

# Ivy Bound - SAT Prep

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If you haven't noticed, summer is over. For many students, it was shorter than ever.

I revisited this article, first written in 2000. My sentiments about summer ring even more true today. My office gets calls from frenzied parents every spring: "my kid has two weeks away here, then has to do her volunteer work there, and then fall sports practice starts up in early August...so she'll be free for 9 days this summer".

Too little freedom; too much obligation. For the sake of teens and their parents, my proposal is more pressing now than ever.

Articles often ask "should the school year be lengthened?". I believe that for teens, it should be SHORTENED, but be made more meaningful". Schools can engender academic intensity, indeed even scholarship, with a 155 day year; (esteemed universities do it in 130). I think 20 – 25 days of a "life enrichment" activity is more valuable than a 10<sup>th</sup> month of more school, provided the nine real months are made more fulfilling. An extra month off, meant for structured work, volunteering, or non-academic enrichment, would help teens and give more opportunities for their teachers.

Some of the best private schools force students to devote a week or more to "experiential learning". I would like public school students to have this opportunity as well.

Mark G

## A "No-Fly Zone" on college admissions

by Mark Greenstein

The pressures that have swamped many college students could be reduced with one sensible change. Admissions committees at competitive colleges ought to remove summer activities from evaluation. "Should our child go to Spain for the summer? No, that's not *different* enough to impress colleges; we'll send her to Ecuador! No, that might appear too elitist; we should send her to help clean up the squalor in Sudan!". This wrangling may be especially fitful for families whose teens ought to be **earning** money in the summer, not spending it. The perception that a vast array of widespread experiences is important to colleges could be lessened in one stroke if Ivy League schools would firmly pronounce "we will not evaluate your summer experiences".

College admissions officers have ample opportunity to evaluate applicants based on their school-year extracurricular activities, their grades, and their test scores. Year-round scrutiny is nearly an invasion of privacy. A kid who needs to take a retail job should not be evaluated against another kid who spends the summer in music camp and trying to start a business. Colleges understandably want to know how directed and assertive an applicant is. But colleges can discern direction and assertiveness by the level of academic challenge and success the applicant

shows during the school year..

What of "volunteer experience", and "diversity of experience"? These criteria put unfair pressure on lower income families, who need to work over the summer to help support their families. Admissions officers should remember that colleges themselves all have a mission to foster diversity and volunteerism once the students matriculate. If a strong applicant lacks these experiences in his teenage years, the college itself has four years to help develop them. Teens often volunteer for superficial college acceptance-oriented reasons anyhow.

Summer can and should be a time where achievement is not the most pressing issue. Students who want to take academic enrichment courses should do it for their own growth, and their own interests. The knowledge and skills gained therein may show up in an improved school transcript, which should be the only academic period the colleges evaluate. Students who want to develop their athleticism should do so for their passion, or even their potential career interests, but not as a "college credential". Students whose summer school grades are put on a transcript should not receive any advantage from having attended summer school.

Dartmouth's Former Dean of Admissions Karl Furstenburg used the metaphor "Strategic Admissions Limitations Talks" in signaling a desire to have colleges collectively agree to lessen the pressures. The Ivy League has the triple advantage of having an association that already works cooperatively on academics, of instantaneously gaining national attention, and of having the clout for others to follow. Consider summers off the record as a meaningful first proposal, a "No-Fly Zone" if you will.

Almost all of us could use 10 weeks of reduced pressure each year; let's begin with the kids.

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