

FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode)

00:00:09:06 - 00:00:32:11

Hello. Welcome back to College Bound Notre Dame's admissions podcast. I'm Maria Finan, one of the senior assistant directors in the office. I'm also a Double Domer, so I received not only my bachelor's degree, but also my master's degree in English from Notre Dame. I'm here with my colleague Zach, and I'll pass it over to him to introduce himself. And the topic of this next episode.

00:00:33:07 - 00:01:09:15

Yeah. Hey, everyone. And Zach Klonsinski, an assistant director here in the Office of Undergraduate Admissions, also a 2017 Notre Dame graduate. We're really excited. And have you caught our first episode? You kind of got a little bit of a sneak peek to today's topic, but we're really excited today to kind of walk you through the non-academic side of our review. So last episode we talked about the academic side, gave our exciting test-optional pilot program extension announcements, and this time with the non-academic review, we're really excited to kind of walk through some of the more nuanced pieces of how we really try and get to know you on the application.

00:01:09:17 - 00:01:40:29

The academic review is great. It's really important for us to know what kind of preparation you have, what kind of intellectual curiosity you display. But the non-academic side is where we actually really get to know you as a person and something that both Maria and I are really excited about. So again, as I closed out the last episode, I want to give you a quick reminder that we do have our evaluation criteria length. There's a page on our website. Use your favorite search engine, simply put in Notre Dame evaluation criteria, and voila, it should be one of your first results on that.

00:01:41:01 - 00:02:11:17

You'll see a number of different kinds of areas that we are looking at and I will start off with one. It is our letter of recommendation and I say letter very intentionally because at Notre Dame we require just one. It must come from a teacher and of course subject area should be from a teacher who had two years of junior or senior in high school. Obviously, if you had someone as a freshman or a sophomore in high school and they are in a core subject area and you kept in touch with that teacher and they can speak to who you are now as a junior or a senior

00:02:11:26 - 00:02:44:00

They can be a great letter of recommendation. Again, must be from a teacher in a core subject area math, English, science, social studies, foreign language. But again, just looking to get to know you and the teacher that knows you best in the classroom. We then offer an optional letter of recommendation and we recommend this one that comes from your high school counselor. So again, recommended, not required. You remember from last episode, Maria talked a little bit about context of the high school. This is where we find a lot of that to come from.

00:02:44:02 - 00:03:16:24

So your letter of recommendation from a college counselor or registrar or assistant principal or guidance counselor, whatever that position looks like at your high school, and they can provide really important context of things like AP Biology and AP English were offered the same period and they were only offered for one period each. You're not Hermione Granger, so therefore you cannot be in both at once. That's really important context for us to know, right? We want to make sure that we're understanding the opportunities that you had in front of you. Your guidance counselor, college counselor may know you really well and can add in some personal things.

00:03:17:04 - 00:03:52:01

That's great. That's not really the focus of this letter. It's to make sure, again, we're not missing something about the context of your educational journey. My favorite fun fact about the Notre Dame admissions process is that we have a record number for a single application in terms of letters of recommendation received. That number is in the mid-eighties. There's a little bit of dispute of it's 80 to 83, maybe all the way up to 86. But just to kind of put that in mind, you know, our record is mid-eighties. Please do not try and attempt to break that record because that student was not admitted to the University of Notre Dame.

00:03:52:04 - 00:04:21:11

So again, we want to see quality, not quantity. You can submit an additional letter of recommendation. If there is someone that you feel their voice belongs in your application, yes, you can submit that additional letter of recommendation. But really, we want to, we do a great job getting to know you. Just that one letter of recommendation from the teacher and the recommended one that comes from your high school counselor. So with that, I'll toss it over to Maria to talk about how we kind of review your activities and your extracurriculars.

00:04:22:11 - 00:04:58:02

Thanks so much. I definitely would echo that more is not better when it comes to letters of recommendation. We really are reading applications holistically, so we are looking at all of these different pieces and I think the activity section is a really great way to give us a little bit more information and just of what you're passionate about, how do you spend your time outside of the classroom? So some of you have really cool, unique talent, right? Maybe you're really good at a sport or you're a gymnast or you're an Irish dancer or you've got art, talent, all of that.

00:04:58:04 - 00:05:30:08

Always really interesting. We see students really getting involved in a lot of different ways. We see you taking on lots of leadership roles. So some of you are presidents of clubs, you're captain of sports teams, your drum majors, your shift managers at work. All of that are great things to highlight. So definitely kind of keep that in mind as you're putting your activity section together. We also love hearing about kind of moments that you take on initiative. Some of you have started at incredible things during the pandemic.

00:05:31:13 - 00:05:42:12

Some of you are challenging the curriculum at your high schools. It's been really amazing kind of over the years just to see all of the amazing things that students do outside of the classroom.

