



Your Community

When an admissions officer is reading your application, they are going to be asking themselves two big questions:

- What are you going to contribute to the college as a student?
- What kind of community member are you going to be and how will you contribute to your college community?

The Community Essay question is so important, because it hits on this second question. Your response essay is an opportunity to show what community means to you, how you make a difference in your community today, and how you plan to contribute to your college community!

Here are a few ways that colleges that may ask this question:

Everyone belongs to many different communities and/or groups defined by (among other things) shared geography, religion, ethnicity, income, cuisine, interest, race, ideology, or intellectual heritage. Choose one of the communities to which you belong, and describe that community and your place within it. – University of Michigan

Describe the world you come from—for example, your family, community or school—and tell us how your world has shaped your dreams and aspirations.– University of California

You have your community's undivided attention. What would you tell them?– Pomona

So how do I get started on my response?

In general, there are two ways to approach Community Essays:

- You can talk about moments where your community influenced you
- Alternatively, you can discuss moments in which you took action within your community

Picking a Community

The next big question is, which community should you pick to discuss?

Most students belong to MANY different communities. Your neighborhood, soccer team, English classroom, religious youth group, book club, family, part-time job, and volunteering group are all fair game. A great way to come up with all of your communities is to write a list of all of your interests and where you spend your time. This should help you generate a great list of communities. Once you have a complete list try to identify the communities that are most important to you or communities where you have made the most impact.

Your Role in the Community

Once you have identified the community, the next step is to think about your role within that community. One of the biggest traps that students fall into is making the essay about the community. Instead, the essay should focus on you and what you the community member!

Your “role” in the community doesn’t have to be as a leader or as a star. It is totally okay to talk about being a substitute player on the basketball team or a book club member where everyone is equal.

Here are a few questions to ponder as you think about your role within your community:

- Do you belong to the community by choice or by circumstance?
- Do you agree or disagree with the community’s values? Have you done anything to change, advance, or thwart the community’s values?
- Are you a leader or a follower? Have you had opportunities to go from one to the other?

College Communities

Some colleges ask will ask the Community Essay with a slight tweak. Instead of asking you about a community that you are part of, they will ask you about the college community that you’ll be entering. You will want to research the ways each college you apply to describes its community. Do you feel like you would fit in? Do they have clubs or other activities that foster the type of community you believe in? What do current students say?

A great way to do this is through a visit to the college in question. If you aren’t able to visit a school, you should get in touch with the admissions office and ask to be put in touch with a current student. Online research can also be helpful, but keep in mind that some student review websites can be a bit polarized

Further Tips

Your essay will be read by a diverse group of people. You should not use an essay about community as an opportunity to take political positions or expound on religious beliefs. Instead, choose a moment that shows some aspect of your place and purpose in the community, and tell that story.

Obscure communities--enthusiasts of the philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, for example--may require more background info than do more conventional communities, such as students who participated in the spring musical.

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