

Sharing Institutional Values: Examples from College Admission Websites



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The following excerpts are from colleges and universities that have articulated their institutional values on their website and have specified the types of skills and experiences that they seek in applicants. By sharing this information with applicants in an explicit way, your institution may better recruit applicants who share your values and possess the skills and experiences you covet. You will also send applicants powerful messages that your institution (and by extension, the larger admission process and society) values more than solely applicants' achievements.

Swarthmore College

While no individual student can epitomize all of Swarthmore's values, these are qualities and attributes that we elevate in our application review process:

- **Intellectual curiosity and an enthusiasm for learning:** We are looking for students who genuinely enjoy learning and are uncommonly curious. Students relish the opportunities presented by our selection of 40+ academic programs, an extraordinarily devoted faculty, and a one-of-a-kind honors program.
- **Creative and proactive problem-solving:** We are intrigued by students who are flexible in their approach to learning, who are comfortable with experimentation, and who are willing to take intellectual risks that move them out of their comfort zone.
- **Generosity toward others:** We are looking for students who want to work with their peers, embrace collaboration, have a strong sense of empathy, and look for ways to support each other.
- **Civic engagement:** We appreciate students who have had a sustained commitment to service, who express a genuine interest in moving our world forward, and who demonstrate an interest in improving their school or local or cultural community in a collaborative way.
- **Willingness to work hard and to seek help:** The volume of commitments you will face at Swarthmore will demand a strong sense of organization. We are looking for students who have developed reliable work habits, an ability to focus on the task or commitment in front of them, and a willingness to use the support resources we provide.
- **Potential contributions to campus life:** Whether you are from an urban center or a rural outpost (or somewhere in-between), we value your point of view. We are looking for students who will contribute their talents, interests, perspectives, and distinct voices to our community.
- **Sustained commitment:** We are more interested in your focus on a few activities over time (such as work, care for parents and siblings, service, or athletics), rather than membership in a long list of clubs—although we understand that some students can balance an assortment of activities.
- **Open-mindedness in general and to the liberal arts writ large:** Our most popular major tends to be “undecided,” and we welcome everyone to the liberal arts tradition. We admit students to Swarthmore College, not a specific major. The ideal Swattie values humanities, the natural sciences and engineering, and the social sciences as lenses through which they can learn and grow.

Source <https://www.swarthmore.edu/admissions-aid/apply-to-swarthmore>

Bennington University

A successful Dimensional Application demonstrates your readiness to meet the demands of a Bennington education including:

- The capacity to design an inquiry, to perform research, to create and revise work, to engage with others, and to communicate your work to the world.
- Intrinsic motivation: the wherewithal to continue when things are hard
- A tolerance for ambiguity and a facility for collaboration
- Aesthetic sensibility and cultural sensitivity
- Self-direction
- Self-reflection
- Self-restraint

Consider how you wish to demonstrate your academic achievement over time, your writing ability, your contribution to your classrooms and your community, and your capacity to make and revise work. Portfolios, research you designed or experiments you engineered, reflective and analytical writing, transcripts, letters of recommendation—all and more are welcome.

Source <https://www.bennington.edu/admissions/>

Trinity College

What kind of student is admitted to Trinity? Generally speaking, we are looking for students who will:

- Explore the breadth of our academic programs
- Take advantage of our urban location and global outreach
- Contribute positively to our college community

Applicants should be well prepared for Trinity's academic work, and desirous and capable of contributing to campus and community activities. Trinity is keenly interested in attracting and admitting candidates who not only give ample proof of academic prowess, but also show evidence of such personal qualities as honesty, fairness, compassion, altruism, leadership, and initiative in their high school years.

We seek candidates who demonstrate a willingness to take an interest in the lives and welfare of others or to place themselves in situations that call for personal initiative and leadership. We believe that such experiences develop an individual's appreciation of ethical issues and may well enhance the capacity to make a difference in the society one will enter as a college graduate.

Source <https://www.trincoll.edu/admissions/undergraduate-admissions/application-process/>

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Ask any admissions officer at MIT, and he or she will tell you that while grades and scores are important, it's really the match between applicant and Institute that drives our selection process. Understandably, we're often asked what is meant by "the match." Here are the key components.

