**Examples of College Admission Character Assessment Tools:**

These tools are intended to spark ideas about how colleges can begin to imagine their own character assessment tools. All rubrics included below are loosely based on ideas currently being piloted by colleges, although the content and format has been substantially altered so as to allow for de-identification. These tools are not intended to be used as-is; they simply serve as examples for the kind of tools you may wish to develop at your own institution, which will be based on your own institutional values and needs.

If you have an additional assessment idea or tool to share, please email us at [collegeadmissions@makingcaringcommon.org](mailto:collegeadmissions@makingcaringcommon.org)

**Sample 1: Identifying Specific Skills or Capacities: Definitions, Examples, and Rubric**

*Best for: Colleges that have a clear sense of what skills they want to assess and what those skills look like in applicants and are ready to use a rubric to assess those skills.*

*Overview: A college identifies a skill or value that is important to their institution or that research suggests is important. College stakeholders develop a clear definition of the skill or value, as well as inclusive examples of how it might manifest in an application, and then train admission staff in how to identify this skill or value. A rubric is established that allows readers to rate applicants on that skill or capacity (e.g., a 1–5 scale) by looking across all application materials.*

**Definitions and examples: Extraordinary commitment to others**

Extraordinary commitment to others might be defined as students doing something above and beyond—in both big and in every day, quiet ways—in service or support of others, including their family members or friends, school, or community. It might include students that make an impact on those that they know well personally or students who influence the lives of strangers. Here are a few examples of how this institutional value might be defined:

* **An extraordinary *family-level* commitment** might present itself as a student who works 20 hours a week in order to support their family income, or who takes care of a younger sibling or sick family member in a sustained way after school. Students might perform other essential, every day tasks for the benefit of those close to them—often without external acknowledgement or reward.
* **An extraordinary *school-level* commitment** to others might present itself in many ways, including through high-quality, sustained school service or volunteer work—the kind of work typically recognized by schools and admission offices for extraordinary service. However, a student that informally and regularly helps others in everyday, quiet ways such as tutoring or coaching peers in school work, art, or sports can also display a high level of commitment to others; although a student may not necessarily be an assigned “tutor” or designated “leader,” what is most important is their sustained, high-quality contribution to others. Both formal and informal relationships and programs should thus be considered.
* **An extraordinary *community-level* commitment** to others might present itself as work on a community problem, sustained volunteer work (e.g., at a hospital or homeless shelter), or as commitment to something of importance to the student that positively benefits or improves others (e.g., assisting with a political campaign, etc.). Community-level commitment also includes students who do work for others in small, every day, and often unrecognized ways such as taking care of other youth in the community that don’t have a place to go after school or picking up neighborhood trash regularly.

**Rubric: Extraordinary commitment to others**

*Note: Readers are expected to look across the entire application, including essays and recommendation letters, to ascertain this information. Readers are required to provide evidence for assigned scores, perhaps by writing a few sentences justifying their scores and by pointing to specific areas in the application where they found evidence of that skill.*

1. ***Poor*** *– Application provides very little to no evidence that the student is committed to others.*

Applicants that score **Poor** may have:

* No formal or informal service to others listed
* Activities that primarily advance the interests and experiences of the applicant instead of others
* No mention of commitment to or support of others in letters of recommendation, essays, etc.

1. ***Fair*** *–**Application provides minimal evidence that the student is committed to others (such as highlighting a short-term, limited scope/impact activity in the service of others).*

Applicants that score **Fair** may have:

* Very limited-scope family commitment (e.g., temporarily taking care of a sick sibling, etc.)
* Limited involvement in a formal or informal other-focused activity (e.g., student volunteers for a one-time event like a fundraiser or holiday gift drive)
* Activities that primarily center around the applicant’s experience or learning instead of true concern or care for others
* Letters of recommendation or essays that note the student is “caring” or “kind to others” but this idea is not expanded upon

