



A DCI Deliberation Guide

College Admissions Policies (Part III):

*How Should Applicants' Backgrounds Be Taken into Account,
If at All?*

Format for Deliberation

Before the Deliberation

- I. Read this Deliberation Guide and Complete the Included Ratings (REQUIRED)

During the Deliberation

- I. Setting Expectations - 5 min.
- II. Getting to Know Each Other - 10 min.
- III. Building an Admissions Policy - 75 min.
- IV. Reflections - 20 min.

Background

So far in our deliberations we have discussed a range of different factors that might be and are often considered in the college admissions process, including race, legacy status, athletic performance, academic merit, gender and socioeconomic status. In our third session together, we will try to pull all of these together by designing what we think would be the ideal college admissions policy. As we do so, we will have the chance to revisit topics and questions we have already discussed as well as engage with new issues that come up.

We will begin this design process by considering specific qualities of some hypothetical college applicants. Read the information below about each applicant's characteristic and then rate how important you think it should be in evaluating whether they should be admitted to both a private liberal arts college and a public university. Imagine you are an admissions officer at these institutions; how much weight should we put on these considerations?

In the second and third columns, you can note how many "points" you would assign to each consideration, on a scale of -5 to 5 (negative scores would decrease their overall application

score, positive scores would increase their overall application score). You can also jot down notes on why you would do so. One way to think about your scoring – if you assign one category a 2, for example, and another a 4, you are suggesting that the second is twice as important as the first.

Note: Much of the text below is adapted from the [College Admissions Sorting Game](#), an activity developed by Oregon Goes to College, a project of Oregon State University. This game was itself adapted from Mary Lee Hoganson’s “The Great Sorting Game,” a publication of the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC).

ACADEMIC CONSIDERATIONS

Applicant Characteristic	Liberal Arts College Points	Public University Points
<p>1) STRONG ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: The applicant has a very high GPA, class rank, and SAT score compared to other applicants.</p> <p>Colleges that admit high scoring applicants are rewarded by national rankings and many are also intrinsically interested in attracting the “best and the brightest” to their campuses. GPAs, class rank, and standardized tests are three widely used metrics of academic performance.</p>		
<p>2) POOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: The applicant got a "D" in an academic course at the end of their junior year and has a relatively low GPA.</p> <p>Grades do matter. And colleges often prefer to see students improve over time, rather than have their grades decline.</p>		
<p>3) RIGOROUS TRANSCRIPT: The applicant has taken as many challenging classes as their high school offers.</p> <p>A more rigorous high school curriculum better prepares students for the rigors of a college classroom. Taking challenging courses indicates a student is willing to do what’s necessary to succeed, even if it means they may not always do as well if they had taken the easier options. Colleges try to pay attention to what’s available to students so they aren’t penalized for attending a school that doesn’t offer as</p>		

<p>many options as another might.</p>		
<p>4) EXCELLENT ESSAY QUALITY: The applicant wrote the best essay of the year - it was passed around the admission office because it was so good.</p> <p>The essay is never <i>the</i> thing that gets a student in (or keeps them out), but a well-written essay can make a big difference in the committee remembering an applicant and advocating for them.</p>		
<p>5) POOR ESSAY QUALITY: The applicant’s college essay about sports focused on their coach instead of on their own athletic growth.</p> <p>College essays should always give the admissions committee more information about the applicant, so students should focus on something they did, learned, or discovered about themselves, rather than about another person.</p>		
<p>6) STRONG RECOMMENDATION LETTER: The applicant is described in glowing terms by their recommender, who provides a detailed account of both their accomplishments and strengths – and how they have overcome challenges facing them.</p> <p>Recommendation letters help the admissions committee learn more about a student. When teachers know their students well, they can better advocate for them.</p>		
<p>7) POOR RECOMMENDATION LETTER: The applicant had trouble finding someone to write their college recommendation letters because they don't know their teachers well.</p> <p>A recommendation that is short, provides no personal details, and reads like a form letter is not likely to help an applicant in the admissions process.</p>		

ATHLETIC CONSIDERATIONS

<p>8) RECRUITED ATHLETE: The applicant has been identified as an athlete who can contribute significantly to your institution’s athletic program.</p>		
--	--	--

Especially for students who plan to participate in college sports, being a strong athlete often matters in the admissions process. Strong teams can enhance the reputation of the institution, increase school spirit, and bring in valuable revenue.		
<p>9) EXCELLENT ATHLETIC PERFORMANCE: The applicant is a varsity athlete who took second place at the regional competition in their sport.</p> <p>Even for those who don't plan to play in college, athletic participation shows a level of commitment and perseverance that colleges want to see.</p>		

