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Westlake college planner: Admissions strategies for UT

Dale Price Special to Westlake Picayune

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Anyone who lives in the Austin area knows the pride that is generated with a simple, "Hook 'em Horns!" We are lucky that our state flagship, the University of Texas, is right in our backyard. The appeal is real: a great education at a local campus can be a great cost savings. So many things, however, have changed regarding admissions to this highly selective university. Let's take a closer look.

According to the 2020-2021 Common Data Set, UT received a whopping 54,241 applications. But the most recent reporting, the 2021-2022 Common Data Set, revealed the highest application surge in history with over 66,043 applications.

How can applicants attempt to position themselves competitively? The process is not as easy as musical chairs, where if you move fast enough, you will get a seat! Instead. It takes strategic planning and attention to detail in the application process.

Automatic admission is granted to students who are in the top 6% of their high school class – a very misplaced relief for many. Yes, you may get in, but unless your application passes the level of scrutiny required to maintain UT's reputation for excellence, you will not be admitted into the major you want. There are 170 areas of study at UT, 169 of which are not your first choice.

Some in-state applicants will be "CAP"ed instead, which means you will be offered indirect admission to a select few majors and invited to begin your college experience at another branch of the UT system and if successful, be invited to matriculate to certain (less selective) majors at UT-Austin after the freshman year. Last year, UT made about 22,000 Coordinated Admission Program offers.

Start sooner rather than later

Class rank is extremely important since 75% of the admitted seats go to the top 6% of students in their high school class. A high GPA, exceptional rigor and class rank are table stakes along with demonstrating your fit-to-major throughout your high school career.

Fit-to-major means applying to your major with evidence of experience. The ability to highlight a deep dive into your intellectual curiosities, providing that demonstration of your true passion for the chosen major, is crucial for any holistic review.

Sometimes generating your own learning experiences outside of the classroom can also do this, extra-curricular activities, summer jobs or creating your very own independent research project point. This doesn't mean decorating your social media pages with orange (unless it really is your favorite color), but it could mean making those videos of science experiments or to taking that summer job at the local museum of natural history.

Draw ‘you’ in three dimensions

Contrary to the rumor that screeners don’t really read the applications, UT readers do exactly that: they read what you write very carefully. Every. Single. Detail. However, rather than send you into a panic that they will be looking for errors in order to cut you out, think of this as an opportunity to shine. Instead of the two-dimensional cartoon character that is so easy to draw, this is your chance to really lay out the three-dimensional potential Longhorn that you are determined to be.

How do you draw this? You layer your achievements throughout the application. We are always tempted to put all the good stuff in our cover letter or essay, but not only is that not necessary, it is a missed opportunity to create a portrait of “you” without boundaries. That there is a bit of wonder in every aspect of your future academic success. Each portion of the application should reveal something new and interesting not only about your academic skills, but who you are as a citizen and potential contributor to the Longhorn community.

Live the UT motto

You may have heard it. You may even like it. But to really increase your chances of admission, you need to live that motto: What starts here changes the world. Tomorrow is too late. Changemakers don’t say, “I’ll start tomorrow.” They start today by mapping out their plan and taking those first steps to implementing it.

Make a difference now by becoming a good leader for your peers and community. Dive deep into your intended area of interests sooner than later. Do your best academically. After all: What starts here changes the world!

Dale Price is the founder of Access College America, a national provider for guidance with college planning in Austin.

The article has been updated to correct that the University of Texas offers admission to about 19,000 students, but it enrolls around 9,000 new students each year. It also corrects that about 22,000 students received a Coordinated Admission Program offer last year.

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