



admissions offices, playing a more supportive role that would allow the entire college selection and admissions process to be conducted, we feel, in a more honest and realistic light that should benefit students and all of us who are involved in its operation.



COLLEGE ADMISSIONS SURVEY
RANK ORDER OF SELECTED ADMISSIONS CRITERIA, AMONG TYPES OF COLLEGES SURVEYED APPENDIX A

TOTAL	H.S. AVERAGE	COURSES TAKEN	RANK	SAT SCORES	COUNSELOR	TEACHER	EXTRACURRICULAR	INTERVIEW	ACHIEVEMENT	STUDENT ESSAY	ALUMNI	OTHER
MOST SELECTIVE	RANK/CLASS	H.S. AVĘRAGE	COURSES TAKEN	TIE: SAT &	COUNSELOR	TEACHER	ACHIEVEMENT	STUDENT ESSAY	EXTRACURRICULAR	INTERVIEW	ALUMNI	OTHER
HIGHLY SELECTIVE	COURSES TAKEN	H.S. AVERAGE	RANK/CLASS	SAT SCORES	COUNSELOR	ACHIEVEMENT	TEACHER	EXTRACURRICULAR	STUDENT ESSAY	INTERVIEW	ALUMNI	ОТНЕК
VERY SELECTIVE	COURSES TAKEN	H.S. AVERAGE	RANK/CLASS	SAT SCORES	COUNSELOR	TEACHER	EXTRACURRICULAR	STUDENT ESSAY	INTERVIEW	ACHIEVEMENT	TIE: ALUMNI &	OTHER
SELECTIVE	H.S. AVERAGE	COURSES TAKEN	RANK/CLASS	SAT SCORES	COUNSELOR	TEACHER	INTERVIEW	EXTRACURRICULAR	ACHIEVEMENT	STUDENT ESSAY	ALUMNI	OTHER
SCHCUL NOT CATEGORIZED	H.S. AVERAGE	COURSES TAKEN	RANK/CLASS	SAT SCORES	COUNSELOR	TEACHER	INTERVIEW	EXTRACURRICULAR	ACHIEVEMENT	STUDENT ESSAY	ALUMNI	OTHER
RANK ORDER	-1	7	က	4	Ŋ	9	7	ω	6	10	11	12



APPENDIX B
COLLESS ADMISSIONS SURVEY
RANK ORDER OF SELECTED ADMISSIONS CRITERIA AMONG FOUR GRADE LEVELS OF STUDENTS SURVEYED

STUDENT POLL

ଝ ଠା	RANK ORDER	GRADE 9	GRADE 10	GRADE 11	GRADE 12	TOTAL
•	H	HIGH SCHOOL AVG	HIGH SCHOOL AVG	HIGH SCHOOL AVG	HIGH SCHOOL AVG	HIGH SCHOOL AVG
-	5	COURSES TAKEN	SAT SCORES	COURSES TAKEN	COURSES TAKEN	COURSES TAKEN
٠	8	SAT SCORES	COURSES TAKEN	SAT SCORES	SAT SCORES	SAT SCORES
•	4	RANK IN CLASS	COLLEGE INTERVIEW	TEACHER RECO	RANK IN CLASS	RANK IN CLASS
-	2	COLLEGE INTERVIEW	RANK IN CLASS	TIE: RANK &	TEACHER RECO	TEACHER RECO
7	ر د	COUNSELOR RECO	ACHIEVEMENT TESTS	COUNSELOR RECO	COUNSELOR RECO	COLLEGE INTERVIEW
	7	TIE: ACHIEVEMENT &	TEACHER RECO	COLLEGE INTERVIEW	COLLEGE INTERVIEW	COUNSELOR RECO
	8	TEACHER RECO	COUNSELOR RECO	ACHIEVEMENT TESTS	STUDENT ESSAY	ACHIEVEMENT TESTS
	6	STUDENT ESSAY	STUDENT ESSAY	EXTRACURRICULAR	EXTRACURRICULAR	STUDENT ESSAY
10	0	EXTRACURRICULAR	EXTRACURRICULAR	STUDENT ESSAY	ACHIEVEMENT	EXTRACURRICULAR
٦	-1	ALUMNI INTERVIEW	ALUMNI INTERVIEW	ALUMNI INTERVIEW	ALUMNI INTERVIEW	ALUMNI INTERVIEW
Н	2	OTHER	OTHER	OTHER	OTHER	OTHER



APPENDIX C

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS SURVEY
RANK ORDER OF SELECTED ADMISSIONS CRITERIA BY INDIVIDUAL COLLEGES RESPONDING TO SURVEY

Other		1122 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1	12
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College		10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 10 1	10
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Courses Taken		1 1 8 1 1 8 1 1 8 1 1 1 8 1 1 1	ო
HS Avg		2 1 2 2 1 1 1 1 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 1	7
	Most Selective Colleges*	Amherst Barnard Brandeis Brown Bryn Mawr Carleton Columbia Harvard Mt. Holyoke Oberlin Princeton Swarthmore Smith Vassar	Sub-total

**Tie

a Unspecified

b Unusual Talent

 $^{\mathtt{c}}$ Alumni child status, geography, academic area of interest, etc.