EXTRACURRICULAR CONSIDERATIONS

Applicant Characteristic	Liberal Arts College Points	Public University Points
<p>10) EXCELLENT EXTRACURRICULAR RECORD: The applicant's afterschool activities include 4-H leadership and caring for their younger siblings.</p> <p>Colleges need student leaders on their campuses, so they are interested in students who show leadership qualities in high school.</p>		
<p>11) RECOGNIZED EXTRACURRICULAR ACCOMPLISHMENT: The applicant is an Eagle Scout or Gold Award winner.</p> <p>College is a lot of work and requires persistence and willingness to tough it out through challenging times. Students who have earned major awards have shown they can persist and accomplish their goals.</p>		
<p>12) EXCELLENT MUSICAL ABILITY: The applicant plays the oboe and is exceedingly good at it.</p> <p>Sometimes the conductor really needs to fill a critical spot in the orchestra. Colleges need to be sure their orchestras, teams, theater departments, etc. can perform to the best of their ability, so they recruit and admit students who can help with that.</p>		

<p>13) POOR EXTRACURRICULAR RECORD: The applicant has not participated in any extracurricular activities, doesn't have an afterschool job, and doesn't have responsibilities to care for younger siblings.</p> <p>Being active and engaged as a high school student is an indication that a student will be active and engaged as a college student. All colleges want active and engaged students.</p>		
--	--	--

DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS

Applicant Characteristic	Liberal Arts College Points	Public University Points
<p>14) FIRST TO COLLEGE: The applicant will be the first person in their family to attend college.</p> <p>Colleges care about building diverse student bodies because it helps ensure more interesting class discussions and a better learning environment for everyone. Students who are the first in their family to go to college are one group of students that many colleges seek to enroll.</p>		
<p>15) MEMBER OF UNDER-REPRESENTED RACE OR ETHNICITY: The applicant self-identifies as a Native American, an under-represented group at your institution.</p> <p>Many colleges are also interested in admitting students from racial and ethnic groups that are under-represented at their institution and in higher education more generally. These groups include Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and other groups.</p>		
<p>16) RESIDENT OF UNDERREPRESENTED GEOGRAPHIC AREA: The applicant is a legal resident of North Dakota.</p> <p>Remember that colleges want diverse student bodies. That includes having geographical representation, too! North Dakota is one of the smallest states, and one that sends very few students to college out-of-state, so North Dakotans are relatively rare on college campuses.</p>		

<p>17) LOW SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS: The applicant has experienced severe levels of poverty growing up.</p> <p>Some institutions are committed to democratizing higher education opportunities and admitting students from poor economic backgrounds, even if their scores are not as strong as those coming from wealthier backgrounds.</p>		
<p>18) UNDER-REPRESENTED GENDER: The applicant is male.</p> <p>Higher education is increasingly facing a gender imbalance, with more women enrolling than men. Some colleges and universities are admitting a larger percentage of male applicants in order to maintain a gender balance in their student bodies.</p>		

INSTITUTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Applicant Characteristic	Liberal Arts College Points	Public University Points
<p>19) EARLY DECISION: The applicant clearly stated that this college is their first choice by applying Early Decision (which is a binding agreement that says they'll attend if admitted).</p> <p>Colleges want students who they know will attend, and Early Decision programs are one way to determine which students will.</p>		
<p>20) INTEREST IN POPULAR MAJOR: The applicant plans to major in psychology, the most popular major at your institution.</p> <p>In some schools, the most popular majors have too many students. This can make it difficult for colleges to have enough course sections or to ensure that students have academic advisors in their field of study. Sometimes, colleges need to reduce the number of students in a particular major and they do this by making it harder for those students to be admitted.</p>		
<p>21) STEM INTEREST: The applicant plans to major in a STEM field like chemistry, computer science, engineering, or mathematics.</p>		

<p>Everywhere you turn, people are talking about the need for more STEM majors. Colleges (and their admissions committees) are paying attention, too!</p>		
<p>22) EXPRESSED INTEREST: The applicant emailed the admission representative to ask questions and tell them about their interest in their school.</p> <p>More and more, admissions committees are paying attention to “expressed interest” from applicants. Most students apply to more than one college, so they want to know that a student who applies is actually interested in attending their school (in other words, they want to know the student isn’t just applying to lots of schools without putting much thought into it). One of the ways they determine that a student is interested is by monitoring how much contact a student has with the admissions staff. Email is one way to do that, and so is visiting a college or meeting with a representative at a college fair.</p>		
<p>23) DONOR RELATIONSHIP: The applicant’s last name is Knight - the name on your institution’s library is Knight - and it’s not a coincidence.</p> <p>Some people give a lot of money to colleges to help them improve academic programs, build new buildings, or simply to pay for the cost of running the school. Donations matter—and fair or not, sometimes they help to ensure a spot in the class for a son or daughter of the donor.</p>		
<p>24) FAMILY CONNECTION: The applicant’s brother is a sophomore at your institution.</p> <p>Many colleges appreciate and respect their history and traditions. Being a legacy (having a close relative—usually a parent, grandparent, or sibling who attended or attends the college) shows that there is a tradition of attending that college in the family, and some colleges consider that when making admissions decisions.</p>		

