



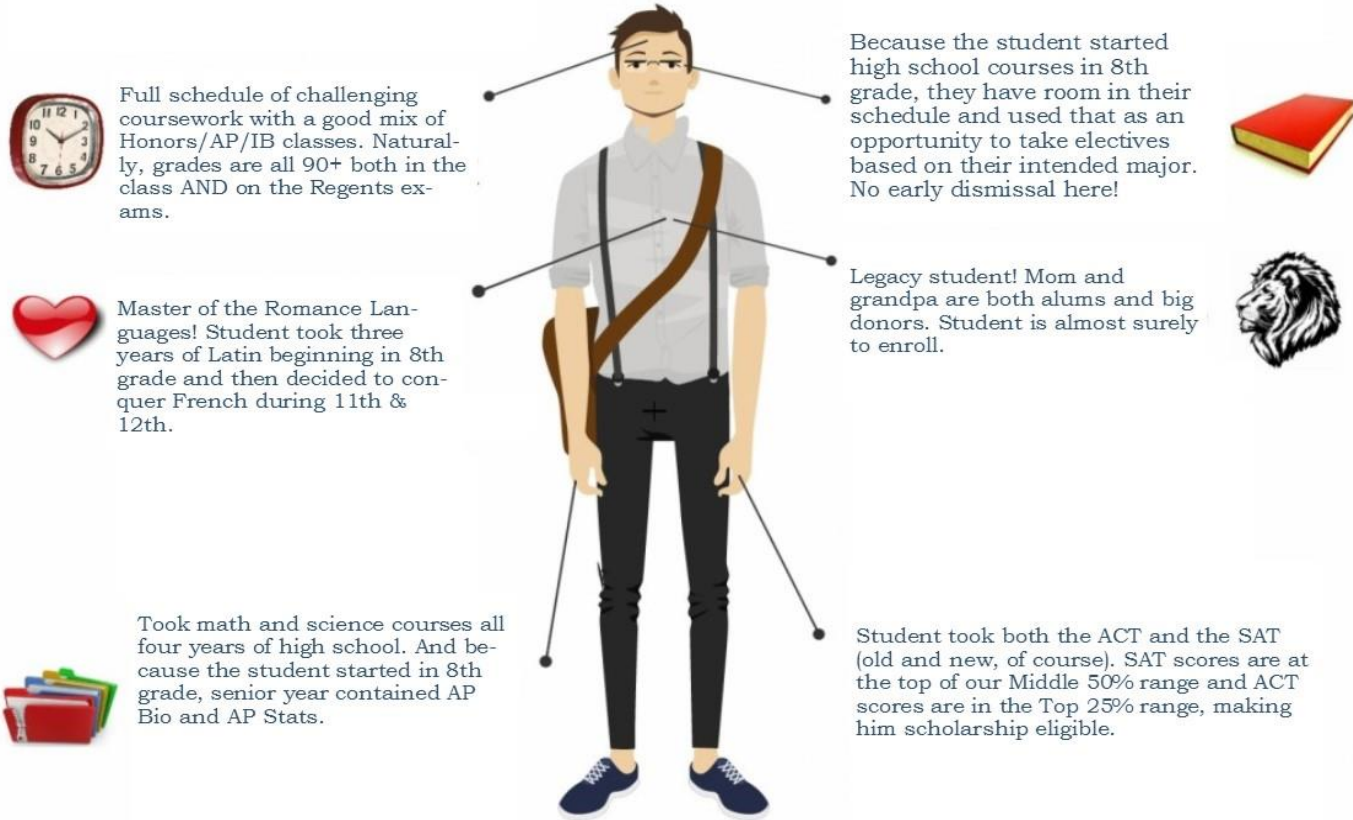
# OpInform 2017



A SUNY Perspective: The “What” and “How”  
of Recommendation Letters and Essays



## The “Ideal” College Applicant



## Colleges Consider:

- Academic performance
- Standardized tests
- Activities and involvement
- Letters of recommendation
- College essay/personal statement
- Personal interview
- Demonstrated interest

