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Evaluating Prospective Students

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Evaluating Prospective Students

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Part I: The Student Admissions Associate

Student Admissions Associates are seniors hired by the College to lead group information sessions and conduct interviews of prospective students. Trusted by the Admissions Office to act with integrity, honesty, and discretion, Student Admissions Associates are chosen based on a number of qualifications and qualities. In addition to a formal application, Student Associates are required to submit short answer responses and participate in an interview with the Senior Associate Director. If chosen, for the position in the upcoming year, students participate in a series of training sessions to observe veteran Associates in action and practice being in leadership. This includes observing and leading group information sessions and interviews, completing practice evaluation write-ups for feedback, and even interacting with parents/families of prospective students who are full of questions and concerns. While some Associates are trained over the summer, others are taught during the beginning of the fall semester, and all await the ‘green light’ of the Senior Director before being considered a full Associate in the Office.

As I am a Student Admissions Associate myself, I also understand that we are ambassadors of the College when speaking in front of students and parents. Whether on or off campus we are representatives of the College at all times. It is our duty to view prospective students in the same light and evaluate them honestly on their potential to succeed at Trinity and positively impact the campus community. After each interview conducted, Associates are required to complete an official evaluation of the student based on academic and extracurricular progress in high school and promise for college. The evaluations are included in each student’s file and read once applications are submitted but are only part of the Admissions Office’s final decision about the applicant’s fate.

Part II: The Admissions Interview

Although interviews are not required for Trinity College applicants, they are highly recommended. We say that “interviews turn a 2D application into a 3D person” and we encourage students to have interviews, including those held by alumni across the nation. I have interviewed and evaluated nearly 70 applicants since this summer, so I can honestly say that interviews have the potential to greatly impact the decision on one’s application. Some interviewees come to clarify discrepancies in their application that the Common Application does not explain. Others come to get an inside viewpoint into life at the College and take advantage of my perspective as a student for four years. Then, there are a few that attend interviews simply because it’s recommended. In any case, interviews give a one-time, staged encounter for hopefuls to add a personal touch to their applications.

Interviewees may be applying for First Year entrance or be transfer candidates for any of the present classes. While I have had much less experience with interviewing and evaluating transfer students (less than five since I’ve been hired), both have the option to meet with us in person or via Skype interview. The actual array of questions posed to each applicant may vary by interviewer, but generally the schedule flows from academics to extracurricular activities. For academics, I noticed that there are some questions I gravitate to more often: “Have you read or written anything recently that was intriguing, disturbing, or challenging? How do you describe yourself as a student? If I asked your teachers about you, what would they say? Is there anything else about academics that I haven’t asked you, but you’d like me to know?” These questions give

insight to most categories on the evaluation write-up form, but also illustrate qualities of their personality as an adolescent and student. As the interviewer, I am interested to know how they go about responding to questions, how they think others view them, and even how they describe themselves. I am also looking for level of articulation, positive attitude or energy about their education, thoughtfulness when answering questions, and attention to detail. Perhaps these aspects were not explicitly taught in the training session, but each are telling of the applicant as a present and future student.

Extracurricular activities also give indispensable information on how the student spends their time outside of the classroom. Questions asked during the second half of the student's interview include their interests, hobbies, creativity, and leadership positions. From community involvement to team participation, interviewees are given the chance to brag about their passions outside of academia. Responses to questions posed indicate a student's interpersonal skills, social strengths or weaknesses, ability to function in groups, and capability to manage their time. There are some students who can take on leadership in multiple groups/teams/organizations and still succeed in higher level classes. There are other students who participate in a plethora of activities but show no commitment to any and lack the ability to prioritize and differentiate between those of importance. My job as a Student Admissions Associate is to identify those students who show signs of great leadership potential or definite promise to improve the climate on campus and in the Hartford community.

My job is also to recognize those students who would not survive socially or academically on campus. The evaluative write-up is my chance to be completely honest about the student and their personality. Although I am an ambassador for the College in trying to persuade students to apply by showcasing my enthusiasm for the school, I am also the person who would know best if the student would be successful here.

