

# **MENAU SCHOOL TOP 20 COLLEGE STRATEGY GUIDE**



# Introductory Assessment

Please read the following questions, then circle the answers below them before you begin reading.

**1. Do you want to attend a Top 20 school for your undergraduate studies?**

Yes    No    Unsure

**2. What do you believe your chances are of being accepted to a Top 20 school?**

None	1-15%	16-30%
31-50%	51-75%	76-100%

**3. Do you think you're doing everything necessary to be accepted to a Top 20 school?**

Yes    No    Unsure

**4. Are you currently well-prepared to apply to a Top 20 school?**

Yes    No    Unsure

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# What is the “Top 20”?

In the following strategies and advice, “Top 20” schools refer to the schools selected by US News and World Report as the twenty best colleges and universities in the year 2023. US News ratings were chosen because they are commonly read and accepted by many who have no better sources to judge the quality of educational institutions, and even by those with greater reliable information.

**They are in no way objective, nor do they claim to be.** There are at least half a dozen other news magazines or

organizations which rank colleges on different criteria and consequently have different lists. Those wishing to gain greater insight into just how little we can actually learn about the objective quality of a school from US News rankings are encouraged to read Malcolm Gladwell’s 2011 New Yorker article, “On the Order of Things,” and a more recent detailed look at their methodology by F. Kelley, “American College Rankings: How They Work and What They Mean.”

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Penn



COLUMBIA



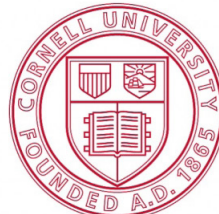
HARVARD



Dartmouth



Yale




Cornell



BROWN



PRINCETON



**Good marks in  
challenging,  
in-depth  
classes are the  
key to success**

# Measuring Up

In a 2013 survey conducted by the National Association for College Admissions Counselors (NACAC), college admissions officers were asked to rank those factors in the application process that they deemed most important when making admissions decisions.

**The top three, in order of importance, were cumulative high school GPA, rigor of classwork taken, and standardized test scores.** In the data that follow, we shall see that a low grade even in the Freshman year can often be enough to

remove students from consideration at Top 20 schools, to say nothing of a low grade received in later years. Classes taken must show depth of study rather than breadth (extra years in foreign languages and lab sciences are crucial in this regard). Finally, standardized test scores, whether the SAT, ACT, or the TOEFL, are very important, but are no substitute for a 4.0 or above cumulative GPA showing the most demanding course load available.

# GPA and Class Rigor

**Grade 09 GPA:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Grade 10 GPA:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Grade 11 GPA:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Grade 12 GPA:** \_\_\_\_\_

Menaul School does not report ranks, however it does report that a student is in the top 10% of his or her class, as well as status as valedictorian and salutatorian of his or her graduating class.

**Circle the following tracks where you will concentrate your studies (You may circle more than one):**

English Language

Physical Sciences

Mathematics

Foreign Languages

Fine Arts

## College Success Stories

### **Student $\alpha$ - Harvard University**

GPA: 4.0 Unweighted

Senior Courseload: World History, AP Comparative Government, US Government, French IV, AP English Lit, Physics III, Calculus II, Physical Education

### **Student $\beta$ - Stanford University**

GPA: 3.94 Unweighted

Senior Courseload: Calculus II, Statistics, Biochemistry, Physics II, English Literature, Creative Writing, Health

### **Student $\gamma$ - Dartmouth University**

GPA: 4.0 Unweighted

Senior Courseload: European History, Psychology, Physics II, Calculus, English Literature, Spanish V, Leadership



## Noncommittal

Students now need to do more than was required of them in the past. They must be able to identify interests and activities that give them the chance to pursue their passions and pursue them vigorously. Whether this is playing sports at the varsity level, multi-year involvement in a musical theater program, or starting up a book club, any activity that gives students the opportunity to display skill, enthusiasm, and active involvement is good. Long lists of activities briefly joined are not impressive; one or two activities pursued over several years, with increasingly



## Well-rounded

demanding roles assumed by the student, are what college admissions officers really want to see. “Leadership” in activities is often stressed, but this can be misleading; **what colleges really want to see is students taking an active, engaged role in their activities, no matter whether they fulfill leading positions in group or subsidiary roles.** Activities need to be joined for reasons that students can clearly and enthusiastically articulate to others if their involvement in them is not to backfire during the application process.



## Narrow

# Extracurricular Activities

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## Current Organizations or Clubs:

### College Success Stories

#### Student $\alpha$ - Harvard University

Extracurriculars: Speech & Debate Club (President), Math Team, French Club, Mock Trial, Model UN, Science Bowl, National Honor Society

## Current Sports:

#### Student $\beta$ - Stanford University

Extracurriculars: Medical Entrepreneurship Contest, Literary Magazine (Editor), Varsity Soccer

## Current Leadership Roles:

#### Student $\gamma$ - Dartmouth University

Extracurriculars: Alpine Skiing Club (Captain), Tennis (JV Captain), Spanish Club (Vice President), Sports Management Club (Founder), Student Government (Treasurer)

## Current Organizations of Merit:

# Be Involved

10%

**All of us** have known students who did nothing but study while in high school. We have also known those who did nothing but play sports, or nothing but play video games.

