

The logo for the Counselor Conference, featuring the word "COUNSELOR" in a white box above the word "CONFERENCE" in a white box, set against a blue background with orange and yellow diagonal stripes in the top left corner.

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Outside of the Classroom:

How to Maximize the Activities & Awards Section

September 2020

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Welcome to our session! (Presenters introduce themselves)

This session of the UC High School Counselor Conference sessions occurred on September 10, 2020. The presentation slide deck was created earlier.

Note: Recent legal developments related to the University's admissions process may affect the content of these materials.

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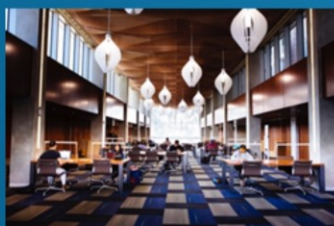
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What is the Activities and Awards Section?



We would like to kick things off with a broad question: “What is the Activities and Awards Section?” It’s important to define what exactly this section is, its purpose, and its significance. “Why is there a section on the UC application for Activities and Awards?” Let’s start at the beginning.

This is where applicants share the larger story of their lives by demonstrating the hours they committed to the things they cared about. They can also share recognition from others in the form of awards.



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This is where students tell us about all the wonderful things they did outside of their A-G coursework. We do not just care about numbers, GPA, and test scores, we want to know who the student is beyond their academics. Since our campuses take a comprehensive approach to applications, we want a bigger picture, to know the student's larger story. What makes them happy? What problems are they wanting and trying to fix? What are their talents and strengths, and in turn what would they bring to our campuses?

You will hear several times today, but this is an open-ended section for students. There is no "right" or wrong way to approach this section, it's really about getting to know the student personally, and being genuine about their activities is the best way to stand out.

All Activities Have Value

School Activities

- Sports
- Clubs
- Summer programs

Home Responsibilities

- Caring for siblings
- Elder care
- Maintaining household

Community Commitments

- Involvement in faith-based organizations
- Helping in neighborhood/community
- Internships

Employment

- Family business
- Summer or afterschool job
- Creating a business

Virtual Opportunities

- Blogs, social media

As the title suggests, we value all types of activities. Here are some examples of activities we commonly see, such as sports and clubs. However we have also included some “non-traditional” examples that still showcase a students involvement outside of the classroom. In other words, what we want to know is how students are utilizing their “free” time outside of school. Not all students have access to after school activities and so they feel that they can not fill out the activities and award section. This by no means is an exhaustive list but we hope it will help you and your students think outside the box. We want to acknowledge virtual opportunities as well, especially during this time where students are finding ways to be creative on online platforms.

The Application

- Students may enter up to 20 activities and/or awards
- The UC does not have a preference

✓ -- select --

- Award or honor
- Educational preparation program
- Extracurricular activity
- Other coursework
- Volunteer / Community service
- Work experience

Add activities & awards

You've told us what you did inside the classroom, and now you'll have the opportunity to tell us about what you're most proud of outside the classroom. We're looking for quality, not quantity - which means that even though you'll have room to tell us about 20 activities and awards, make sure to focus on the ones that are most important to you. Choose experiences that demonstrate commitment, responsibility, leadership, and most of all, genuine interest.

1. Educational preparation program
Cal-SOAP

2. Extracurricular activity
Track & field varsity team

Add another activity or award

I've finished adding activities

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Students will have twenty spaces to enter their activities but should not feel pressured to fit all 20

- Students will categorize the activities themselves based on the list we have provided and there is no limit for each category.
 - We know some HSs offer educational preparation programs like college advising, Gear Up, etc.
 - Other coursework can be any relevant coursework that is NOT A-G like AVID, any A-G coursework should be noted in their academic history section of the application
- We do not value one activity over another, but we do value commitment, progression and leadership in this section.
- Students should do their best to categorize activities in a way that makes sense to them. We wanted to allow students the flexibility and choice to enter the activities that best reflect **their** interests and achievements. At the same time, we added more guidance and specific questions to help students fill out each category (from past years where it was 5 space for each).
- Students should not repeat the entries, even if they might fit into more than one category.
- The order of activities does not matter, and students cannot rearrange the order once they've completed this section

The Application

- Students will enter their activities in 9th - 12th grade
 - Includes spring semester of senior year
 - After 12th is for a "Gap Year"
- Students will include time spent on the activity
 - Average hours

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When did you participate in this activity? *

If you participated during the summer, select the grade you were in before that summer.