Below is a higher-level rating exercise. Harvard rates each candidate in six categories: academics, extracurriculars, athletics, personal, recommendation letters, and the alumni interview. Building on the list above, below is a similar but different list of categories to consider. Rate each according to how much weight you think it should have in the admissions process. Use the following scale – Most Important (5), Very Important (4), Somewhat Important (3), Not Very Important (2), Least Important (1). Factors can be weighted equally if you’d like to do so.

	Liberal Arts College	Public University
Academic Considerations		
Extracurricular Considerations		
Athletic Considerations		
Diversity Considerations		
Institutional Considerations		

Setting Expectations (5 min)

In this section, we will review the “Expected Outcomes,” “Deliberative Dispositions,” and “Conversation Agreements” below.

Expected Outcomes of the Conversation

The purpose of this deliberation is to explore our areas of agreement and disagreement over what the admissions process should look like at both private and public institutions of higher education. Over the course of the deliberation, we will have the opportunity to listen to the perspectives of our fellow deliberators as well as share our own experiences and beliefs related to college admission policies. By the end of the conversation, we will have identified which considerations we think should be most and least important in the admissions process, and to what extent we agree or disagree on these priorities. Finally, we will have reflected on our conversation, what we have learned from our time together, and what next steps we want to take.

Deliberative Dispositions

The DCI has identified several “deliberative dispositions” as critical to the success of deliberative enterprises. When participants adopt these dispositions, they are much more likely to feel their deliberations are meaningful, respectful, and productive. Several of the Conversation Agreements recommended below directly reflect and reinforce these

dispositions, which include a commitment to egalitarianism, open mindedness, empathy, charity, attentiveness, and anticipation, among others. A full list and description of these dispositions is available at <https://deliberativecitizenship.org/deliberative-dispositions/>.

Conversation Agreements

In entering into this discussion, to the best of our ability, we each agree to:

1. Be authentic and respectful
2. Be an attentive and active listener
3. Be a purposeful and concise speaker
4. Approach fellow deliberators' stories, experiences, and arguments with curiosity, not hostility
5. Assume the best - and not the worst - about the intentions and values of others, and avoid snap judgements
6. Demonstrate intellectual humility, recognizing that no one has all the answers, by asking questions and making space for others to do the same
7. Critique the idea we disagree with, not the person expressing it, and remember to practice empathy
8. Note areas of both agreement and disagreement
9. Respect the confidentiality of the discussion
10. Avoid speaking in absolutes (e.g., "All people think this," or "No educated people hold that view")

Getting to Know Each Other (10 min)

In this section, we will each take 1 minute to remind each other of our names and where we are currently located. We'll also answer one of the following questions:

1. To what extent has higher education been important to you?
2. To what extent has higher education been important to someone close to you?

Building an Admissions Policy (75 min)

In this section, we will examine the arguments for and against preferential consideration for athletes and children of alums. We will each take 1-2 minutes to answer the questions below, without interruption or crosstalk, one set at a time (starting with "Academic Considerations"). As you are answering these questions, we can refer to our ratings of the various factors

described above. After everyone has answered the questions in the first set, the group is welcome to take a few minutes for clarifying or follow up questions and responses. Continue exploring the topic as time allows, and then move onto the next set.

Academic Considerations (15 min)

1. Which, if any, academic considerations should be included in the admissions process?
2. How important should they be relative to each other? Equally weighted or some weighted higher than others?
3. How important should academic considerations be generally in the admissions process?
4. Should any of these factors differ for private and public institutions?

Athletic Considerations (15 min)

1. Which, if any, athletic considerations should be included in the admissions process?
2. How important should they be relative to each other? Equally weighted or some weighted higher than others?
3. How important should athletic considerations be generally in the admissions process?
4. Should any of these factors differ for private and public institutions?

Extracurricular Considerations (15 min)

5. Which, if any, extracurricular considerations should be included in the admissions process?
6. How important should they be relative to each other? Equally weighted or some weighted higher than others?
7. How important should extracurricular considerations be generally in the admissions process?
8. Should any of these factors differ for private and public institutions?