1. ***Good*** *– Application provides some substantive evidence that the student is committed to others (such as highlighting an impactful, other-focused activity or family commitment).*

Applicants that score **Good** may have:

* Some sort of meaningful family commitment (e.g., identifies working to support the family income or taking care of a younger sibling over a summer, etc.)
* Involvement in formal or informal other-focused activities (e.g., student volunteers for a multi-week or semester-long service project, regularly tutors classmates after class, or describes supporting a friend through a short-term challenge)
* A mix of activities that promote the applicant’s experience or learning while simultaneously promoting care or concern for others
* Letters of recommendation or essays that discuss some aspect of how the student is committed to helping or supporting others

1. ***Excellent*** *–**Application provides deep and sustained evidence that the student is committed to others (such as highlighting a long-term or highly impactful other-focused commitment).*

Applicants that score **Excellent** may have:

* Long-term family commitment (e.g., student takes care of a family member for an extended time, likely at some personal cost)
* Deep involvement in formal or informal other-focused activities (e.g., student regularly volunteers for a charity, organizes peers’ involvement in other-focused activities, or speaks at length about supporting the needs of others)
* A clear pattern of commitment to others across application materials
* Letters of recommendation or essays that discuss in detail how a student is committed to helping or supporting others

1. ***Exceptional*** *–**Application provides extraordinary or truly exceptional evidence that the student is committed to others.*

Applicants that score **Exceptional** may have:

* Long-term family commitments (e.g., student takes care of a family member in an ongoing way, despite personal cost)
* Extraordinary involvement in formal or informal other-focused activities (e.g., student regularly volunteers for one or more charities, demonstrating an extraordinarily large time commitment and impact; the student may coordinate involvement of their peers in other-focused work; or the student’s application speaks extensively about supporting the needs of others)
* An exceptional, rare pattern of commitment to others across all application materials
* Letters of recommendation or essays that greatly emphasize the student’s commitment to, and accomplishments in, helping or supporting others

**Analyses:**

A number of descriptive analyses can be conducted using the character data admission readers generate during the review process.

***Reliability***

As a first step, it is vital to assess the reliability of the character ratings chosen. In other words, to what degree do admission raters agree on the definitions of key skills or capacities of interest and the different ways they manifest in an application? For institutions that assign multiple admission readers for each application, the level of agreement between readers can be determined statistically.

For example, if two readers both identify an applicant as demonstrating an exceptional level of commitment to others, this high degree of reliability suggests a greater likelihood that the skill or capacity is actually present in the application. Low reliability metrics might indicate that an institution should conduct additional training to clarify definitions of complex skills and the types of evidence needed for assigning specific ratings.

***Character Skill Ratings Across the Admission Funnel***

An institution can investigate the degree to which students in its applicant, admit, and matriculant pools possess high levels of important character skills or capacities. Are the specific skills of most value to an institution actually prevalent among admitted students and those who ultimately enroll? If a high percentage of accepted and enrolled students are flagged as possessing a “Fair” or “Poor” level of that skill or capacity, this might raise questions about whether the institution’s application materials and review process are fully meeting its needs.

***Relationship Between Skill or Capacity Ratings and Student Characteristics***

A key set of analyses involve assessing associations between specific skill ratings and student characteristics. Such characteristics can include gender, race, socioeconomic status, and first generation status. For example, do admission readers, on average, assign high ratings for a specific skill to female students compared to male students? Do readers tend to assign high ratings on specific skills or capacities to students from minority ethnic-racial backgrounds at a different rate than for their white counterparts, or vice versa?

Institutions can also explore differences in ratings across standardized test scores, grade point averages, and other ratings used in the admission process (e.g., Do students with a high overall rating for admission tend to also have a high rating on certain skills or capacities?).

***Predictive Modeling***

Ratings data can be included in predictive models to understand whether an applicant’s rating on a certain skill or capacity makes them more likely to attain admission beyond other factors in the admission decision. Furthermore, institutions can assess whether these ratings are predictive of positive outcomes (e.g., academic achievement, graduation) once students arrive on campus.

