

Is Scouting Worth it?

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So much of what we do as parents is geared towards helping our children negotiate the trials and tribulations of growing up. We want to make sure that every aspect of their day-to-day interactions is enriching, safe, and time well spent. We worry about them, we talk with them about the dangers around them, we drive them to any number of sporting and school related activities, we constantly direct them towards learning opportunities, and we always have in the back of our minds, *“He’ll need this experience later on to help him get into a good school”*.

Joining Cub Scouts back when they were Tigers or Wolves seemed like a fun distraction at the time. But what you didn’t know was that if (and this is a big if) they stick with it through Eagle Scout, it might increase their chances of getting into a top tier school. How is that possible? Take a look at the following table:

#	Institution	Fall '09 accept rate
1	Harvard Univ. Cambridge, MA	7%
2	Princeton Univ. Princeton, NJ	10%
3	Yale Univ. New Haven, CT	8%
4	Columbia Univ. New York, NY	10%
5	Stanford Univ. Stanford, CA	8%
6	Univ. of Pennsylvania Philadelphia, PA	18%
7	Calif. Inst. of Tech. Pasadena, CA	15%
8	MIT Cambridge, MA	11%
9	Dartmouth College Hanover, NH	13%
10	Duke Univ. Durham, NC	19%

Source: Ranking by US News and World Report, 2009

In 2009 the top 10 colleges in the country had an average acceptance rate of 12%, that’s down 3% from 2005. In 2008 (the latest year this data is available) these same colleges had an average of 17,000 applications submitted to each of them for admission and of those applications; an average of 2,600 were accepted at each. One more fact is that admission figures for these same institutions for the past 7 years show that their acceptance rates have remained relatively flat.¹

Now if you couple those figures with the fact that the U.S. Education Department predicts that the largest graduating high school class in US history was in 2008. That class was 3.3² million students in size (for comparison, in 1980 there was 2.3 million HS Grads³), and that number will stay relatively constant until 2016 when it will dip slightly to 3.2 million and then gradually begin to rise again. In addition to this, over the past 10 years the number of colleges that high school seniors apply to has increased to 15⁴ schools (this number is up 3 fold since the early ‘90’s). By using shared application sites colleges make their application process easily replicated. Students fill out one application and customize sections of it for

the different institutions they want the site to submit it to. Companies like www.commonapp.com aggregate over 400 college applications and make it easy to apply and pay for, one-stop-shopping! It's easy to see that we have a problem here.

That problem being; if the number of high school graduates is increasing, along with the number of applications from each college bound high school student, and the number of students being accepted by top colleges is leveling off, how in the world does your child stand out in that crowd and get noticed?

By being a Cub Scout and sticking with it all the way through to being an Eagle Scout, that's how.

In a recent Washington Post article the author wrote about high school students who were over-scheduled with activities and how most college acceptance boards were beginning to see through this melange of activities for what it was really worth, nothing. The acceptance boards asked; how can students who take part in 15-20 activities get anything out of participating in them? Either they are super human and can live without sleep or they were outright lying about their experiences in them since they couldn't possibly get anything of value from the brief periods of time they could devote to them.

Now, nothing will ever take the place of having excellent grades, and high SAT scores to prove that you're a good student to college admissions boards. But in order to stand out, these same boards are looking for good students who have done 3 to 4 out of school activities over a long period of time. Not the 17 or so last minute activities done poorly and in an obvious shallow attempt to impress admissions personnel.

This article went on to state these same admissions boards indicated that sports, music, and civic groups rank among the top activities a college bound student should take part in. But they added a twist, the student needs to have done them for more than just a few years and their participation needs to be verifiable. Cub Scouts leading into Boy Scouts satisfies those requirements.

Scouts who participate fully in all that a Pack has to offer begin to form a connection with the city and its residents. They begin to see that reaching out and helping for the good of others is a smart thing to do. Mostly they begin to understand how the world of Scouting works and they form connections to boy scout troops in their community who help with some of the shared community service events, scouting for food is a big one. This journey begins with cub scouts and ends in boy scouts where he'll do the same type of work but now it goes on to a higher purpose.

To become an Eagle Scout he'll move through 6 rank levels, he'll need 21 merit badges, he'll be graded on his participation and leadership in the troop, he'll take part in 100's of hours of community service, and he'll need to plan and present his Eagle project. To do his Eagle project he'll use all of the things he's learned in school and in scouting. He'll then document and present the results of that project to a group of leaders and professionals outside of the school system for approval. In essence his Eagle project is a three

dimensional thesis, presented, developed, approved, and graded by a board of community professionals, in essence they validate his secondary education. College admissions boards love this.

So is it worth it? I don't know, but what I do know is, if you're looking to help your child stand out in a crowd and get something of real value? The journey in scouting has nothing equal to it and he'll need the experiences he has in scouting later on to help him get into a good school.

¹ Numbers obtained and assembled from those institutions web sites for admissions figures

² College Board, Trends in Number of High School Graduates: National PPT file

³ US ED Inst of Education Sciences, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2001/proj01/tables/table23.asp>

⁴ The College Board