



Admissions

What you won't hear anywhere else

PREPMATTERS™ EDUCATIONAL COUNSELING, TEST PREP & SUBJECT TUTORING

WHO AM I?

- 1) I was chartered in 1819 but it took another six years for students to begin attending classes.
- 2) One of my earliest students became a famed poet: Edgar Allan Poe.
- 3) One of my most famous buildings is modeled after Rome's Pantheon.
- 4) Although some of my earliest classes were small, today some 20,000 students enroll each year, 13,500 of whom are undergraduates.
- 5) My early history is associated with one of our country's founding fathers.

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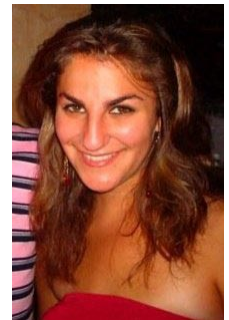
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WHO AM I?

The University of Virginia located in Charlottesville, Virginia and founded by Thomas Jefferson.

What Students Say

Some say it's hardest to appreciate what's in our own backyard. For some, that would include the University of Maryland, but not for Rebecca (Becca) Certner, who will major in cellular biology and molecular genetics. Becca has just begun her sophomore year as a Terrapin and a member of Gemstone, one of Maryland's honors programs. She loves it, but laughs as she recalls that College Park wasn't her first choice. In fact, she waited until the very last day she could to decide. In the end, two things swayed her. One was the atmosphere on campus, which she says is more than school spirit. There's a feeling at Maryland of being happy, academically challenged, and knowing you can try absolutely anything because Maryland has it all!



Gemstone is Maryland's most selective honors program, and Becca laughs when she says that she almost didn't bother to apply and only did so when she saw it was an easy application. Ninety percent of her classes are regular classes, but what Gemstone gives her is an opportunity to perform original research as part of a team. Gemstone has a great track record. Many prior projects have had huge success, produced great research and even received grant money. The Gemstone participants propose their own projects and sign up for teams on those approved. Becca and a friend offered a project idea that garnered the most sign-ups last spring, and now they head a team of 14 students in a Chesapeake Bay study of how to reduce algae blooms. She is very excited at the thought of their idea going forward as a serious research project and excited about the potential impact the project could have.

Becca loved Maryland from her first day and says that her first weeks on campus were the most fun she's had. She acknowledges that the university is big but says she never felt on her own or as if she couldn't find help if she needed it. For one thing, she had her Gemstone group, which Maryland houses in the same dorm, creating a community within the larger community. She also loved her two roommates and signed up (with a fourth friend) for another year together.

Becca has loved her classes. She says a couple are large lecture classes but she doesn't find them a problem. The teachers make themselves available and those that aren't comfortable with the size need only sit in the front row. What excites her are the endless research opportunities. She receives an email nearly every day to inform her about some research project that is taking applications. She says you never run out of opportunities at Maryland.

Becca enthusiastically recommends Maryland, or any large university. She says it's completely false that by attending a large school, you won't be challenged academically. She knows some people feel that way, but that hasn't been her experience. Her classes are plenty hard, but she's having the time of her life!

The University of Maryland at College Park is home to 25,800 undergraduates, 10,150 graduate students, 127 undergraduate majors, and 112 graduate degrees.

TRAPS AND AMBUSHES

It's easy to put together a list of dream and reach schools, and even to complete and send the applications for them, but you can't stop there. 'Safeties' are important, even if it's not exciting to think about them. After all, they're not the schools you're interested in attending. They're the back-up, the 'if all else fails' plan.

Safeties, however, are terribly important. It's much too competitive in admissions not to apply to a good number of them. How many? Eight to ten on your total list is generally a good mark, and it's smart for three of those to be safeties -- real safeties where you absolutely know that your grades and scores are well within the level they accept. Remember though that having them on your list isn't enough. You have to fill out those applications and get them sent. Otherwise, you'll be doing a high wire act, and they won't do you one bit of good!