**Sample 2: Examining the Relationship Between Skills or Capacities and Admission Outcomes**

*Best for: Colleges that don’t know what skills they wish to assess in students or aren’t able to formally consider character, social emotional, or ethical skills and capacities in admission decisions at this time.*

*Overview: A college uses research to define a wide range of skills and capacities important to the institution that an applicant may possess. Readers are instructed to note one or more prominent skills or capacities that are present in each applicant, after reviewing all application materials. These tagged skills or capacities are not incorporated into the admission decision-making process. However, at the end of the admission cycle, the college examines which skills are most associated with admission outcomes (e.g., denied, accepted, waitlisted, matriculated). The college may also follow enrolled students over time to see which skills are most and least associated with student success.*

*This approach allows colleges to explore their own preferences and biases in the admission process; have conversations about what they value and how they define those skills or capacities; and identify a small list of key skills to potentially identify in applicants in subsequent admission cycles.*

**Definitions and examples:**

* **Achievement orientation:** Sets high standardsand works diligently to meet them
* **Compassion**: Displays concern for the welfare of others that is evoked by perceiving another individual as struggling or in need
* **Creativity:** Identifies novel ways to explore the world and offers original, new insights
* **Critical thinking:** Adept at evaluating, interpreting, and synthesizing different sources of information to solve problems
* **Curiosity:** Desires to learn and understand new things and how they work
* **Ethical responsibility:** Understands moral aspects of difficult situations and acts in a way that balances the interests of the self with the greater good
* **Gratitude:** Haspositive feelings of appreciation when another person has purposely given something of value
* **Grit:** Exhibitspassion and perseverance in attaining long-term goals
* **Growth mindset:** Believes that intelligence and talents can advance through perseverance and dedication
* **Harmony:** Actively seeks inner happiness and values cohesion amongst diverse social groups
* **Metacognition:** Is aware of inner feelings and thoughts and is skilled in articulating them to others
* **Optimism:** Approaches life with a positive outlook and has high expectations for the self and others
* **Perspective-taking:** Perceives another individual’s point of view
* **Purpose:** Possesses a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at the same time meaningful to the self and consequential for the world beyond the self
* **Resilience:** Bounces back from challenges and responds well to feedback
* **Self-control:** Overcomes feelings, impulses, and actions in order to accomplish longer-term goals
* **Self-efficacy:** Believes in their ability to complete tasks and achieve goals
* **Tolerance:** Open to learning about different cultures and peoples and values diversity

Remember that possessing a particular skill should not be dependent on access to social, cultural, or economic capital. Character-related skills or capacities that colleges examine in applicants should be relatively common, conceptually distinct, and predictive of outcomes of interest. It is essential that admission readers and other stakeholders coalesce around clear definitions of particular character-related skills or capacities that are inclusive of the experiences of students from all backgrounds.

**Rubric:**

*Note: We recommend choosing a standard number of skills or capacities (between 1–3) that readers assign to each applicant. As a result, readers are forced to prioritize the top few skills in each application, and must resist the urge to label some students as possessing many or all skills or capacities.*

Please list the three most prominent skills that best describe applicant X:

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Remember, identified skills will not affect admission decisions or scores. Instead, these skills will be used to conduct additional analysis after admission decisions have been made.

**Analyses:**

A number of descriptive analyses can be conducted using the character data admission readers generate during the review process.

***Reliability***

As a first step, it is vital to assess the reliability of the character measures chosen. In other words, to what degree do admission raters agree on definitions of the key skills or capacities of interest? For institutions that assign multiple admission readers for each application, the level of agreement between readers can be determined statistically.

This analysis can suggest whether two admission readers evaluating a particular applicant tend to identify the same prominent character skills or capacities. A high degree of reliability suggests a greater likelihood that the skill or capacity is actually present in the application. Low reliability metrics might indicate that an institution should conduct additional training to clarify definitions of complex skills and highlight how they might manifest in application materials.