## What matters?

# Everything.

extracurricular

Quality of activities

personal statement

honors

character

essay

community service

opportunity

grit

rigor

high school performance

responsibility

passion

Board Scores

diversity

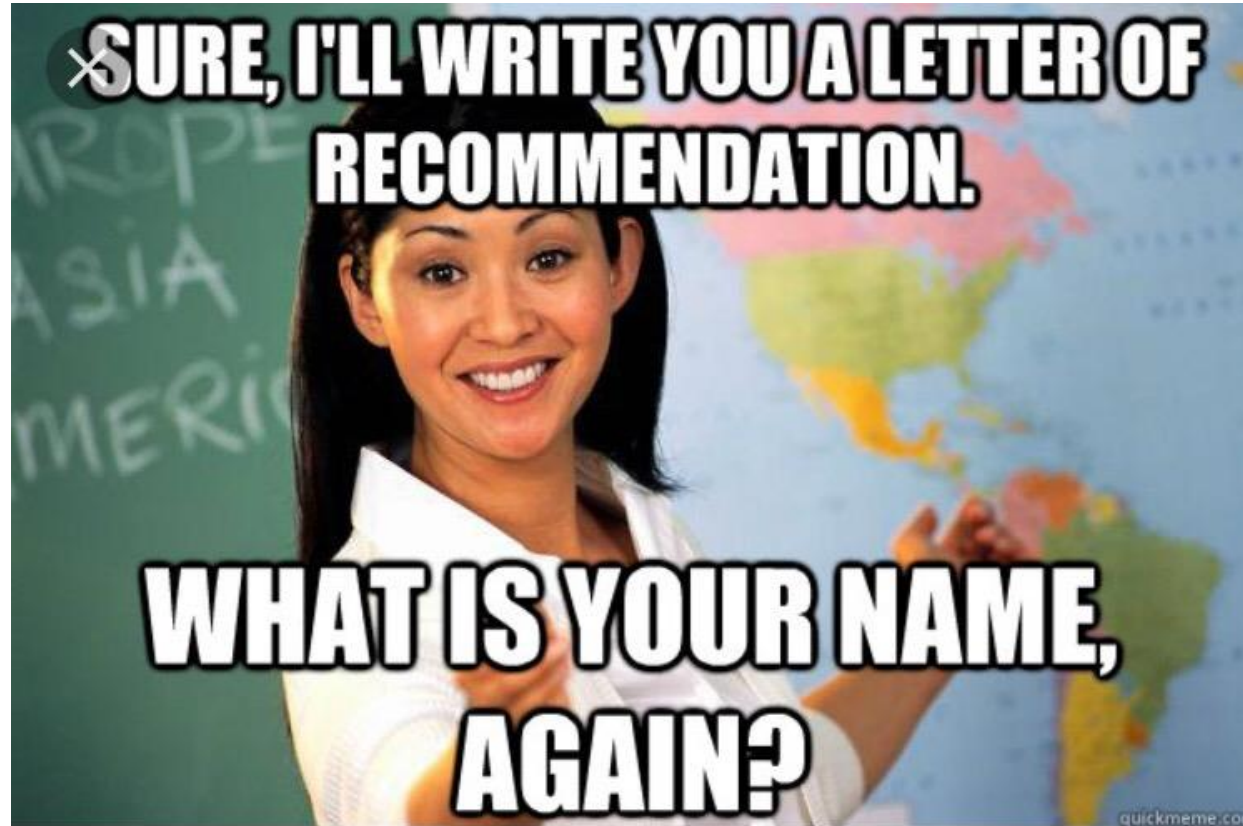
talent

Letters of recommendation

## Activities and Involvement

- Meaningful, sustained community service
  - Immersed in the experience
  - Emotional awareness
  - Develops a sense of responsibility
- Leadership positions
  - In school or within the community
- Continuous commitment
  - Dedication demonstrated, not just one time event
- Employment vs. activities
  - Demonstrates responsibility
- Quality not quantity of Activities
- Involvement leads to opportunity

## Recommendation vs. Reference





- Avoid form letters that simply replace name and pronouns
- Bullets are ok to use
- Provide additional insight instead of restating application details
  - Work ethic, response to adversity, overcoming obstacles



## Growth Mindset vs. Fixed Mindset

I can learn anything I want to.	VS.	I’m either good at it, or I’m not.
When I’m frustrated, I persevere	VS.	When I’m frustrated, I give up.
I want to challenge myself.	VS.	I don’t like to be challenged.
Tell me I try hard.	VS.	Tell me I’m smart.
My effort and attitude determine everything.	VS.	My abilities determine everything.

Counselors can speak to: effort, struggle, applying strategies, selecting difficult tasks, learning, improvement, and persistence in the face of setbacks.

## Letter of Recommendations Additional Tips

- Include student’s name and date of birth
- Use letterhead to identify where it is from
- Letters are very beneficial especially for students on the “bubble”
- Letters give additional insight to tie together the other pieces on the application



The bane of every college applicant:  
the admissions essay.

## Why Essays are important

- Essays are the student’s personal introduction to the admissions committee
- The essay is the student’s voice and opportunity to share who they are
- Provides non-cognitive variables to relate to the student

## Essay Prompts 2017-18

1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
2. The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
3. Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
4. Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma - anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.
5. Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
6. Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?
7. Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.

