

## Painting Your Self-portrait: A Guide to College Admissions

This document will provide you with a general understanding of what colleges are looking for. Remember that some schools like Alabama or Auburn emphasize GPA and standardized test scores more than other criteria listed. Others like Furman and Davidson use the GPA and standardized test scores as a benchmark for admissions and then turn to the essay, recommendation, and community involvement. Once you have read this document, reread the "5000 Choices" pages to see what different colleges require.

**Developing Your Self-portrait:** College admission is a competitive process that is won by demonstrating uniqueness and distinction. Colleges are looking to create a diverse population of extraordinary students. Thus, simply seeking to portray yourself as the best student may not be as helpful as demonstrating that you are different from the crowd.

Don't see this as a game to win, but as a path to discover where God wants you to serve in life's next phase. With this perspective you might actually discover the process is quite edifying.

**An Objective Portrait:** There are certain numbers that serve as metrics that schools use to determine how you measure up against other students. Remember, these numbers may tell the score, they do not tell your story. You need a more complete portrait to do that.

1. Grade Point Average (GPA): This is developed by averaging your semester grades earned during your freshman through senior year. At Westminster we weight provide a weighted GPA.
2. Standardized Tests Scores (ACT, SAT or PSAT)

**The Portrait of a Westminster Graduate:** As a graduate of Westminster, you have attended a school where graduates average a 29 on the ACT, students are required to study logic and rhetoric. You have written and defended a Junior and Senior Thesis. You have read the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Inferno*, excerpts from the *Lives* of Plutarch and excerpts from the *Federalist and Anti-federalists Papers*. You have studied Latin since third grade and have learned history and literature through the Harkness method, which has forced you to go beyond memorizing facts to develop your own opinions about the issues you have confronted. For help with understanding the distinction of a Westminster graduate take a look at the [Westminster Graduate Profile](#).

Colleges are looking to see how distinctive your high school was in at least the following areas:

- Academic standards
- Types of classes
- Curriculum

**A Distinctive Portrait:** Below is a general checklist for how to paint a portrait that will really set you apart. However, we recommend you get beyond the checklist. Don't merely look for service projects to impress schools. While this is certainly better than playing video games for four years, selective schools and competitive scholarship programs want to believe you know who you are and what you want. They want to see that you are genuinely ready to serve and lead. To do this, you must know your interests and passions and pursue them fervently.

1. Activities or community involvement: What did you do with your free time?
2. Personal essays: Can you articulate who you are and what you want?
3. Recommendations: What do teachers and counselors see in you that is unique and extraordinary?

For more information on developing your self-portrait, go to the [Common Application page](#).