***Refining List of Character Skills and Capacities***

It is important to develop for admission readers a set of character-related skills or capacities that are relatively common yet conceptually distinct.

Simple frequency distributions can be helpful for identifying skills that are assigned much less frequently than others—these can potentially be removed. Cross-tabulations can also highlight co-occurrence among skills or capacities. For example, are students identified as “creative” also almost always considered “curious”? If there is a very strong correlation between two skills or capacities, institutions might consider removing one from the rubric or combining them. This would help to streamline the rubric for future admission cycles.

***Prevalence of Character Skills Across the Admission Funnel***

For a high-level perspective of trends in assigned character skills or capacities across the admission funnel, an institution can investigate the top skills or capacities among students in its applicant, admit, and matriculant pools. Are the specific skills of most value to an institution actually prevalent among admitted students and those who ultimately enroll? If a low percentage of accepted and/or enrolled students are flagged as possessing that skill or capacity, this might raise questions about whether the institution’s application materials and review process are fully meeting its needs.

***Relationship Between Skills or Capacities and Student Characteristics***

A key set of analyses involve assessing associations between specific skills and student characteristics. Such characteristics can include gender, race, socioeconomic status, and first generation status. For example, what types of skills do admission raters assign, on average, to female students compared to male students? Do readers tend to assign specific skills or capacities to students from minority ethnic-racial backgrounds at a higher rate than their white counterparts, or vice versa?

Institutions can also explore differences in assigned skills or capacities across standardized test scores, grade point averages, and other ratings used in the admission process (e.g., Do students with a high overall rating for admission tend to possess certain skills or capacities?).

***Predictive Modeling***

The skills or capacities identified can be included in predictive models to understand whether possessing certain skills or capacities makes an applicant more likely to attain admission beyond other factors in the admission decision. Furthermore, institutions can assess whether these skills or capacities are predictive of positive outcomes (e.g., academic achievement, graduation) once students arrive on campus.

**Sample 3: Tagging System for Identifying Specific Skills or Capacities: Definitions and Examples**

*Best for: Colleges that have a clear sense of what skills they want to assess and how they manifest in application materials. Colleges that wish to identify students that demonstrate an extraordinary amount of the skill or a concerning lack of it.*

*Overview: A college identifies a skill or value that is important or that research suggests is important. College stakeholders develop a clear definition of the skill or value, as well as inclusive examples of how it might manifest in an application, and then train admission staff in how to identify the skill or value. A tagging system is established that allows readers to note applicants with that skill. Alternatively, colleges may choose to only identify exceptional cases where the skill is unusually present or not present. These tags are considered in the holistic review process and might be especially informative when evaluating students “on the bubble” of admission.*

**Definitions and examples: Curiosity**

Curiosity can be defined as a strong desire to learn new things and understand how they work. Curious applicants demonstrate an interest in learning more, feeling more, or experiencing more. They may articulate a desire to better understand the unknown or to seek and solve specific problems. Curiosity may also manifest in an applicant’s desire to learn about others, experience new things, and build relationships with new people. Here are a few examples of how this institutional value might be reflected in different parts of the application:

* **Extracurriculars**: An applicant is very involved over time in one or more activities that suggest their interest in learning new things, which can be commonplace or profound. This could include enthusiastic membership in a robotics club where the student explores solutions to complicated design problems, membership in a cultural exchange group to learn more about people with different backgrounds, or participation in a variety of clubs and sports to learn new hobbies and ideas. A student might be involved in a research project outside of school or may intentionally seek out an opportunity to shadow a professional in a field in which they are interested.
* **Personal Statement**: An applicant’s personal statement suggests their desire to learn more about another person’s point of view or way of life—this could be a person from a different country, culture, or religious background. The applicant’s essay underscores their strong, genuine desire to learn more about this other person, place, or experience, and explores related questions the applicant wishes to pursue.
* **Letters of Recommendation**: Recommenders refer to an applicant as extremely interested in learning more about the world, experiences, or other people. A recommender might offer examples from the classroom where the applicant constantly asks probing, intellectual questions related to course content, does research on their own to solve problems or flesh out answers, and seeks to understand and reflect upon the experiences and points of view of others. A teacher might talk about an independent study project that a student pursued beyond the prescribed curriculum or the way they connected disparate topics in a unique manner.