Part III: The Interview Evaluation

Interviews last about 30 minutes and are spread half an hour apart. At the end of each interview Student Admissions Associates can spend free time doing evaluations to summarize the encounter. The evaluation has two components to each of the three categories: a scale for check marks, rating the student from "below average" to "truly outstanding," with space for writing comprehensive comments for each section. In each rating there is a first, second, and third tier to check off and likewise, there is a ranking scale at the bottom of the form for the student's overall interview. The comments sections contain memorable quotes the student said and the interviewer's personal beliefs about the student as a scholar, learner, and developing young adult.

Now, it is clear that each Student Admissions Associate will have a bias toward one applicant or another. We each have different majors/minors, personalities, extracurricular activities, and long-term career goals that may forge a closer conversation with a particular interviewee. This form is currently the most accurate way to judge applicants interviewed by various Associates on the same grounds, despite our individual biases. Understandably, it is easy to label an applicant "average" and "truly outstanding" in any category, but it is quite difficult to discern between "good" and "very good." For me, the difference between two rankings typically comes from how much I liked or received their personality. While I rank the student's form with check marks from academics to extracurricular activities to personal qualities, I write comments in the opposite order, giving personality priority. The order in which sections are completed will also vary by interviewer, but I find this order most effective for remembering how passionate the

student was in each category. I believe that passion in demeanor is a direct foreshadowing to ambition and communication skills.

Evaluating an individual on personal qualities may be the most subjective and odd task for an evaluator, but it is also my favorite section of the evaluation. This section requests ranking for their indicated social maturity, energy shown, self confidence, and overall expression. In the comments section, I also take note of their initial greeting, their demeanor as indication of confidence or nervousness, positivity or optimism about the future, interest in my experience as a current student, and eye contact throughout the interview. I am even interested in their ability to socialize with peers or their potential to contribute to any of the –isms (racism, sexism, etc) we seek to combat. Personal qualities are also apparent in some responses to interview questions on how they view themselves as students or how others on the team receive them, and the like. As juniors and seniors in high school, their current level of motivation and interpersonal skills are an allusion to their ambition and promise during their First Year of college.

Next, extracurricular activities are ranked again from “below average” to “truly outstanding” in terms of accomplishments, depth of involvement, and even in leadership potential. For this portion, I am personally intrigued by students who creating new groups in their schools or communities, the amount of trust faculty place in them, and by their desire to continue any particular activity in college. I am also drawn to favor those applicants that show willingness to try new activities or create new organizations at Trinity that we don’t have. Students who show interest in community service, internships, and traveling abroad also exhibit a sense of open-mindedness, curiosity, and independence that may result in slightly higher scoring. For me, a student who is consistently interested and active in improving the world around them should be ranked higher than one who performs just above the minimum community service hours required of them.

Finally, the academic section of the evaluation asks Associates to rank applicants on qualities like intellectual ability, commitment to learning, inquisitiveness, and work habits. While a person who possesses a high GPA, test scores, and higher level classes would qualify for marks in the “good-very good” section, one who is additionally passionate about their field of interest and its ability to improve the human disposition, would make it to the “truly outstanding” category. In the comments section, I mention their possible interests for major or career paths, how peers and professors at Trinity will respond to them, and their motivation to obtain even higher goals than a simple college major. Of course, every school is different and may not offer higher level classes or may not provide GPA or diversity in student body, but there have been several cases where applicants seek more challenging courses from other schools, including colleges, and that deserves recognition.

Taking all the rankings and comments into consideration from each section, Student Admissions Associates decide on a final overall score, which is located just below the summary. This final score may be decided by counting the amount of check marks in each ranking and choosing an overall score accordingly. It may also be decided by simply taking a deep breath and choosing the one that best suites the overall impression of the student. Sometimes there is a discrepancy, between the individual scores from each of the three sections and it’s necessary to choose an overall score that averages in the middle. Occasionally, I find myself checking off two boxes as a first instinct when I feel the applicant has fallen right between any two differentiations. In some cases, I will refer back to my genuine beliefs about the student’s personality or potential and choose the higher or lower of the two. Given that there is no rubric

for making these decisions, the choice is completely left in my hands, and more generally in the hands of trained Student Admissions Associates.