Diversity Considerations (15 min)

1. Which, if any, diversity considerations should be included in the admissions process?
2. How important should they be relative to each other? Equally weighted or some weighted higher than others?
3. How important should diversity considerations be generally in the admissions process?
4. Should any of these factors differ for private and public institutions?

Institutional Considerations (15 min)

1. Which, if any, institutional considerations should be included in the admissions process?
2. How important should they be relative to each other? Equally weighted or some weighted higher than others?
3. How important should institutional considerations be generally in the admissions

process?

4. Should any of these factors differ for private and public institutions?

If there is strong disagreement in the group, try to explore the underlying reasons for the disagreement – are they based on different factual interpretations, different value emphases, or different life experiences? Perhaps you can agree on where precisely you disagree, which can be helpful. Alternatively, if there is widespread agreement in the group, try to dig deeper and examine the nuances of these policies – are there particular contexts, for example, where your agreement breaks down? Or perhaps your reasons for supporting particular policies are different? Exploring this complexity can be helpful as well.

Reflections (20 min)

While today's conversation is an important step in the journey, effectively balancing concerns about college admission policies will take time and commitment. Please reflect on the insights from your discussion with your fellow participants today, and then answer one of the questions below without interruption or crosstalk. After everyone has answered, we can continue exploring additional questions as time allows.

1. What was most meaningful or valuable to you during this deliberation?
2. Where are the areas of both agreement and disagreement in your group?
3. Have any new ways to think about this issue occurred to you as we have talked today? Any new ideas that might transcend our current way of conceiving of the problem and its potential solutions?
4. Was there anything that was said or not said that you think should be addressed with the group? Are there any perspectives missing from this conversation that you feel would be important to hear?
5. What did you hear that gives you hope for the future of conversations on issues related to college admission policies?
6. Is there a next step you would like to take based upon the deliberation you just had?

Publishing a Summary of our Deliberation

The DCI offers single-issue, multi-session D Teams such as yours the opportunity to publish a brief summary of what you discussed over the course of your deliberations. This summary will be drafted by your facilitator or the student participant-observer on your team, and it will describe the expected outcomes of the D Team, the deliberation process you participated in, and both your areas of agreement and disagreement (“The group agreed that...” or “Some Team members thought..., while other Team members believed...”). It may also contain testimonials provided by your D Team members included in the survey circulated after today’s deliberation. The draft summary will be circulated to the Team for everyone’s input and approval before it is published on the DCI’s website; authorship will remain anonymous unless everyone unanimously consents to their names being published. The post will be sent to subscribers to the DCI Blog, and you are welcome to forward the post to policymakers and anyone else who you think might be interested in reading it.

About This Guide

Writer: Graham Bullock

Managing Editor: Carla Cole

Executive Editor: Graham Bullock

© Copyright 2022 Deliberative Citizenship Initiative

The Deliberative Citizenship Initiative

The Deliberative Citizenship Initiative (DCI) is dedicated to the creation of opportunities for Davidson students, faculty, staff, alumni, and members of the wider community to productively engage with one another on difficult and contentious issues facing our community and society. The DCI regularly hosts facilitated deliberations on a wide range of topics as well as organizes training workshops for deliberation facilitators. To learn more about these opportunities, visit www.deliberativecitizenship.org.

DCI Deliberation Guides

The DCI has launched this series of Deliberation Guides as a foundation for such conversations. They provide both important background information on the topics in question and a specific framework for engaging with these topics. The Guides are designed to be informative without being overwhelming and structured without being inflexible. They cover a range of topics and come in a variety of formats but share several common elements, including opportunities to commit to a shared set of Conversation Agreements, learn about diverse perspectives, and reflect together on the conversation and its yield. The DCI encourages conversations based on these guides to be moderated by a trained facilitator. After each conversation, the DCI also suggests that its associated Pathway Guide be distributed to the conversation's participants.

DCI Pathways Guides

For every Deliberation Guide, the DCI has also developed an associated Pathways Guide, which outlines opportunities for action that participants can consider that are related to the covered topic. These Pathways Guides reinforce the DCI's commitment to an action orientation, a key deliberative disposition. While dialogue and deliberation are themselves important contributors to a healthy democracy, they become even more valuable when they lead to individual or collective action on the key issues facing society. Such action can come in a range of forms and should be broadly understood. It might involve developing a better understanding of a topic, connecting with relevant local or national organizations, generating new approaches to an issue. or deciding to support a particular policy.

If you make use of this guide in a deliberation, please provide attribution to the Deliberative Citizenship Initiative and email dcide@deliberativecitizenship.org to tell us about your event. To access more of our growing library of Deliberation Guides, Pathway Guides and other resources, visit www.deliberativecitizenship.org/readings-and-resources.