40%

**Such students did** the bare minimum when it came to in-class involvement and actively talking with and including others not in their immediate social group.

100%

**Whether they** are international or domestic, students today who behave like this are swiftly rejected by college admissions officers. The reason is that diversity matters in crafting an interesting class that will challenge its students to think, act, and create.

**One-note or one-dimensional students simply have nothing to contribute to this kind of community, and can scarcely hope to gain admission to a Top 20 school, where factors like social or political position and personal wealth mean little to well-endowed institutions.**



# Community Involvement

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**Long-term Volunteer Work:**

## **College Success Stories**

### **Student $\alpha$ - Harvard University**

Community Involvement: Volunteering with local hospital, Volunteering with Red Cross, Red Cross Blood Ambassador

**Civic Organizations:**

### **Student $\beta$ - Stanford University**

Community Involvement: Water Filtration Project in Navajo Nation, Church Youth Leadership, 200 hours with National Energy Education Development Project (N.E.E.D.)

**Community Leadership:**

### **Student $\gamma$ -Dartmouth University**

Community Involvement: Community Education Fund (Board Member), School Leadership Group, Founder of Non-profit providing free SAT/ACT tutoring to underprivileged students

**Awards and Recognition:**

**Total Volunteer Hours:** \_\_\_\_\_

# Standardized Tests

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Top 20 schools routinely receive thousands, even hundreds of thousands, of applications. They retain their quality by rejecting almost every single applicant. **The most generous schools have acceptance rates of 15%; while others go as low as 5 or 6%.** The 5-15% of students who get accepted to these schools are those who do everything discussed previously. The important thing to note here is that while the majority of applicants rejected from

these schools did everything mentioned; there simply wasn't enough space for them, and they did not stand out enough to admissions officers. We can thus see a grim reality: even if students do everything they should to be competitive, they have only a 5-15% chance of being accepted at any given school. **It follows that students who are lacking in any of the areas mentioned above have an almost 0% chance of being accepted to a Top 20 school.**

**Table 1: Standardized Test Ranges for Top Schools**

Top Eight Universities (U.S. News Rank)	SAT English	SAT Math	ACT English	ACT Math
Princeton University (New Jersey)	690-790	710-800	33-35	31-35
Harvard University (Massachusetts)	710-800	720-800	33-35	31-35
University of Chicago (Illinois)	720-800	730-800	33-35	31-35
Yale University (Connecticut)	710-800	710-800	33-35	30-35
Columbia University (New York)	700-790	710-800	33-35	30-35
Stanford University (California)	680-780	700-800	32-35	30-35
Duke University (North Carolina)	690-790	710-800	32-35	32-35
University of Pennsylvania (Pennsylvania)	720-780	730-800	32-35	30-35
AVERAGE MEDIAN SCORE	750	760	34	33

# Personal Test Scores

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PSAT 10: E\_\_\_\_\_ M\_\_\_\_\_

PSAT 11: E\_\_\_\_\_ M\_\_\_\_\_

SAT Grade 11: E\_\_\_\_\_ M\_\_\_\_\_

SAT Grade 12: E\_\_\_\_\_ M\_\_\_\_\_

ACT Grade 11: E\_\_\_\_\_ M\_\_\_\_\_

ACT Grade 12: E\_\_\_\_\_ M\_\_\_\_\_

SAT II Tests:

**How are you currently preparing for  
standardized tests?**

## College Success Stories

### Student $\alpha$ - Harvard University

SAT: 1580 Composite (790 E, 790 M)

ACT: 35 Composite (36 E, 34 M)

SAT II: 800 Math II, 800 US History

### Student $\beta$ - Stanford University

SAT: 1460 Composite (720 E, 730 M)

ACT: 35 Composite (35 E, 35 M)

SAT II: 800 Chem, 770 Bio M, 760 Math II

### Student $\gamma$ - Dartmouth University

SAT: 1600 Composite (800 E, 800 M)

ACT: 36 Composite (36 E, 36 M)