Remember that possessing a particular skill should not be dependent on access to social, cultural, or economic capital. Character-related skills or capacities that colleges examine in applicants should be relatively common, conceptually distinct, and predictive of outcomes of interest. It is essential that admission readers and other stakeholders coalesce around clear definitions of particular character-related skills or capacities that are inclusive of the experiences of students from all backgrounds.

**Rubric:**There are three main approaches for implementing a tagging system. Colleges might choose from the following options:

* **Exceptional:** Admission readers tag applicants who demonstrate an exceptional level of a particular skill or capability. Only a small percentage of applicants should be tagged (e.g., fewer than 5%).
* **Inclusive:** Admission readerstag any student who shows substantial evidence of the skill or capacity in their application.
* **Notably Absent:** Admission readers tag applicants for whom there is an alarming lack of a particular skill or capacity.

Note that colleges can define and tag multiple skills or capacities. Admission readers might be instructed to use as many tags as needed. For example, a reader might tag applicant A as possessing “creativity” and “motivation,” but assign zero tags to applicant B.

**Analysis:**

A number of descriptive analyses can be conducted using the character data admission readers generate during the review process.

***Reliability***

As a first step, it is vital to assess the reliability of the character measures chosen. In other words, to what degree do admission raters agree on definitions of the key skills or capacities of interest (in this case, curiosity)? If one reader tags an applicant as possessing an exceptional level of curiosity, did the second reader do the same?

This analysis can suggest whether multiple admission readers evaluating a particular application tend to identify a trait consistently. A high degree of reliability suggests a greater likelihood that the skill or capacity is actually present in the application. Low reliability metrics might indicate that an institution should conduct additional training to clarify definitions of complex skills and highlight how they might manifest in application materials.

***Prevalence of Character Skills Across the Admission Funnel***

An institution can investigate the presence of specific character tags in its applicant, admit, and matriculant pools. If a low percentage of accepted and/or enrolled students are flagged as possessing tags that are of utmost importance to an institution, this might raise questions about whether the institution’s application materials and review process are fully meeting its needs.

***Relationship Between Skills or Capacities and Student Characteristics***

A key set of analyses involve assessing associations between specific tags and student characteristics. Such characteristics can include gender, race, socioeconomic status, and first generation status. For example, do admission raters tend to tag female applicants as exceptionally curious more often than male students, on average? Do readers tag students from minority ethnic-racial backgrounds as curious at a higher rate than their white counterparts, or vice versa?

Institutions can also explore differences in how tags are assigned across standardized test scores, grade point averages, and other ratings used in the admission process (e.g., Do students with a high overall rating for admission tend to have certain tags?).

***Predictive Modeling***

Tags can be included in predictive models to understand whether possessing (or noticeably not possessing) certain skills or capacities makes an applicant more likely to attain admission beyond other factors in the admission decision. Furthermore, institutions can assess whether these skills or capacities are predictive of positive outcomes (e.g., academic achievement, graduation) once students arrive on campus.

