

How to Beef Up Your College Application

by [Joie Jager Hyman](#)

Founder and President, CollegePrep360; Author

It's important to note that the title of this blog post says "beef up," not "fluff up." We're talking about things of substance, that will stick to your ribs. (Mmm, barbequed ribs . . .) Not fluffy cotton candy that'll leave you hungry. Here's the gist of this delicious analogy: you probably already know that it's bad to manipulate your activities or join clubs for the sake of joining (or worse, lying about joining) just to appear more involved in your college applications. But we're talking about correcting course and adding something substantial to your application, if it's otherwise looking a little barren.

It's easy—and understandable—to feel overwhelmed in the college application process. This is especially true if you may don't have the strongest test scores or transcript. The pressure is on if you're a rising senior as there is little time to turn around your academics or re-take the SAT. Fall and application is right around the corner, so what can you do to put your best foot forward for college admission committees?

First off, don't panic! There is still time for you to beef up your application. Here are five steps you can take, as described in my new book, [B+ Grades, A+ College Application](#).

1. **Be a leader:** It takes more than just being President of Key Club to catch an admission officer's eye. Colleges value "quality over quantity" when it comes to extracurricular activities, and they are looking for students who take initiative. Examine the things you are already doing and enjoy, and see where there might be opportunities for you to take your involvement to the next level, or if you've been discounting your level of involvement already. Research organizations that work for causes or issues you support and look for opportunities to build on the work that they are already doing. For example, if you are passionate about politics, see if there is a local campaign for which you can volunteer. (Fall is election season, after all!) Honing your personal interests makes it easy to invest the extra time and energy to stand out in them.
2. **Get an internship:** Yes, you can get an internship as a high school student! Similar to becoming a leader, having an internship gives you relevant experience and shows admission committees that you have a genuine passion for your interests. When it comes to your college applications, it is better to get an internship through organizations where interns must apply for and earn the position rather than getting one through someone you know. You may have to be resourceful when looking for internships, combing your personal network and reaching out via the Internet. Keep in mind that interns should be humble and flexible (and you will more than likely not get paid!).
3. **Get a job:** If you don't have the time or money to invest in an unpaid internship or academic summer program, you should consider getting a job. Having a job exhibits a strong sense of maturity and responsibility on your college application. The admission committee will understand that you were capable of adhering to a schedule, getting along with colleagues, and performing assigned tasks—all essentials of undergraduate work. Though delivering pizza may not seem as glamorous as a museum internship, a real job can actually be more rare in the increasingly selective college applicant pool—some of what is conventionally considered "interesting" is now commonplace. Some old-fashioned elbow grease may end up working in your favor.
4. **Take a class:** If you're a not-so-perfect student who could benefit from strengthening your academic profile, you may want to consider enrolling in online or community college courses. While the grades you earn will not affect your high school GPA, at the end of the day, college admission officers want to admit students who are intellectually curious and take initiative. Even if your schedule is jam-packed, most community colleges offer courses during the summer and in the evening for flexibility.
5. **Consider a summer program:** Some summer programs demonstrate intellectual passion. You could choose a program that allows you to take college-level courses and live on campus as if you were a college student. Or, you could also apply for a program that is subject-focused such as a foreign language program abroad. Unfortunately, not all summer programs offer financial aid, so make sure you can afford the program before you apply.