

Applying to College during COVID

A dark blue, diagonal shape that starts from the bottom left corner and extends towards the top right corner, covering the lower half of the page.

What is the same?

Holistic Review (most)

Families should continue to be realistic.
Balanced college lists.

Fit is an important factor. We suggest less
of an emphasis on rankings.

Biggest factor is the student's transcript.

All students have been affected by the
pandemic.

What is different this year?

Test optional or test blind admissions

Fewer activities

No spring grades

No campus visits

Uncertainty about how applications will be reviewed

The COVID-19 pandemic has created uncertainty among students and families about nearly all aspects of the college admission process, including the role of standardized testing.

Due to the cancellation of SAT and ACT testing dates, more than 1,450 US colleges and universities announced they are moving to a test-optional policy, and more will surely follow. By going test-optional, institutions are making a definitive statement that they will not need test scores to make admission decisions this year. Despite the change in policies, high school students and their parents are asking, “Does test optional really mean test optional?” The answer, simply put, is: YES.

“The following colleges with test-optional policies in place affirm that they will not penalize students for the absence of a standardized test score. Together, we strongly endorse a student-centered, holistic approach to admission that will not disadvantage any student without a test score.”

Nearly 600 Deans have signed, including Stanford, UC’s, Harvard, MIT, Penn, UIUC, and many more.

See [NACACNET.ORG](https://www.nacacnet.org)

Test Optional Means Test Optional

Individualized holistic review optimally reflects three common characteristics:

1. Mission alignment, which is focused on advancing the institution's core educational goals through the admissions process.
2. A two-part inquiry regarding applicants: attention to their likely ability to succeed and thrive at a given institution and attention to their ability to enhance the educational experiences of their peers in and out of the classroom.
3. Consideration of multiple, often intersecting, factors—academic, nonacademic, and contextual—that, in combination, uniquely define and reflect accomplishments and potential contributions of each applicant in light of his or her background and circumstances.

Holistic Review

How will my application be reviewed?

- Within the context of your high school (no spring grades for anyone)
- With the understanding that many activities will be different than normal
- With possibly a greater focus on the student's transcript and senior curriculum
- With possibly a greater interest in Letters of Recommendation and Essays
- If test scores are submitted, they will understand that averages will probably be lower

For the most part, many admission processes will be the same as usual, others will be creating new methods for evaluating some students.

How can I improve my application?

Don't forget that non-academic activities are also very important.

Explain how you used your time, even if it was planting a garden, cooking for your family, learning how to knit, or self teaching yourself something (guitar, coding, making a podcast)

Be authentic.

Write about the activities that are important to you. Don't try to guess what they want to hear.