**Sample 4: Cross-Input and Cross-Skill Rating Grid**

*Best for: Colleges that know the specific skills they wish to assess in applicants and are committed to using the most thorough and least biased practices.*

*Overview: A college identifies a specific number of skills or capacities they wish to assess in applicants. Each skill is defined and inclusive examples and staff training are provided, along with a rubric for scoring each skill. Readers assess each skill area and provide a separate score for each application “input” (e.g., essays, letters of recommendation, and interviews get their own scores). The scores are then averaged to obtain an overall score, which lessens the weight placed on any one skill score or application input. This helps reduce the tendency that one exceptionally good or bad letter of recommendation, for example, strongly affects a student’s score.*

**Rating System:**

* Admission readers seek evidence of a particular skill or capacity in each application input (e.g., extracurriculars, letters of recommendation, personal statement, interview, etc.). Applicants are assigned a score representing the strength of that skill or capacity for each input. For example, a score of 5 indicates that an applicant displays an exceptional level of a particular skill, while a score of 1 indicates a low level of that skill.
* If there is no or weak evidence of a skill provided, no score is assigned. For example, a letter of recommendation that talks vaguely about the applicant being “resilient” would get no score (N/A) for resilience. Missing inputs should also get no score (N/A). Note that an incomplete grid (with N/As) can still be used to calculate a total score; N/A designations do not negatively influence an applicant’s overall score.
* A low rating on any skill indicates that an input both provided evidence of a student’s capacities and that the applicant possesses limited proficiency in that area.
* Once scores are assigned across application inputs, an average score is calculated for each skill or capacity. An overall score can then be created by taking the mean of the average scores across all skills or capacities measured.

**Definitions and examples:**

**1. Resilience**Resilience can be defined as a capacity to recover quickly in the face of challenges. Applicants who display a high level of resilience are not afraid of failure. They are adept at responding to—and growing from—feedback to achieve their goals. They may have also overcome substantial obstacles or setbacks to meet their goals. Here are a few examples of how this institutional value might be reflected in different application inputs:

* **Extracurriculars**: An applicant may highlight how they faced some type of setback but, rather than being deterred from moving forward, persevered in achieving their goals. For example, an applicant might discuss how they wanted to start a new club but faced significant resistance from school administrators. They may highlight how, despite the constant pushback they received, they felt empowered to continue advocating for the club and ultimately were able to establish the group.
* **Personal Statement**: The personal statement discusses an applicant’s ability to bounce back from challenges in the process of achieving their goals. An applicant may write about their experience in a particular class or interaction that was difficult, or a problem facing their family or local community that impacted them in some way. The student’s commitment to addressing this problem, even when their chance of success is low, shines through in their personal statement.
* **Letters of Recommendation**: An applicant’s letter of recommendation indicates the student is responsive to feedback. For example, a teacher explains that a student initially struggled in a course. However, on account of their hard work and ability to thoughtfully embrace constructive criticism, the student’s work was one of the strongest in the class by the end of the semester.
* **Interview:** An interviewer states that an applicant spoke extensively about their ability to overcome setbacks and remain optimistic in the face of challenges. These challenges can be personal or related to their academic or curricular pursuits. It was clear that a student’s resilience enabled them to not just face headfirst obstacles in their path but to overcome them and fully thrive.

**2. Creativity**

Creativity can be defined as the ability to generate original insights and identify novel ways to explore the world. Applicants who display a high level of creativity are imaginative and do not feel bound by traditional ideas, methods, or interpretations. Creativity can manifest in many ways. While creativity is often associated with those interested in fields like art or writing, applicants interested in any field can display creativity directly through their work and as well indirectly through their interactions with others. Here are a few examples of how this institutional value might be reflected in different application inputs:

* **Extracurriculars**: Applicants who display creativity may launch a new club or start a business that takes a unique approach to filling an unmet need in their school or community. Applicants can also be creative in how they solve problems encountered in clubs, sports, jobs, or other after-school activities they already are a part of. For example, an applicant who serves as an editor on their school newspaper might describe how they increased the number of local businesses sponsoring the publication through reimagining their sponsorship packages. It is clear from an applicant’s admission materials that they are not afraid to “think outside the box” and try new things, even if it means they might not succeed.
* **Personal Statement**: In their personal statement, an applicant might discuss the unique perspectives they bring to solving problems. An applicant may highlight particular instances when they built a new tool or were able to help their family or community overcome an obstacle through finding creative solutions. For example, a student may describe how they leveraged their programming skills to develop a new app that would support community building in a virtual environment.
* **Letters of Recommendation**: An applicant’s letter of recommendation might highlight the student’s imagination and their knack for offering original insights. They may be passionate inventors who seek to make a change in the world through the novel tools and perspectives they provide. Recommenders might describe a student as adept at identifying hidden patterns or recognizing connections between unrelated ideas and phenomena.
* **Interview:** Interviewers might characterize the student as innovative, an inventor, or an artist. They might note how the applicant is not satisfied with the status quo and is not afraid of asking “Why?” Interviewers may state the student is one who would provide a unique, diverse perspective to the college community.