APPENDIX C (Continued)

Other	2)		i o i	12a 12a	12 ⁴ 11 ⁸	1 i i	1 1	12 ^a -	12a	1	12ª -	ı	1 1	. B.C.	7 I	12
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	Highly Selective Colleges*	Albany (SUNY) Allegheny Bates Bennington	Binghamton (SUNY) Boston University	Carnegie-Mellon Clark	Colby (Maine) Colgate Dickinson	Duke · Emory	Franklin & Marshall Georgetown	Hobart Kenyon	Lafayette Lehigh	New York U U. of Penn.	U. of Rochester R. P. I.	Sarah Lawrence	Trinity (Conn.) Tufts	Vanderbilt William & Marv	William Smith	Sub-Total

^aUnspecified ^bAwards, Talent



APPENDIX C (Continued)

	Avg	Courses Taken	Class	Scores	Couns	Tchr Reco	Extra- crclr	College Intervw	Ach Tests	Stdnt	Alumni Intrvw	Other
Very Selective Colleges*					·							
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Ohio Wesleyan	7	7	m	Ŋ	4	9	7	ω	11	. თ	10	d _C L
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Polytech (Brooklyn	1	Н	Т	Т	7	7	1	ო	2) [1	J.
Rollins College	7	П	м	Ŋ	4	10	8	9	7	თ	11	4 I
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Other	·	69 11 12b 31 11*	
Alumni Intrvw		5 8 11 10 12 11	
Stdnt		2 6 11 10 8	
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College		4 ト ト の の の	
Extra- crclr		3 8 11 7	
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Class		0 m u m u m	
Courses Taken		1 22211	
HS Avg		7 9 1 1 7 1 7 1	
	Very Selective Colleges* (Continued)	Sweet Briar Syracuse Wake Forest Wheaton U. of Wisconsin Sub-Total	

Special Interests and Talents Personal Attributes a Work Experience b ".-- Unspecified

forades in specific courses and Grade Pattern, ascending or declining
H.S. Course Grades in 9, 10, 11, 12th year Math, English and in two "Laboratory" Sciences
good Health
h Specific consideration is given to children of Alumni

High School Graduation



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	Selective Colleges*	Alfred American U.	U. of Bridgport Brockport (SUNY)	Colorado State	U. of Connecticut	Cortland (SUNY)	U. of Detroit	Drake	Elmira	Fairleigh Dickinson	Fredonia (SUNY)	Furman	Geneseo (SUNY)	Hartford	Iona	U. of Maine (Orono)	Marist	U. of Maryland	Michigan State	U. of Minnesota	New Paltz (SUNY)	Northeastern	Norwich-Vermont	Oneonta (SUNY)	Oswego (SUNY)



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	Selective Colleges* (Continued)	Platisburgh (SUNY) Potsdam (SUNY)	Randolph Macon	U. of Rhode Island	Rhode Is. College	Rider	Bonaventur	St. Michael's (Vt.)	So. Conn. State	Thiel	Upsala	Utica College	U. of Vermont	Villanova	V. P. I.	Westfield State	C. of White Plains	Wilkes	Windham	•	Sub-total

Academic calibre of the H.S.



a Unspecified

(Recommendations) from other school personnel (faculty & Staff): e.g., Principal, coach

(Community Activities, Part-time Employment, etc.

APPENDIX C (Continued)

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	Colleges Not Categorized*	A. I. C.	Annhurst	Ashland	Averett	Bentley		Burralo College	(XNOS)	Caldwell	City U. of N.Y.	Curry	East Tenn State	Fitchburg State	Florida Tech	Indiana State	Jacksonville U.	Johnson State	Keane State	Lynchburg	Maritime College	Marymount (Va.)		Montclair State	Nathaniel Hawthorne	New York Tech	Northern Colorado	Ohio State	Pace (Westchester)



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	Colleges Wot Categorized* (Continued)	C. W. Post Purchase (SUNY) Quinnipiac Roger Williams St. John's (NY) St. Leo Santa Cruz, U. Cal. Southern Illinois Springfield Syracuse (SUNY) Tampa Trinity (Vt.) Westchester State	Sub-total	TOTAL COLLEGES

a Unspecified

b Unspecified

School Attended (We look at the percentage of students attending two and four-year colleges)

Anth/Science Average

Audition/Portfolio (for Performing Arts/Visual Arts applicants only).

* The "Most Selective-Highly Selective-Very Selective-Selective-Not Categorized" college admissions classification scheme is based on the Selectivity Index appearing in the 1974 Edition of the Counselors' Comparative Guide to American Colleges, by James Cass and Max Birnbaum, published by Harper & Row, New York City.

