

For selective schools, aim to stand out

“What are my chances of getting into (highly competitive college)?”

I get this question a lot. And while I try my best to provide a clear answer, the truth is, it depends. It is hard to know who you will be competing against, and many of the schools in the upper echelon are getting more and more selective.

In both good and bad ways, colleges change their emphasis in terms of what they are looking for with each applicant pool. Despite the uncertainty, it is still possible to get a general sense of how a student will fare. I recommend using their published admissions stats as a guide, but know that past performance doesn't always predict future performance.

For this column, I will stray from my typical message — that there are excellent colleges among those who accept far more than 25 percent of its applicants — to focus on the more selective schools. But just know if you're on track to graduate from high school, there is a college you can get into that will be the right fit.

OK, with that said, let's take a look at how to answer, “What are my chances of getting admitted to (highly competitive college)?”

First, what does a selective college look for? While it varies, a student's transcript is probably most important — meaning courses, course-progression and



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grades. In general, colleges want to see how you challenge yourself in the context of your high school and how well you perform. This is usually about 75 percent of what colleges look for in applicants.

While a 4.0 GPA is great, a 4.0 without advanced placement classes, or APs, will not be competitive compared with other applicants, especially if the student's high school offers 25 AP classes. It is often better to take a hard class but get a B than take an easier class and get an A. Of course it is even better to take the hard classes and get As, but that is not always in the cards.

More importantly, take weighted classes in your area of interest, assuming you can handle the extra work and stress it may entail. Always remember that there's more to life than school and grades, and aim for a balance of challenging classes but also fun and mental space.

With that in mind, course-planning is crucial. Work with your counselor and parents to figure out the right course pattern for you. If you're interested in STEM, try to take math that leads to calculus and take

advanced science classes. If you're interested in liberal arts and humanities, make sure to take honors and AP classes in those areas.

Now, for more context about how your GPA measures up to students at schools you're considering, look online at the College Board website (<https://bit.ly/1ikkb69>) and Naviance (<https://student.naviance.com/dshs>) to see how yours stacks up compared to the incoming freshman class. Keep in mind, this is a rough estimate.

The next factor considered is a combination of test scores, passion/activities and essays. Different colleges give these different weights. Basically, it's great if you can be strong in all of these categories, but it's OK if you don't measure up in certain areas, especially if you can make up for it.

For example, if you are a student who has a passion for animals, join FFA and be a leader. Often this can counteract not-so-stellar test scores. Same with writing a fabulous essay or having a standout interview.

While on the subject of testing, again do your research and see what scores are required for the schools to which you are applying. Usually they will cite the middle 50 percent range, which shows the scores that are in the 25th to 75th percentile. When evaluating those test scores, keep in mind that 25 percent of the people who are accepted to that college get in

with lower scores than the 25th percentile; therefore, do not give up hope if you are lower than their range.

To strengthen your application, if you are in the lower 25th percentile, it may be worthwhile to retake the SAT/ACT or take subject tests. If you are above their range, you are in better shape, but this does not mean that you can count on admission. Nothing is certain, unfortunately.

On to activities — it's quality, not quantity. Pick a few things and do them well and consistently as opposed to joining a million clubs and just being a member. Demonstrate leadership and intellectual curiosity by having the clubs/extracurriculars line up with what you want to study.

If you're interested in pre-med, maybe join the Red Cross Club, for instance. If you have this type of résumé — filled with quality activities that show your passion — you also are in great shape. If not, do not fret. Focus on using the essay to show them why to pick you.

In the essays is where you can gain some real traction with respect to private schools. Wow them. Show them who you are and why they should admit you by picking a unique topic that highlights your intellectual curiosity. This is not an English paper, but rather a chance to convince them that you will be an enthusiastic, engaged and accomplished student who will make the best use of the

resources available to you during your time on their campus.

Other aspects that schools may consider or that may tip the scale in your favor: being a first-generation college student; being a legacy; showing demonstrated interest; and overcoming a significant challenge, to name a few. For more information about these characteristics, talk to the schools' admissions officers and do research online.

