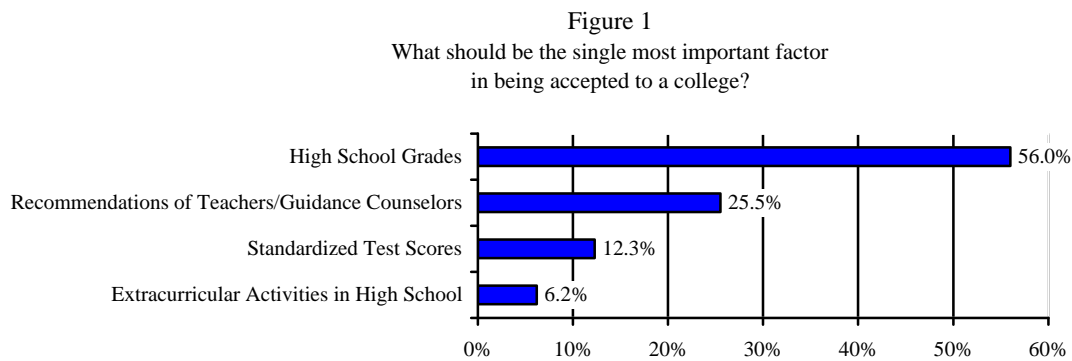


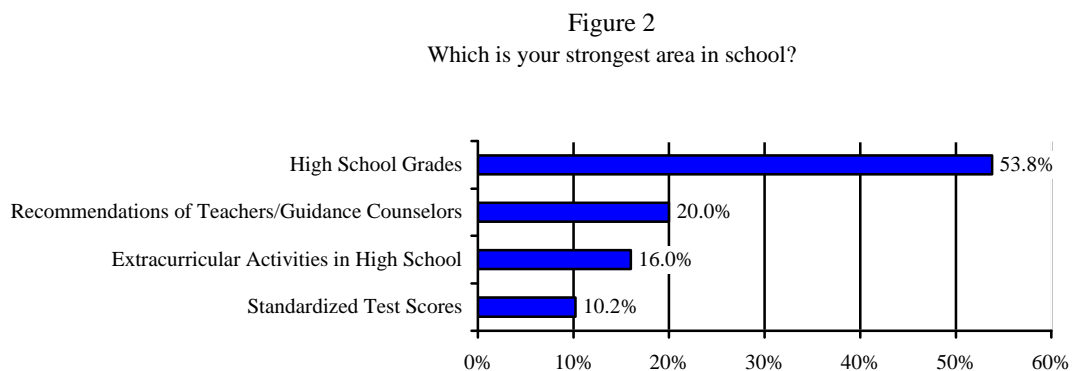
## How Candidates for Admission Would Select Themselves. If They Could...

Deciding which students to admit is a challenging and complex process for many colleges and universities. Specific selection criteria vary by institution, but admissions officials commonly focus on an applicant's grades, standardized test scores, recommendations from teachers and guidance counselors, out-of-class extracurricular activities, application essays, and special talents. Stronger weights are placed on some of these measures over others, depending on a specific school's objectives in shaping its next new class.

While colleges and universities, not student candidates, are completely in control of this part of the process, we thought it would be interesting to measure how students order the priorities of the selection process themselves. Maguire Associates, Inc. (a higher education research and consulting firm) and the National Research Center for College and University Admissions (NRCCUA) recently asked a group of high school juniors and seniors what they thought should be the single most important factor in being admitted to a college or university. As Figure 1 shows, over half of the 3,490 students polled said **high school grades** should be the most important criteria. Surprisingly, **teachers and guidance counselor recommendations** (26%) is the next most frequently identified factor, while relatively few students said **standardized test scores** or **extracurricular activities** (12% and 6%, respectively) should be the most important factor in the decision-making process.



Students were then asked to indicate the area they believe themselves to be strongest in. Figure 2 shows that over half of the students (54%) claim to be strongest in their **grades**. Another 20% said **recommendations**, and 16% said **extracurricular activities**. Only 10% of the students said they are strongest in their **standardized test scores**.



Comparison of students' responses to the two questions reveals a strong trend. Student candidates tend to be somewhat self-serving in their opinions, often indicating the area in which they feel they are strongest as what should be the single most important factor in being accepted to a college (see Table 1). For example, 73% of those whose strongest area is their high school grades think that should be the most important admissions factor, while 52% of those whose strongest area is their standardized test scores believe that should be the main criteria.

**Table 1**  
**What Should Be the Single Most Important Factor in Being Accepted to a College/University by Students' Strongest Area in School**

		Which is your strongest area in school?							
		Score(s) on standardized tests (e.g., SAT, ACT, etc.)		Grades in high school		Recommendations of teachers/guidance counselors		Extracurricular activities in high school	
		n	Column %	n	Column %	n	Column %	n	Column %
<b>What should be the single most important factor in being accepted to a college?</b>	<b>Score(s) on standardized tests (e.g., SAT, ACT, etc.)</b>	185	> <b>51.8%</b>	135	< <b>7.1%</b>	48	< <b>6.8%</b>	60	10.8%
	<b>Grades in high school</b>	97	< <b>27.1%</b>	1377	> <b>73.3%</b>	267	< <b>38.2%</b>	214	< <b>38.3%</b>
	<b>Recommendations of teachers/guidance counselors</b>	65	< <b>18.2%</b>	316	< <b>16.8%</b>	349	> <b>50.0%</b>	160	28.7%
	<b>Extracurricular activities in high school</b>	10	< <b>2.8%</b>	49	< <b>2.6%</b>	34	4.9%	124	> <b>22.2%</b>

Notes: Light shading indicates statistical significance. Bold indicates a significant difference within that cell. '<' means % in cell is less than the expected frequency. '>' means % in cell is more than the expected frequency. \* indicates the Chi-Square test is statistically significant though no % in cell differs significantly from the expected proportion.

Profiles of the students by their self-assessed strongest area reveal some interesting differences, including:

- Comparatively high percentages of the students who say they are strongest in their standardized test scores are male, have taken an AP course, use the Internet 6+ hours per week, would most like to attend a college/university that is private, one that has a campus environment with minimal social regulations, and are slightly more interested in colleges of science/technology and engineering. Given the relatively high percentage of male students in this group, many of these differences are largely a gender effect: the male students are more inclined toward a campus with few social regulations, heavier Internet users, and more interested in schools of business, colleges of science/technology, and engineering colleges.
- In contrast, students who say they are strongest in their high school grades report A+ or A grade point averages and are disproportionately female.
- Students who claim to be strongest in recommendations from teachers or counselors or extracurricular activities disproportionately report slightly lower grade point averages (particularly B or lower). A high percentage of those strongest in recommendations want to attend a community/junior college or trade/technical school, while students who say they are strongest in extracurricular activities are not surprisingly more interested in sports such as basketball, cheerleading, track and field, and football.

While the findings of this research are not necessarily “ground breaking,” clearly the weight placed on certain admissions criteria can affect the make-up of an incoming class. Most importantly, this research emphasizes that the profile of students who are strongest in standardized test scores is somewhat different from that of students strongest in high school grades. Other research conducted by Maguire Associates on behalf of colleges and universities frequently shows demographic or attitudinal differences by various measures of academic aptitude as well as interests in extracurricular activities. In sum, institutions of

higher education should consider the biases inherent in each criteria as well as the school's strategic goals to determine how much weight to place on each factor under consideration.

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