- **Alignment with MIT's mission to make the world a better place.** Remember that there are many ways to make the world better—we're not looking for applicants to have cured all infectious disease in the world by the time they're fifteen. Tutoring a single kid in math changes the world. Lobbying a senator to change bad policy changes the world. There are thousands of examples.
- **Collaborative & cooperative spirit.** The core of the MIT spirit is collaboration and cooperation: you can see it all over the Institute. Many of the problem sets (our affectionate term for homework) at MIT are designed to be worked on in groups; cross-department labs are very common; MIT is known for its interdisciplinary research; the Open Source movement is powerful here; publishing and sharing of results is the center of academic research. Fostering a collaborative environment is an important part of the MIT community. If you enjoy working alone all the time, that's fine! But you're probably not going to be particularly happy here.
- **Initiative.** Research projects and seed money and interesting lectures aren't simply handed to students on silver platters here. Opportunities abound at MIT, but they must be seized. For those students who take initiative—who take advantage of what's around them—MIT's resources are unparalleled.
- **Risk-taking.** MIT wants to admit people who are not only planning to succeed but who are not afraid to fail. When people take risks in life, they learn resilience as a result—because risk leads to failure as often as it leads to success. The most creative and successful people—and MIT is loaded with them—know that failure is part of life and that if you stay focused and don't give up, goals are ultimately realized.
- **Hands-on creativity.** MIT is an active, hands-on place. Innovation is risky and messy! Getting your hands dirty and trying something new is often the best way to achieve success. We apply theoretical knowledge to real-world problems here; our Latin motto means "Mind and Hand." In other words, you shouldn't just enjoy thinking, you should also enjoy doing.
- **Intensity, curiosity, and excitement.** In a nutshell, you should be invested in the things that really mean something to you (we're not particularly picky as to what). Explore! Choose quality over quantity—you don't have to do a million things to get into college. Put your heart into a few things that you truly care about and that will be enough.
- **The character of the MIT community.** Our community is comprised of good people. People who take care of each other and lift each other up. People who inspire each other to work and dream beyond their potential. We're looking to admit people who by nature will sustain the qualities of this community.
- **The ability to prioritize balance.** Work hard, play hard. Despite what you may have heard, this place is NOT all about work. To be successful here, you must prioritize some measure of downtime. Therefore, we like to see that you've prioritized some downtime in high school as well. Question #1 (Tell us about something you do simply for the pleasure of it.) is not a trick question. Answer it honestly.

Source <https://mitadmissions.org/apply/process/what-we-look-for/>

Pomona College

Pomona is a great destination for students with strong academic passions who want to do something meaningful with their lives...

...We welcome applications from students who want to join a collaborative and creative community, and we look forward to learning about your goals, your ideas, and your developing self through reading your application.

We evaluate applications holistically, taking into account:

- Investment and involvement in a community or passionate pursuit
- A love for learning, and a willingness to challenge yourself and go outside your "comfort zone"
- An openness to new ideas and rejection of easy answers
- An appreciation for a collaborative learning environment
- Personal character—be it grit, kindness, diligence or serving others
- Risk-taking and adventurousness
- Creativity and innovation
- Appreciation for the visual and/or performing arts

Source <https://www.pomona.edu/admissions/apply>

University of Pennsylvania

Penn seeks the brightest scholars from the broadest range of backgrounds and life experiences—students with intellectual curiosity, an interdisciplinary mindset, and a desire to contribute to the world. Penn looks for students with the ability to turn their ideas and interests into action, people whose talents and experiences will energize our community.

Source <https://admissions.upenn.edu/admissions-and-financial-aid/apply-for-admission>

University of Southern California

USC students pursue ambitious intellectual and professional goals by studying across disciplines and taking advantage of the diversity of programs available. They are willing to venture outside their comfort zones. They are interested in the world, in other peoples and cultures, and enjoy examining important issues from a global perspective. USC students are unafraid to speak up in class to make others think or fight for a cause. They get involved by participating in student organizations and connecting with others. They seek to grow to their fullest potential, and they seek to serve others in the community along the way.

Source <https://admission.usc.edu/apply/our-admission-process/>

Georgia Institute of Technology

Students often ask what makes a good record or they believe there are certain things they need to list on their record. In reality, we are most interested in learning what you are passionate about, and we value the different interests our students bring to Georgia Tech. Some of the traits we value in this portion of the application include:

- Commitment
- Self-motivation
- Personal Responsibility
- Compassion for Others
- Initiative
- Leadership
- Entrepreneurism
- Intellectual Curiosity

Source <https://admission.gatech.edu/first-year/contribution-to-community>

Last reviewed July 2020.

From 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>

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