What it all really comes down to is essentially three steps:

■ Make sure your course progression, testing plan and activities play to your strengths.

■ Craft a well-balanced list of colleges. Hope for the best, but include at least two “likely schools.”

■ Work hard to put together the best application package that you can. Pay attention to how you're presenting yourself, carefully select essay topics, ensure that data entry is correct, maximize your specific contributions and complete and submit all parts of the application by the deadline.

And, that is all folks. Not too hard, right? Not! But as always, remember there is a right college for you.

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Take advantage of some truths about wine

I recently read a piece by Lauren Volper called “Nine things you should stop believing about wine right now.”

The wine myths she debunks: sweet wines are unsophisticated; you should avoid the cheapest wine on a wine list; screw caps are blasphemous; most expensive equals best; rosé is sweet; riesling is sweet; white wine should be ice-cold and red at room temperature; you get hangovers from tannins; you should always drink white wine with fish.

I'm pretty confident that “Wineaux” readers do not subscribe to these beliefs. But it's always worth addressing them on occasion — especially when an Occasion is approaching. A good off-dry wine can, for example, be a very sophisticated partner for the wildly varied flavors on the Thanksgiving table. A local chenin blanc, for example.

Many excellent wineries now use screw caps, especially for wines that are meant to be drunk right away. Most of the rosés now appearing in wine stores are quite dry and are perfectly appropriate for the season (another myth is that they are exclusively summer sippers). Dining out to celebrate? On a carefully selected wine list, the cheapest wine should be an

excellent choice. And of course, one of “Wineaux”'s first principles is that expensive doesn't mean good.

Yes, white wines should be chilled (though some are perfectly fine at room temperature). But, no, not icy; and reds — especially the ones you might consider for Thanksgiving dinner — are often best at around 63 degrees, which means half an hour in the fridge before your meal. You get hangovers from too much of anything alcoholic, especially if you're dehydrated, and lots of reds go well with fish — the classic salmon and pinot noir pairing a case in point.

And riesling? Well, if I had to pick one wine that would most assuredly partner well with holiday foods of many varieties, it would be a good riesling, which comes in many degrees of sweetness. My personal preference would be a “trocken” (that is, dry), although many dry rieslings are not so helpfully labeled. Like the delicious and very reasonable Kuentz Bas Riesling, an Alsatian beauty from Berkeley importer Kermit Lynch.

A new arrival at the Co-op (\$15) it has the characteristic floral nose that sometimes makes people pronounce riesling “sweet” even though it has less residual sugar than many whites



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WINEAUX

that seem dry. And it has, as well, wonderfully clean lemon notes on the palate with a long fresh finish. This is a 2017 bottling but, unlike many whites, it will retain its freshness for years. Added perk: its tall slender bottle will look elegant on your holiday table, especially if it sits next to the almost-matching Kuenz Bas Pinot Noir (\$18), a holiday choice that I've written about in the past and continue to find a rare pinot bargain.

Another wine that has the “sweet” reputation, and some are, indeed, relatively sweet, is chenin blanc. The grape does really well in our area, and many local wineries make quite nice versions, some dry, some off-dry. These are definitely not the cloying chenin-blancs-in-jug that I remember from my college years; wine that, in fact, was often not even made with that grape.

Chenin's an excellent choice

for holiday wine, whether you choose a local one like the reliable and very reasonably priced Dry Creek Dry Chenin Blanc (Co-op, \$14), a South African one like the highly acclaimed Ken Forrester, or a European one like a Vouvray.

There are lots of myths around sparkling wine, too. Most people don't even think about them as an accompaniment to dinner, but my first choice for holiday drinking, whether with appetizers or with the turkey and trimmings, is something sparkling, like a lovely sparkling Vouvray, from, of course, the Vouvray region in France's Loire Valley.