Going Against the Grain

Have you ever wondered why diversity is such a popular essay topic? Of course, colleges like having a mix of people on campus -- a mix of ethnicity, of geography, of talent and so forth. This is particularly true of small- to medium- sized institutions because large universities, by virtue of their size, have some of everything without trying, but it's not so automatic for small- to medium- sized colleges.

It's curious. Students like colleges where they fit in, where there are other students like themselves. Colleges, on the other hand, are looking for students who are different from those they already have in order to increase their diversity. The colleges, while trying to make themselves more diverse, are, by virtue of the style they project, attracting more of the same kind of student.

That headache for the colleges, however, creates an interesting admissions dynamic. Offering something that a college has less of (and wants more of) may generate interest. If you are from a part of the country from which they have fewer students, or if you have a different ethnic background from their norm, or if you declare a major that is not as popular, you may have something that will interest them. In a competitive situation, that might just buy you a second look or even an invitation to the party.

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It helps if you offer something different.
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Evaluating the Transcript

The transcript is the official, cumulative, and comprehensive record of grades earned by a student over four years of high school. It's a record of what courses were taken and the grades earned in each. Most transcripts will also include an average of all grades, called a cumulative grade point average (or GPA). Official transcripts, required by college admissions offices, are copies certified by the school registrar and sent directly to admissions offices.

That's all pretty straightforward, but what happens after that is less so because every college, of course, makes its own rules. We see this in how different colleges evaluate the high school transcript.

The principal differences involve (1) whether to include all courses or only academic courses and (2) whether to assign extra value (or weight) to higher level courses (namely honors and AP).

Many colleges only use an academic GPA, comprised of English, math, foreign language, history/government and

science, which means that the cumulative GPA you may find on your transcript isn't the one your favorite college will use at all. Instead, they will recalculate your GPA using only grades from courses in those five core academic areas.

Many colleges use a weighted GPA, giving extra value to honors and AP courses, but many others do not, using an unweighted GPA. Still other colleges work with whatever the high school sends irrespective of what system is used.

There are other variations too. Some colleges will count a course in religion or computer science as an additional academic course while others won't. At least one (the University of Michigan) only uses sophomore and junior year grades.

It's a patchwork of policies, but they are important to understand if you're trying to evaluate how well you fit a particular school's profile of accepted students. Numbers can speak volumes, but you have to be sure you're working with the correct formula.

College Cousins

Traditional, southern, intellectual, and yuppie are all adjectives that might apply to Davidson and Washington and Lee. Davidson is located in Davidson, North Carolina, 20 minutes outside Charlotte. Washington and Lee can be found in Lexington, Virginia, near Roanoke. Davidson takes its name from the town in which it resides while Washington and Lee's name gives homage to its first major benefactor, George Washington, and its one-time president, Robert E. Lee.

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**Davidson College and
 Washington & Lee University**

Academic excellence gives both schools a reputation that belies their small size. Both have distribution requirements to ensure their students get a true liberal arts education. Washington and Lee has an unusual 12-12-4 academic calendar, comprised of twelve-week terms for fall and winter and a four-week spring term, which enables students to avail themselves of special opportunities such as elective courses, internships, and study abroad.

Davidson retains its affiliation with the Presbyterian Church, and an honor code holds a central place at both institutions. These hard working students, however, know how to relax on the weekends, and Greek life dominates the campus social life at both. Campus activities are also very popular. As the smallest Division I NCAA school, Davidson prides itself on having 21 competitive NCAA sports. Its premier event is the annual "cake race," a 75 year-old tradition. Washington and Lee hosts a nationally known Mock Convention every four years for the political party not occupying the White House.

These are two small, selective, and traditional institutions. They are small in size and located in small communities, but have big reputations that remind us that they are not to be overlooked.