**3. Gratitude**

Gratitude can be defined as feeling a deep sense of appreciation when given something—tangible or intangible—by another person. When a person displays gratitude, they are recognizing the goodwill in their lives that is outside of themselves. Applicants who display gratitude may demonstrate appreciation for those who have given them things, time, support, or opportunities that have allowed them to develop into the person they are today. Here are a few examples of how this institutional value might be reflected in different application inputs:

* **Extracurriculars**: An applicant is very involved in a group or event focused on showing appreciation for the contributions of others (e.g., veterans). More than just “showing up” for the event or group, the applicant demonstrates that their gratitude is long-term and consistent as their involvement unfolds over time. The applicant takes care in their application materials to describe the contributions others have made and why the applicant is personally grateful for them.
* **Personal Statement**: In their personal statement, an applicant talks about their use of a gratitude journal or another consistent practice of gratitude in their life. The applicant may describe a frequent subject of their gratitude and what that person or group’s contribution has meant to them or others. The applicant might also discuss how the practice of gratitude has affected them.
* **Letters of Recommendation**: Recommenders refer to an applicant as one who demonstrates gratitude consistently and reliably in their interactions with others. For example, a teacher recommender might share how the applicant regularly expresses their thanks for the teacher’s support during and after class. The teacher might indicate that the applicant is someone who consistently displays appreciation for the contributions of friends and classmates.
* **Interview:** Interviewers note how the applicant consistently mentions their gratitude for certain people or opportunities in their life. For example, a student may discuss their appreciation for their school’s teachers and staff who helped promote their academic success or their feelings of belonging and inclusion.

**Rubric:**

**Resilience**

**5) Exceptional:** Recovers exceptionally, very frequently, and/or very quickly from substantial or sustained challenges; pushes themselves well outside of their comfort zone consistently and reliably; and demonstrates that they have grown substantially and extraordinarily over time from receiving feedback from others. The applicant’s activities and involvement suggests they are very comfortable with change and learning from challenges.

**4) Very Good:** Accomplishes substantial goals, even in the face of challenging setbacks. They often push themselves outside of their comfort zone and are receptive to feedback. The applicant is comfortable with the learning process and adapts well to change.

**3) Good:** Accomplishes set goals and overcomes some inherent challenges. They occasionally push out of their comfort zone and are generally open to feedback and change.

**2) Fair:** Accomplishes some goals they have set, but goals may be limited or the applicant may have faced very few challenges in achieving those goals. They do not push themselves regularly outside of their comfort zone.

**1) Poor:** Easily gives up or avoids challenges altogether; application materials suggest they are less receptive to receiving feedback from others or making changes to plans. They rarely leave their comfort zone.

**Creativity**

**5) Exceptional:** Consistently and exceptionally thinks “outside the box” to generate novel ideas, make something new, or solve unique problems. The applicant expertly draws creative connections not just across their academic courses but also across their personal experiences and current events.

**4) Very Good:** Thinks “outside the box” often in very meaningful ways and demonstrates strong interest in and talent for exploring new ideas, problems, products, or art.

**3) Good:** Demonstrates some interest and talent for exploring new ideas and approaches. Generates new and generally strong ideas, products, artwork, or solutions to an array of problems.

