

DHSPA SPONSORED COLLEGE PANEL - OCTOBER 20, 2011

Lynn Koobusch of the Programs committee introduced Phyllis Weihs who will moderate tonight's panel discussion on the college process. Phyllis introduced the panel: Susan Waters, Assistant Director of Admissions at Duke University (DU), Ian Harkness, Associate Director of Admissions at Gettysburg College (GC), Ann Brown, Director of Admissions at Union College (UC), and Craig Dionne, New England Regional Director of Admissions at University of Denver.

Q: Can you describe how an application is reviewed in your office, what is weighted more heavily?

UD: Apps are read by territory and all travel is also by territory. One-half of the admission decision is based on the transcript and the strength of curriculum and the student's success at challenging themselves. 30% is based on SAT and ACT test scores. They superscore the SAT and take the highest individual score results of the ACT. The remaining 20% is based on the essay, the recommendations, and the activities. Read by 3 people. UD offers Early Action.

DU: They look at the curriculum choices made by the student, the grades earned., the SAT or the ACT. They look at 2 academic recommendations, essays, and activities outside the classroom. They have multiple readers on each application, most apps go to a committee. Interviews are optional and can be regional, they are non-evaluative. They will accept one additional recommendation.

GC: The first application review is random. Admissions officers grab a pile of applications and read through as many as they can; the first thing they look at is the essay. The second is the question on the supplement: *Describe a situation in which you have made a difference in your school or community and what you learned from that experience*. The third is the transcript, they look for challenging classes and good grades. The 2nd review is done by region. They highly encourage interviews. The third review will be done by committee. GC is test optional.

UC: They love extra information. The activities section is mandatory, the academic piece is extremely important, the quality of the essay is also important. There are 2 readers and 1 final reviewer.

Q: How do you feel about additional information, i.e. portfolios, video clips?

GC: They will send a portfolio to the art department, and musical talent is assessed by audition.

DU: Supplemental materials are forwarded to the appropriate department.

Q: Is legacy important?

UD: They acknowledge that being a legacy might make you more likely to attend if accepted. If you are a borderline student, it might move you toward acceptance.

GC: Same as UD.

UC: They do take into consideration legacy applicants. They consider a legacy a part of the Union College family.

DU: As an anecdote, the saying in the Admissions world is: a legacy can heal the sick but it can't raise the dead.

Q: Does your college prefer an applicant who has received As in regular classes or Bs in honors/AP classes?

UC: A balance between the two is ideal. Students should take the hardest classes they can take and still remain successful.

GC: Take APs and get As (laughter! Take the hardest classes a student can take and still remain successful.

DU: Same as above.

Q: Let's talk about the essay; can you share with us a favorite essay? Can you tell if they have been doctored?

UD: The best essay will tell the admissions person something they did not know about the student and something they could not have found elsewhere in the application. It should be strong and it should be your own.

UC: The college is looking for the voice of a senior. It should be your own original construction; they suggest you review it three times.

DU: Try to avoid beautiful essays about someone else. If you must write about someone else, make sure you explore your attachment to this person. Let a friend read it and ask him/her to give you a 3 sentence summary of what your point is. If what they say is what you were trying to convey, then it is ready to go.

Q: Early Decision. What percentage of accepted students applied ED?

UD: They do not have ED. They have EA. 45% of their freshmen class applied EA. The acceptance rates are the same for EA and Regular.

DU: Last year, they had 29,200 applicants. They offered spaces to 27% of the ED applicants and 10% of the regular admissions applicants. Of the 1700 students matriculating, 1100 were regular admissions applicants and 600 were ED.

GC: They admit 40% of total applicants. The acceptance rate for ED students (and they have ED1 and ED2) is slightly higher.

UC: They received 5,000 applicants for 575 spots. 70% of ED applicants are admitted (athletics plays a factor) and 40% of regular applicants are admitted.

Q: Is there an advantage to submitting your application several weeks ahead of the deadline?

GC: Yes, get your application in early. There is more time to review it. They received 1,500 applications over the 2 days preceding the due date. It is hard to give each application their "due" in that case.

UC: Anywhere between 2 weeks and 1 month before the due date is great.

UD: For rolling admissions schools, the earlier the better.

Q: How do you meet your enrollment goals? How do you use the waitlist?

UD: We have a goal of 1,250 freshmen. The mix becomes a factor, % in state/out, % of color, % male/female, etc. In 2010/11 they took 12 kids off the waitlist, no one came off the waitlist in 2009/10. In 2008/9 they accepted 400 off the waitlist.

DU: They use the committee and the waitlist to round out their percentages. Last year, they asked 2,000 if they wanted to remain on the waitlist and 1,000 said yes. Of that 1,000, 100 were accepted. They always try to accept 10-15% from the Carolinas so the waitlist can help them accomplish that.