- ☒ 9th grade
- ☒ 10th grade
- ☒ 11th grade
- ☐ 12th grade
- ☐ After 12th grade

How much time did you spend on this activity? *

It's ok to estimate, but try to be as accurate as possible.

Hours spent per week: 10

Weeks spent per year: 45

- For each activity, students will be asked the years in which they were involved.
- When completing the Activities & Awards section, students should focus on their time in high school, but prior involvement is also a strength they want to highlight since it demonstrates consistency and progression.
- Students should also include any activities they have planned for the spring semester of their senior year. You will notice here that there is also an option to choose "After 12th Grade" - this is meant for students who are taking a gap year before attending college.
- For each activity, we will also be asking about their time commitment: their hours per week and weeks per year spent on an activity. We understand that students may not know the exact number, and this also may vary throughout the year. In this case, students should give us their best estimate or average.

The Application

- Students will have 350 characters to describe each activity
 - Change from 500 last year
 - Title is 60 characters
- Do not need full sentences
- Focus on their role or responsibility
- May expand in PIQs

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What's the name of the activity? *

What did you do? *

Think about your experience, and what you accomplished and learned. We'd also like to know if you've held a leadership role, which can mean more than just a title — it can mean being a mentor to others, acting as a point-person in charge of a specific task, or taking a lead role in organizing an event or project.

350 characters remaining

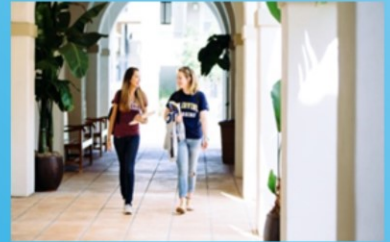
Students will have an opportunity to describe each activity in 350 characters. This is a change from last year, when students had 500 characters. We want students to be concise with their descriptions and intentional with their words.

- It should be a short description of the activity or award in which a student focuses on their role or responsibility within the activity - not necessarily a description of the activity itself.
- Students should focus on their involvement and how the activity was unique to them. We don't need an actual description of volleyball or basketball, but rather, what was their role on the team? How did this activity affect them or help them progress?
- If it's an activity or organization specific to their high school or their community, they can describe the club's mission or goal, but still focus on their specific experience
- In addition, this is where students can tell us if they were involved in an activity prior to ninth grade. For example, if they have been playing a sport for five years prior to high school that shows consistency and commitment
- Lastly, because students only have 350 characters they may not be able to expand as much as they'd like. In this case, the Personal Insight Questions is a great way to tie an activity/award into their response and potentially reflect

and demonstrate what they've learned or how they grew from a particular involvement

A note on COVID-19...

- Students are evaluated within their context
- Students will not be penalized for lack of activities at this time
- If they were able to continue their activity (i.e. online), how did the activity change and how did they adjust?
- Students may have new responsibilities at home
- If they had an activity planned and it was cancelled before it began, make a note in "Additional Comments"



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We cannot address this section without addressing concerns regarding COVID-19

- we are aware that this year may look different than years prior. It's important for students to remember that we always evaluate them within their context and their environment. We are not penalizing students for lack of activities during this time.
- However, if they were able to continue an activity, how did the activity change for them or how did they adjust? They may have new responsibilities that they didn't have before COVID-19, such as taking care of a sibling or helping their community - this can all be included in the Activities & Awards section.
- If they had an activity planned but it was cancelled, we want to know about it and they should make a note of it in the Additional Comments section of the UC Application, instead of including it in the Activities & Awards section.

Tips and Best Practices for Students



Now that you know more about this section of the application, we want to give you some tips on how your students can best present themselves. We want to be clear here that we are not giving “negative points” in this section of the application. If a student doesn’t follow all tips and best practices, it won’t hurt them, but we also want them to make the most of this section, which is where our tips are useful.

Diversify

- Not all 20 entries have to be from the same category
- Consider activities/awards not affiliated with school:
 - home responsibilities
 - faith-based community service
 - part-time employment



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While we want students to give us a full and complete picture of their lives, they should not feel pressure to use all 20 spaces provided in the Activities & Awards section. If they have more than twenty activities or awards to include, they should pick and choose what they feel most strongly or passionate about, but try to give the admissions counselor a broad view of their involvements. In this case, try to include one example from each category.