SAT II: 780 World History, 780 Biology,  
800 Math II, 800 US History

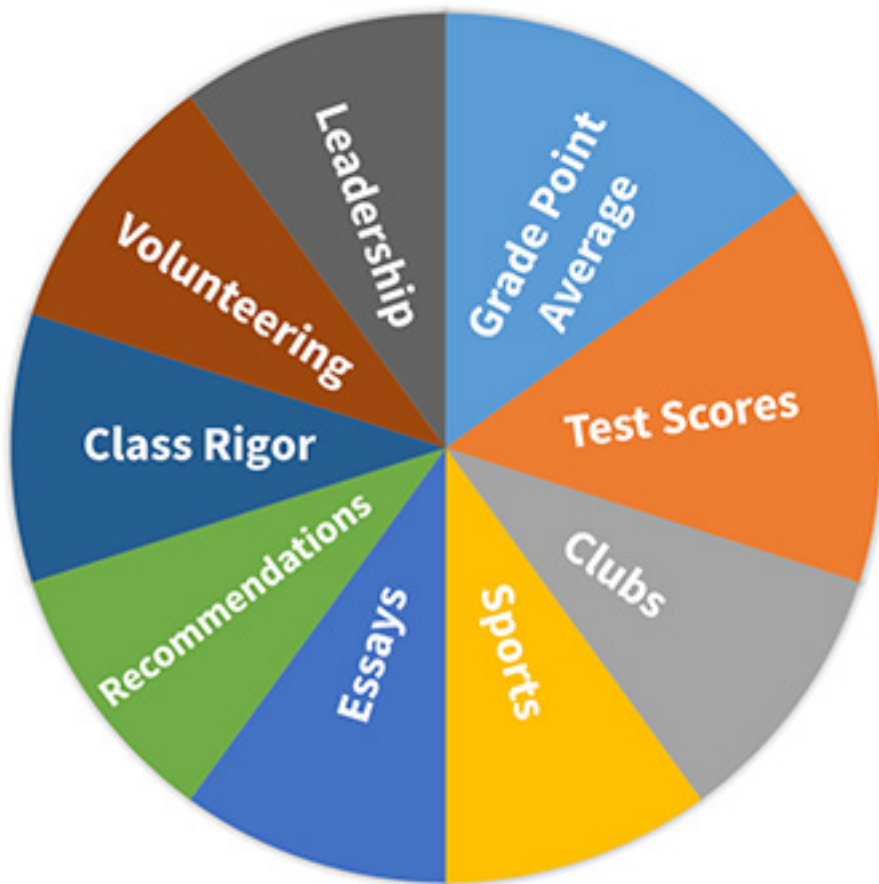
# The College Essay

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Students today cannot just be machines who are good at mathematical or scientific calculations. They must have the skills to communicate effectively and clearly with others in both speech and writing. **This means that they must be able to read well above grade level by the time they graduate**, and be so practiced in the art of writing that they can accurately describe their own minds and hearts in their college admissions essays. The difference between answering an essay prompt with facts or plain descriptions and answering it with grace, poise, and insight is the difference



between acceptance or denial to a Top 20 school. **There is no substitute for hard, sustained work from a young age in achieving this level of mastery in the English language.** Unhappily for international students, there are also no exceptions made at Top 20 institutions for having come from a different language background. They must prove that they are as good as, and in most cases better than, the best US domestic students when it comes to their ability to use English well. All students must have the tact to avoid trite topics like “My Mission Trip Abroad/Journey to America Changed My Life,” “I Learned Important Lessons About Helping Others By....” Or “My Dream Has Always Been...And Now at University, I Can Pursue It.” Such essays make students sound uninspired, at best; and at worst, the essays make their writers sound like egoists who want only to further their own agenda.



# What Is Well Rounded?

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Top 20 schools are looking for a student who is well-rounded. Roundedness is a difficult concept to define, suffice to say that colleges are not looking for someone who is unwilling to try new things, to take risks, and to demonstrate leadership and engagement with their community. In the United States, it is not enough to be merely the greatest scholar in one's

school, one must also demonstrate leadership through positions within sports teams, clubs, volunteer positions, and within the community, both inside and outside of the school. **Any student who fails to succeed in even one of these areas will be at a severe disadvantage when applying to a Top 20 school.**



# An Honest Appraisal

Therefore, when applying to colleges, students need to realistically ask themselves if they are outstanding in all of the respects we discussed. If the answer is yes, then those students should apply to Top 20 schools, but entertain no hope of being admitted by any of them. Students who realistically cannot claim to be universally outstanding should accept that they simply have no chance of being admitted to a Top 20 school, and find a school better suited to their aptitudes and

abilities. This is an unpleasant truth. The pleasant side to be found in it is that there are more than 4000 colleges and universities in the US, many of which will provide any student with an excellent education if that student is willing to take the time to look for them, apply to them, and do their best at the schools to which they are offered admission. An honest appraisal, made early in the application process, will save students money, time, and heartache later on.



# Concluding Assessment

Please read the following questions, then circle the answers below them considering what you have learned as you read this strategy guide

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**1. Do you want to attend a Top 20 school for your undergraduate studies?**

Yes   No   Unsure

**2. What do you believe your chances are of being accepted to a Top 20 school?**

None                  Almost None  
1-15%                Higher than 15%

**3. Do you think you're doing everything necessary to be accepted to a Top 20 school?**

Yes   No   Unsure

**4. Do you think you're well-prepared to apply to a Top 20 school in the coming years?**

Yes   No   Unsure

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