GC: They offer the waitlist to a few hundred students each year. They use the waitlist to build their class; they are looking to meet their goals as to students of color, musicians, athletes, male/female, etc. Last year they offered 400 students a position on the waitlist, 250 accepted. Of that, 25 were offered admission. While on the waitlist it is a good idea to keep in touch with the admissions counselor as it demonstrates interest.

Q: Do you track demonstrated interest (visits, phone calls)?

DU: They do not factor demonstrated interest except when pulling students from the waitlist.

UC: Be genuine. If you are going to engage an admissions counselor in a question or a discussion of the waitlist, be genuine. If you can't make a visit to Schenectady, be sure you visit when the rep is at DHS. If you can't attend the college visit at DHS, let the admissions rep know why.

Q: How do you treat community service opportunities?

UD: We like to see that the student has made good use of their time outside of the classroom. They assess the quality of their involvement in the activities in which they participate.

UC: If you volunteer with your church, if you are involved in scouting, if you are home and tending to an older family member, these are important activities to include.

Q: Has the economy affected how you evaluate applications?

GC: The economy has affected their aid packages. They have found that they cannot be need blind for 100% of their applicants. They are need blind for 90-95% of the applicants. For the last 5%, they sometimes need to think about how to give them money.

Q: Let's talk about GAP Years. If a student is considering a GAP Year program, when should they apply to your college?

UC: Their advice is that those students who are thinking about a GAP Year program should apply to UC in the fall of their senior year. If they decide to pursue a gap year, then UC will defer their admittance date.

Q: What part does athletics play at your school?

UD: Recruited athletes are pre-approved from the admissions office prior to any official visits. Coaches can appeal that pre-approval, honestly, sometimes gambles are taken.

DU: They follow every rule and guideline of the NCAA.

GC: Being a DIII school, coaches actively recruit student athletes. The admissions office works with coaches. The bottom line is that you have to have a reasonable expectation that the athlete will be able to succeed in the classroom.

UC: They are a DIII school for all sports except ice hockey (DI). They caution that all student athletes be realistic. They have had years where there are 40 aspiring lacrosse players, but only 7 spots.

Q: What is the impact of social media on the application process? Facebook? Twitter? Can it be a negative in the application process?

UC: They will sometimes look at an applicant's profile picture on Facebook to jog their own memory if they can't remember the applicant. They do recommend that you do not put personal information on College Confidential (a media website).

DU: They are not searching facebook for information about prospective students.

Q: Can you describe your most successful student?

UD: A student who works hard and plays hard (by that they mean enjoying everything the outdoors of Colorado has to offer).

DU: A student who has an academic drive, one who is competitive with themselves but not cut throat with others.

GC: A student who is very involved – in the classroom and outside the classroom.

UC: A student who sets goals and can meet their goals, a student who is purposeful and has a "stick to it" attitude.

Q: Does it help an applicant if they attend a summer program hosted by your college?

UD: They do not have summer programs.

DU: Participation will not help in admissions.

GC: They host programs but participation is not a factor in admissions decisions.

Q: How are your recent graduates doing?

GC: 95% of their recent graduates are either working or in graduate school. They have a great network of alumnae who welcome GC students to shadow them.

DU: Most of their graduates are either on Wall Street, the Peace Corps or Teach for America.

UC: 65% of their recent graduates are working, 30% are in graduate school.

UD: Nearly 100% of their engineering and business graduates are employed. They have recently doubled the size of their Career Services. One advantage they have is that Denver is a city of about 3 million people (similar to Boston). But there are only 6 colleges in Denver, so if you are interviewing for an internship or job, you don't have the same numbers of other students vying for the same position.

Q: How important is a college visit?

UC: They do note if you live within 2-1/2 hours or so and have not visited.

GC: A campus visit is very important as it reflects demonstrated interest. They have a 92-93% retention rate from freshman to sophomore year in part because they feel their students have visited and know what GC is all about.

Q: How do you handle transfers?

GC: With that retention rate they don't admit many transfers. They may accept 10-12 students as entering freshmen in the January following their high school graduation. They had 25 incoming sophomore transfers last year.

DU: A college visit is not a factor. Transferring into Duke is more competitive than undergraduate admissions. Last year they accepted 18 out of 700 candidates for transfer.

UD: They bring in 200 transfer students each year. Some of these students have spent a year at an accredited college and have reactivated their transcript.

Q: Can you get financial aid if you apply ED?

All schools agreed that the same financial aid package would be available.

UC: Families should be aware that there is now a requirement on all college websites that they have a Net Cost Calculator, which will tell you exactly what you need to earn to pay for college.

Q: Speak a little about recommendations and the essay.

All agreed that one guidance counselor recommendation and two (recent) teacher recommendations could be supplemented by one additional recommendation. The Common App has a 500 word limit on the essay. The Common App no longer cuts the essay off at 500 words so it is really more of a guideline. If you go over by a little it is okay.