**2) Fair:** Demonstrates limited interest in or talent for generating new ideas, products, artwork, or solutions to problems.

**1) Poor:** Unwilling or unable to approach problems or ideas from different perspectives; overly reliant on rote approaches to learning or simplistic views of the world.

**Gratitude**

**5: Exceptional:** Consistently and exceptionally shows their appreciation and respect for a wide variety of people—including those who are different from them or who they are not particularly close with. The applicant goes above and beyond to show extraordinary appreciation in words or action for opportunities they have been given or that others have been given; they consistently and reliably recognize in words or actions the goodwill in their lives.

**4: Very Good:** Regularly shows strong appreciation for a wide range of people—including those who are different from them or who they are not particularly close with. Has a strong sense of the opportunities they have been given and recognizes regularly, consistently, and meaningfully, in words or actions, the contributions of others.

**3: Good:** Often shows genuine appreciation for the contributions of others and recognizes the opportunities they have been given.

**2: Fair:** Shows limited or occasional appreciation for the contributions of others.

**1: Poor:** Does not recognize how others have contributed to their success or to their access to opportunities. The applicant is unable or unwilling to recognize the sacrifices made by others, including those close to them; they may also display a sense of entitlement.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Extracurriculars** | **Personal Statement** | **LORs** | **Interview** | **Average** |
| **Resilience** | 3 | 3 | 5 | N/A | 3.7 |
| **Creativity** | 2 | 2 | 3 | N/A | 2.3 |
| **Gratitude** | N/A | 5 | 3 | N/A | 4.0 |
| **Average** | 2.5 | 3.3 | 3.7 | N/A | 3.3 |

**Analysis:**

A number of potential descriptive analyses can be conducted using this rating grid data.

***Trends in Application Input Scores***

One set of analyses involves examining trends in ratings for specific skills or capacities across different application inputs. If certain skills consistently receive lower—or higher—than average scores for a particular input, admission stakeholders may want to explore that input further. For example, do admission readers, on average, assign higher gratitude scores for letters of recommendation than for personal statements? If so, this might suggest that readers are potentially having trouble identifying what constitutes strong evidence of gratitude in the personal statement. Or, if gratitude is a key skill that an institution values but few students are delving into this capacity in their personal statement, this might suggest that an institution consider revising its essay question to explicitly focus on gratitude.

***Relationship Between Skills or Capacities, Application Inputs, and Student Characteristics***

Another set of analyses involve assessing associations between specific skills and student characteristics across the application inputs. Characteristics might include gender, race, socioeconomic status, first generation status, and outcome measures like standardized test scores and grade point averages. For example, one question to explore would be whether admission raters assign male applicants, on average, higher overall scores for creativity than females. Or, do female students tend to have higher creativity scores on certain application inputs (e.g., the personal statement) compared to males?

Associations can also be explored between applicant characteristics and the overall grid score. It is important to examine if certain types of applicants are receiving lower scores than others so that score disparities can be rectified.

***Predictive Modeling***

The overall score from the grid, as well as the sub-scores, can be included in predictive models to understand whether possessing certain skills or capacities makes an applicant more likely to attain admission beyond other factors in the admission decision. Furthermore, institutions can assess whether these skills or capacities are predictive of positive outcomes (e.g., academic achievement and graduation) once students arrive on campus. This data can be used to further refine the grid, as well as evaluation procedures and application materials more generally, to ensure all application inputs are providing useful information.

Last reviewed August 2020.

Ross Anderson, T. & Weissbourd, R. (2020). *Character assessment in college admission: A guide of best practices with accompanying resources.* Retrieved from <https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu>

Access our full suite of character assessment in college admission resources: <http://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/resources-for-colleges/character-assessment-college-admission-guide-overview>

Making Caring Common Project

Harvard Graduate School of Education

14 Appian Way

Cambridge, MA 02138

Email us with feedback, questions, or to learn more: CollegeAdmissions@MakingCaringCommon.org

www.makingcaringcommon.org