



WHAT DOES HOLISTIC ADMISSIONS MEAN?

CASE STUDIES

HOLISTIC:

ho·lis·tic, adjective, \hō-'lis-tik\

Definition: relating to or concerned with complete systems rather than with individual parts.

(Mirriam-Webster)

Example of a holistic admissions statement: "...ensures goals are met by considering, among several indicators, demonstrated leadership qualities, awards and honors, work experience, involvement in community service, extracurricular activities and other special circumstances, such as family status, socioeconomic status and the applicant's race. The University does not consider any of these elements independently, nor does it assign each factor numerical points; rather, the University evaluates each applicant's file as a whole, using the provided information as context to evaluate the applicant's uniqueness as a candidate for admission."

TO BE OR NOT TO BE...

THE CRITICS

- “Too personal”
- Attaches decisions to “quality as a human being”
- “Dishonest... arrogant... to claim that they are entitled to pass judgment on the character of ... 17- and 18-year olds”
- “Cannot possibly rate ... personalities”
- “Unhealthy for anxious high school students”
- Uses “indefinable qualities”
- Origin in “suppression of ‘overrepresented’ minorities”
- “Selective discrimination” – “designed to help minority students only”

THE PROPONENTS

- Who the student is “as a person”
- “Take various sensitive factors into account”
- Acknowledges the process is “subjective but not arbitrary”
- “Provide opportunities to socioeconomically disadvantaged students”
- “Contributes to diversity of cultures, ideas, and perspectives while maintaining merit”
- “More vibrant communities.... More likely to succeed in the overall environment”
- Studies show ~90% reported unchanged or increased average GPA & test scores, 96% report grad rates unchanged or increased

SO WHAT DOES HOLISTIC ADMISSIONS INCLUDE?

- Academic record & curriculum quality
- Test scores
- Essay/writing
- Extracurricular activities
- Recommendations
- "Fit"

HOW DO WE LOOK AT THESE FACTORS IN AN APPLICATION?

Academic record & curriculum quality

- GPA
- Credit hours/distribution
- Rigor
- Grade trends

Test scores

- Improvement
- Within ranges of their HS and our college

Essay/writing

- Style (vocab, rhetoric, grammar, punctuation, spelling)
- Story (interesting, insightful)

Extracurricular activities

- Clubs, hobbies, community service, etc
- Applicable skill sets learned (Leadership roles / ability to find and build communities)
- Continuity

Recommendations

- Academic, extracurricular, and personal factors

“Fit”

- Demonstrated interest
- Interview
- Interests and passions align with university
- Other special qualities: athlete, world-class trombonist, etc

CASE STUDIES

In your assigned breakout group, review 3 applications to Fairbrook University:

- 3800 students from many states and countries
- 60% receiving financial aid
- Strong programs: arts, languages, political science, anthropology, economics, creative writing, engineering
- New athletics complex
- Residential college system; 90% living on campus
- 45% of applicants admitted (60% are from public schools, 40% independent/church)
- SAT Verbal range: 580-640 – SAT Math range: 600 to 720

Task: Admit one, Waitlist one, Deny one

RESULTS

Admit

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

Waitlist

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

Deny

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

FINAL THOUGHTS

- This situation is just for the purpose of the exercise – though schools are selective and have to make tough decisions, students are not being pitted against each other for individual spots
- Holistic admissions IS subjective but not arbitrary (to steal a phrase)
- Criteria CAN change (i.e. what position is needed in what sport)
- What may be publicized as “red flags” are not necessarily going to negatively affect an applicant
- Decisions are not judgments on individuals, but instead of their fit according to the institutions changing needs
- Others? Questions?