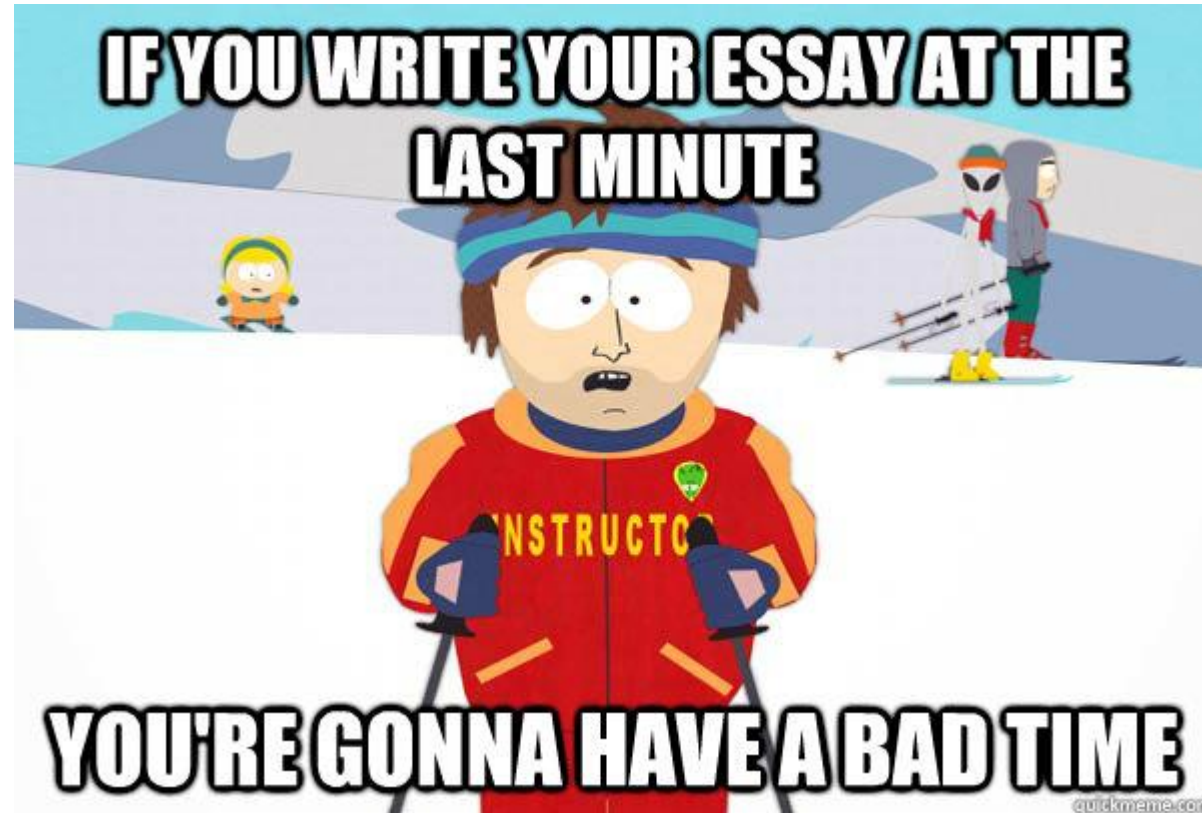
## Essay Faux Pas



- The essay I wrote for English will get me in, I got an A+
- Using the essay as opportunity to provide an excuse for a poor grade
- The essay is weird, off topic, not relatable
- Submitting the wrong essay to the wrong school
- Submitting an essay written by parents or the “internet”


## Advise students to

- Be Original
- Be Creative
- Be Honest
- Take a Risk
- Relate to the Campus
- Tell Their Story - Qualities; character and personality should show
- Proofread, edit, rewrite
- Don't save the essay for last









# **HS COUNSELORS: INSERT PRESENTATION TITLE HERE**

**A VIEW FROM BEHIND THE DESK**

# WHAT DO COLLEGES CONSIDER?

- Academic performance
- Standardized tests
- Activities and involvement
- Letters of recommendations
- College essay/personal statement
- Personal interview
- Demonstrated Interest

# ACTIVITIES AND INVOLVEMENT

- Quality, not quantity, of involvement
- Leadership positions and continuing commitments
- Employment in place of activities
- Service/Volunteerism
- Activities resume enhances application
- Involvement leads to opportunity

# LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

- Submit 1 – 3 letters, even if not required
- Value of selection
- Offers different perspective on a student
- Give time and instructions and format of required letter
- Provide an activities resume and transcript
- Write a thank you note

# COLLEGE ESSAY/PERSONAL STATEMENT

- Your voice in the application process
- Opportunity to share personal values and story
- Choose your topic carefully
- Essays should be unique, but not weird
- Follow the directions
- Proofread, edit, rewrite
- Don't save it for last!

# PERSONAL INTERVIEW

- Important, even if not required
- Opportunity for colleges to get to know you beyond your transcript and test scores
- Way for you to learn more about the college
- Parent vs. student roles
- Practice interviewing – it's a skill

# DEMONSTRATED INTEREST

- Distinguish yourself – in a good way
- Visit the campus/interview/express interest
- Be proactive in contacting your admissions representative.
- Provide additional information as appropriate.



**Questions?**