It is important that students remember non-school activities are just as VALID to include in this section, such as babysitting, working to pay for necessities, or helping at home, as we want to see all parts of their lives.

Demonstrate Consistency

- What does the student have experience with?
- Can their experience be quantified?
- Has the student been involved in the activity before high-school?
- Were there opportunities for growth or leadership?



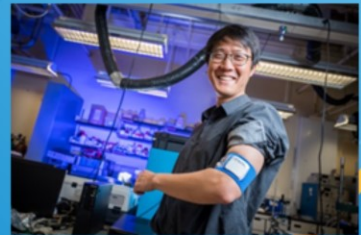
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It is helpful when a students can show longer involvement in one activity or have strength and consistency in that involvement versus having little experience in several different areas. Of course, we still want to hear if a student is involved in multiple activities for a shorter period of time, but consistency and commitment are most valuable. As we mentioned before, if a student has been a part of an organization or has done an activity (ex. taking music lessons) well before high school and continuing into high school, that is definitely something they should highlight in their description. Students can also demonstrate growth and progression in their activity: Did the student start off as a member and later become the president, co-president, etc.?

Demonstrate Leadership

- Identify any leadership roles they've had in the activity
- Official titles or non-traditional roles
- Initiative in starting an activity
- Leadership is different for everyone



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A good way for a student to demonstrate their role in an activity is to highlight any leadership opportunities they have had. This can be the president, treasurer, chair, or captain of a club or activity, but it doesn't have to be official or come with a title. While being the president is an impressive title, it does not always demonstrate leadership; we're looking for leaders and that can come in different forms. This could be leadership on a job, at your church, in your family. It could be as a member of a group rather than the positional leader. It is important for the student to help us understand their role and responsibilities, not just their title. Students can also demonstrate leadership by answering a need in their school or community: did they help start a club, organization, or business? Help your students understand that leadership looks different for everyone and can appear at school, work, home, etc.

Quantify and Measure

- Significance of award or honor
- How much did the student contribute?
- Account for:
 - Total time
 - Scope
 - Impact of their work



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Where possible, it's great to understand the context of the student's achievement! If they received an award or honor, how many competed versus how many received? How competitive was it? Again, it is also important that a student focuses on their contribution and role within the activity.

It is helpful when a student helps their reader understand:

- Total time: how many hours per day/week/month?
 - ex. I practiced for 30 hours and spent 6 hours traveling to competitions per week
- Scope: school, citywide, statewide, national, international
- Impact: number of people helped, how much money was raised, etc.

Examples of Activities & Awards



We also want to share with you some examples of activities and awards taken from past UC applications. For each example we will be polling all of you to determine whether this is a good example or a missed opportunity in the activities and awards section – to be clear, we are not trying to determine whether or not an activity is good or bad, but rather, is the applicant describing their role and responsibility and helping the reader understand their activity or award? We also want to preface by saying that these examples are some of the more “obvious” ones that we see on a UC application. It is not always this black and white for an reader and there are often areas of grey when reviewing activities and awards.

Example #1: Work Experience

Activity	Description
Farm Work	<i>"Helped with my father's business since he is the sole employee. I started helping in the 6th grade. Worked moving produce, selling produce and planting seeds after school and on the weekends. The farm business was shut down before 12th grade."</i> (238 characters)
Length of Involvement	
Years involved: 9th - 11th Hours per week: 25 Weeks per year: 50	

This is a good example of employment:

The student shows family responsibility, as he helps because his dad is the sole employee. They show a strong level of commitment, as they explain that they have been doing this since before 9th grade and tells us how much time per week they are contributing to this activity. There is a clear example of what the student did, with action words that help the reader understand their role. It also explains why the student did not continue the activity, as the business ended before their 12th grade year. This example is clear and concise.

Example #2: Award or Honor

Honor/Award	Description
Senior of the Month Award - September 2019	<i>"Senior of the Month award recognizes seniors for all-around achievement. Recognized for my achievement of straight As throughout high school in all available honors and AP courses, my contributions as ASB President, Mock Trial Co-Captain, California Scholarship Federation President, and involvement in many other clubs and activities on campus." (344 characters)</i>
Years Awarded	
12th	

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This is a good example of an award received:

The student offers a clear description of the award and why they received it and give us quantifiable measures. This student also goes on to explain each of their involvements in the rest of their activities & awards section.