00:05:44:09 - 00:06:15:29

So definitely I would encourage you to think about kind of what are you, what are you doing at school? But also what are you doing outside of school? So for some of you, you might have factors that kind of limit your extracurricular engagement. And we do want to hear about those as well. I know a lot of students, depending on where they're from and they have very long commutes. If you're commuting, you know, 45 minutes or an hour in the morning and then in the afternoon, that may be impacting kind of what extracurriculars you're involved in.

00:06:16:01 - 00:06:50:24

So definitely don't forget to tell us those additional family responsibilities, that can also be something that you put on your activities list. Maybe you've been caring for an elderly relative, maybe you translate for your family. Maybe you're the oldest in your family and you have a lot of younger siblings and you're driving them around and cooking dinner and helping with homework and all of that. We really want to think about this very holistically. We do, of course, see things like service pretty commonly. Fun fact at Notre Dame is that approximately 80% of our students do service before they graduate.

00:06:51:03 - 00:07:24:29

So many of you do service in high school, but we value your work experience just as much. So if you are a student who is working a job, whether that's because you need gas money or you're supporting your family, or that's just something that is important or a priority to you, all of those things count. So think very broadly about, you know, how do I spend my time when I'm not in class? It could be research-based. It could be, you know, you play in a band, all sorts of different pieces, whatever it is that you're really passionate about.

00:07:25:01 - 00:07:26:03

We love reading about ...

00:07:27:27 - 00:08:05:07

Kind of bigger picture as we're going through kind of these more non-academic pieces, we're really trying to get a sense of who you are. You know, so many of you demonstrate just exemplary character traits through your letters of recommendation and things that are written about you. We see you really caring for the communities that you're a part of. And, you know, we love to see those pieces. And I think, you know, people always wonder kind of, how do you read all of these applications, right? I mean, you get 26,000 applications in a year.

00:08:05:09 - 00:08:35:09

What are you looking for? But I think we love seeing moments that you are finding resonance with our mission or with Notre Dame's values. And so we see that coming through in kind of different areas of our non-academic review process. So we've talked about letter of recommendation, we've talked about activities, but there's of course, one more piece. And Zach, I'm going to let you give a little bit of discussion on the topic of essays.

00:08:36:07 - 00:08:43:09

So do you want to maybe talk briefly about that, knowing that we can't possibly cover everything we want to cover about essays in this episode?

00:08:44:20 - 00:09:17:08

Absolutely. And in case you didn't pick it up from Maria's little tease there, our next episode will actually all be about understanding the college essay. So if you're interested by anything I say here or in learning from two of us who have given a understanding the college essay presentation three years in a row now. Stick around for our next episode. But to give you a quick little recap and a little tease. The best college essays help a reader get to know you better. That is the entire goal of a college application, I say.

00:09:17:15 - 00:09:57:15

You have great topics. You can have terrible topics or any topic can be a great essay. Any topic can be, you know, not a great essay, really. The best college essay, again, helps a reader get to know you better if you do that with your college essay. That is a successful college essay. Just give you a little tease though. What don't essays need? That's a question that we're often asked when we give our presentation on the biggest one big words. If Maria, our double donor, who is a undergraduate English major and a English master based on her degrees, if she needs to look up the word, you probably didn't use it correctly, so avoid big words.

00:09:57:28 - 00:10:33:26

You also don't need a title. You can use a title, but you do not need a title on your essays. You do not need footnotes or citations. You don't need to open with a catchy opening quote. Humor. Not every essay has to be funny, especially your friends tell you you're not funny. Maybe don't try and be funny in your college application essay. You also don't need to write about a transformative life experience. We'll get into some of our favorite essay topics and such in the next episode, but you can write a great essay about any topic and it can be one of the most mundane things otherwise that is shown to be this transformational thing.

00:10:34:12 - 00:11:05:07

Based on your essay, you also do not need to make us cry. You know you don't need to make us laugh. You don't need to make us cry. One of the other things that I really recommend staying away from in college essays is looking at a course catalog and giving us class numbers or repeating classes that you would like to take. Same thing with the next one, which is facts that we know about our university. We know about Notre Dame. Maria and I are paid to go and share Notre Dame with people. And it's, we're very fortunate and very excited to do that.

00:11:05:20 - 00:11:42:07

But we don't need to be told about Notre Dame and your college essay because we know about Notre Dame. So avoid sharing things that are simple facts about the University because we want to think about it. We want to see that you're engaging with the University, as Maria mentioned, kind of with our mission and how that really responds to what you as a person are looking for in this college discernment process. That's really what we're looking for more than just that, you know, about our University. So if that was a little bit of a tease about what don't essays need. Join us next episode for what essays might benefit from Marie and I are really excited for that.

00:11:42:09 - 00:11:47:24

It's a passion project of ours every summer and so I will let her close us out and I hope to see you next episode.

00:11:49:10 - 00:12:09:03

Thanks again for joining us, talking about our non-academic review process and as Zach said, we'll get into all things essay in the next episode. But again, thank you for joining us in this episode of College Bound and hopefully this is helpful for you, especially to our seniors who are working on putting their applications together. See you next time.