	Davidson for Fall 2007	Washington and Lee for Fall 2007
Number of Applications	4,413	6,386
Number Accepted	1,133	1,074
Percent Accepted	25.7%	16.8%
Number in Freshman Class	482	456
Undergrad Enrollment	1,750	1,775
% Men and Women	50% to 50%	50% to 50%
% in Fraternities & Sororities	40% (fraternities only)	77%
Middle 50% SAT (Admitted)		
Critical Reading & Math	1270 - 1450	1340 - 1460
Middle 50% ACT	28-32	28 - 31
Percent in Top 10% of Class	85	93



Honesty in Test-Taking

We've all heard horror stories of SAT administrations that went wrong—the proctor shorted the time on a section, the room was too hot or too cold, distractions paraded through the room one by one. In those situations, students can choose to have their scores cancelled and try again for a better experience. Many of us, however, have heard the other kind of story as well: the proctor lets the students have extra time on a section or two, or allows students to return to sections already completed, or even turns a blind eye to rampant cheating by the students.

Unfortunately, student attitudes toward cheating have changed dramatically in the past few years. They are more permissive. Some might not even recognize as cheating some practices such as giving exam questions to another, using essays off the internet, filling in an answer or two after time was called, texting the definition of a tricky vocabulary word. After all, if "everyone" is doing it, isn't it really OK?

When it comes to standardized tests, however, there is no tolerance for cheating of any sort. Sure, your proctor might be asleep, but your academic integrity is on the line. SAT scores from tests taken under "unusual circumstances" will be canceled, and the colleges who receive your scores will be told of the cancellation. ETS also follows up on individual instances by thoroughly investigating irregularities such as suspicious score increases.

All this is good practice for college, where many universities are working harder than ever to maintain their honor codes and promote academic integrity. Graduate exams are moving past ink fingerprinting to digital fingerprints, digital photographs, camera monitors, and even

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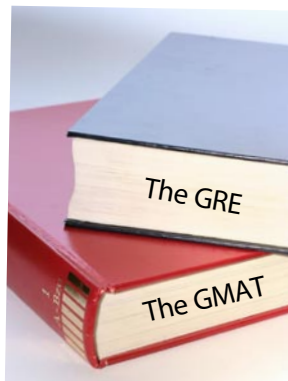
THE GRE FOR BUSINESS SCHOOL?

The GRE has long been considered an incredibly versatile test. After all, with a GRE score, you're set for anything from a Ph.D. in linguistics to a Master's in architecture. It's a catch-all graduate test for a diverse range of graduate schools. Recently, however, the GRE became even more useful.

In an effort to diversify their applicant pools, a few business schools are accepting the GRE instead of the GMAT. They are finding that some populations—women, for instance—are just more likely to take the GRE than the GMAT, so why not? Students who otherwise might not consider an MBA just might be swayed enough to apply if the GMAT obstacle were dismantled—or so some business schools are reasoning.

Of course, not any standardized test would do. The MCAT, for instance, wouldn't be a good substitute: too much chemistry and not enough critical reasoning. The GRE, however, is actually quite similar to the GMAT, frequently using business contexts to present questions, and it has a significant overlap in the math skills tested. Both tests also emphasize writing skills, a must for business schools.

Business schools that accept the GRE hope to attract a wider range of applicants and, in turn, to admit a more creative and open-minded class of students, one that can help them answer business' call for more creative business leaders. If that connection is ever proven, there will be more than the current handful of business schools to embrace the GRE alternative. In the meantime, one thing is certain: it's a good thing for students. More options in testing mean more opportunities for students with diverse talents to shine, and we will watch with interest to see what happens in the future.



Honesty in Test-Taking (continued from page 3)

digital hand scans in an effort to crack down on cheating -- and all for good reason. There have been too many scandals in the business world based on good old-fashioned dishonesty. That's why many colleges still prize their honor code and why ethics courses are part of a standard business curriculum. Universities, graduate schools, and businesses in general are looking for students who know how to close their answer books at the end of a section, whether or not the proctor is watching.

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George Washington University

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