I have in mind a brut from Domaine Pichot (Co-op, \$18), which got 90 points from Wine Enthusiast and well deserves the score; I had a bottle just last week with a variety of cheese and some smoked fish, and it was delightful — nutty and spicy with definite Champagne-like yeastiness and really good acidity. It bubbled and bubbled all through a long dinner and made me feel quite celebratory on that entirely ordinary day.

The Pichot family is one of the oldest in Vouvray, dating back as viticulturists to the 18th century. Jean-Claude, who produced this sparkler, is the only one who currently continues the family

tradition. The Pichot vineyards are planted exclusively with chenin grapes in calcareous clay soil. The grapes are hand-harvested and fermented in wooden barrels; the second fermentation takes place, as in the traditional (Champagne) method, in the bottle.

And speaking of Champagne ... I recently attended a Kermit Lynch tasting. John from Valley Wine, and Anthony and Victoria from the Co-op were there, too. We compared notes on the bucketful of various small-production Champagnes that KL imports and all really liked the Veuve Fourny & Fils even though it was one of the least expensive.

This is a really elegant, premier cru, 100-percent chardonnay Champagne — bone-dry, complex, lovely. If you're going to splurge on “the real thing” for Thanksgiving or any other winter holiday celebration, this is a really great choice. It was our household pick for New Year's Eve last year and we loved it. Valley Wine Company has it at \$42. So, no, the most expensive Champagne, on or off a wine list, isn't necessarily — or even probably — the best.

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UC Davis student receives \$10,000 scholarship

Enterprise Staff

Deserea Langley of Susanville Indian Rancheria is one of four Native American students from across California who received a \$10,000 scholarship from the Morongo Band of Mission Indians near Palm Springs as part of the 14th annual Rodney T. Mathews Jr. Scholarship program.

Langley attends UC Davis, where she is pursuing a Ph.D. in Native American Studies. Her doctoral research will be the first comprehensive history of the Susanville Indian Rancheria and the implementation of the Dawes Act in Northern California. She plans to be an education counselor at a tribal college or state university to help educate future leaders.

“The Rodney T. Mathews Jr. Scholarship at Morongo was created to reverse the trends that

NAME DROPPERS

have left Native Americans as the most underrepresented group in colleges and universities,” Morongo Tribal Chairman Robert Martin said. “We are happy to be supporting each of this year's deserving recipients in attaining the education and skills they need to pursue their goals and improve their tribal communities.”

Since launching the program, Morongo has provided \$470,000 in scholarships to 49 Native American students seeking to secure a college or post-graduate degree. The scholarship program is unique in that it is open to enrolled members of any of the more than 100 federally recognized tribes in California.

American Indians and Alaskan Natives comprise less than 1 percent of the nation's college students,

the lowest college enrollment rate of any ethnic group, according to the U.S. Department of Education. Similarly, only 15 percent of American Indians hold bachelor's degrees, fewer than any ethnic group in the U.S., according to the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The scholarship program honors the late Rodney T. Mathews Jr., a Morongo tribal member and Hastings Law School graduate who passed away in 2004 after serving as a judge pro tem for more than a decade.

Scholarship applicants are considered based on their academic success and community service. Candidates must be full-time students at an accredited college or university; complete 60 hours with a designated California Indian agency; and be actively involved in the Native American community.

Oliver Fiehn, 51, of Davis, has been reappointed to the California Scientific Guidance Panel, where he has served since 2013.

Fiehn has served in several positions at the University of California, Davis since 2004, including professor and associate professor of metabolomics, director of the Genome Center and faculty lead at the Metabolomics Core in the Department of Molecular and Cellular Biology.

He was a group leader at the Max Planck Institute of Molecular Plant Physiology from 1998 to 2004 and a visiting research scientist at the University of Washington in 1999.

Fiehn was a research scientist at the Technical University of Berlin, Department of Water Quality Control from 1994 to 1997.

He earned a Doctor of Philosophy degree in analytical toxicology from the Technical University of

Berlin and a Master of Science degree in analytical chemistry from the Free University of Berlin.

This position does not

require Senate confirmation and there is no compensation.

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