Example #3: Extracurricular Activity

Activity	Description
Olympic Development Program	<i>"I've competed with the best of the US and got to the top. Also making the tiny cuts to get to the very top were very rewarding."</i> (126 characters)
Length of Involvement	
Years involved: 9th - 11th	
Hours per week: 2	
Weeks per year: 21	

This is a missed opportunity:

As you can see, there is no description of what they actually did - we don't even know the sport in which they are referring to. Unless the reader is familiar with this program, they would not know what the student actually did or achieved and we are taught not to make assumptions when reviewing an application. We have questions here: Why did you stop? What are tiny cuts? Who are the best of the US?

Example #4: Volunteer/Community Service

Activity	Description
Elementary Tutor	<i>"As co-president in senior year, I organize a tutoring program with a local elementary school for at-risk fourth- and fifth-graders. I found and trained 25 tutors this year. This consisted of interviewing other students, and making a week-long training program."</i> (263 characters)
Length of Involvement	
Years involved: 11th - 12th Hours per week: 1 Weeks per year: 20	

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This is a good example:

The student demonstrates leadership and there are clear examples of the student's role and responsibility. There is succinct detail of the student's involvement and the scope of the program, and what they did is measurable. This is also concise, yet gives the reader a good amount of detail and clarity.

Example #5: Educational Preparation Program

Activity	Description
MESA	<i>"Being a part of the MESA program has been a great experience. MESA students are able to discuss with each other and come up with ideas that will help our project." (161 characters)</i>
Length of Involvement	
Years involved: 10th - 11th	
Hours per week: 7	
Weeks per year: 45	

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This is a missed opportunity:

It is not clear what the student's role or responsibility was in MESA and they described the program rather than their involvement.

Questions we have: Why didn't they continue the program into their senior year?

What did they gain from this experience? What did they actually DO in this program?

Counseling Your Students



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Common Myths & Misconceptions

The Volunteer and Community Service Section is the most important...

No category in this section is more important than the others. Students should consider ALL categories.

They don't read it anyway!

This is one of two ways to get to know the student outside of the classroom. Consider this as their unofficial resume.

Twenty entries are mandatory...

We do not have a set list of activities that are required. However, we will look for consistency, longevity and commitment. Quantity is not valued more than Quality.

Each entry must be 350 characters long...

Being clear and concise is an important part of this section. Remember that we are not looking for complete sentences!

Readers only want to see school activities...

Students should consider school, community, county, state, national and international involvement.

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What makes sense to us as professionals does not always have the same effect on students in processing this section. This can be a huge missed opportunity if students don't understand what we are looking for as they navigate this section. These are some common myths and misconceptions that students regularly make that cause this section to be less effective in the comprehensive review process. Students want to know what kinds of activities look best, but remember that we are just asking them to be themselves! It's important for students to remember that we rarely ask questions in the UC Application that we don't want to know the answer to – we want to get to know them! When reviewing this section, we value quality over quantity. The length of what is written is less valuable than the content and learning about a student's involvement. Of course we want to know what a student does in school, but they should also look beyond in-school involvement. What a student does outside of the class, no matter where it is, adds context and value to the overall application.

Top Mistakes Made by Students

Leaving this
section blank

Assuming we
know the activity

No clarity on
roles and
responsibilities

Unaware of the
importance of
the section

Talk more about
the activity than
themselves

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As you are counseling students these are common mistakes to keep in mind and to make students aware of (in no particular order):

1. Leaving This Section Blank : It is a huge missed opportunity to leave the section blank but it is very common and simply leaves us with the desire to know more. Between 9th-12th Grade there has to be something a student can talk about and if there truly is nothing, have them address it in the Additional Comments Section.
2. Assuming the activity is known to all: Students commonly believe that we know activities that are unique to their high school or community. Unless it is a national program, students should spell out the name and add a quick description. No acronyms allowed!
3. No Clarity: Students don't provide a clear definition of the their role and responsibilities. A little background on what the activity is can be helpful, but we still need to know what THEY did.
4. Unaware of the importance of the section: Students may not be clear about the role that this section plays in the admissions process. It's important for them to know what the comprehensive review is and why this section is so important to the process.
5. Talk more about the activity than themselves: We learn nothing about students and their commitment when they talk only about the program. It turns into a list with no value if we can't personally connect the student to the activity described.

As a counselor, you are in a unique position to motivate!

Ask your students:

- What victories can they share that occurred outside the classroom?
- How can we better understand their world, responsibilities, and challenges?
- Which of their involvements show leadership, consistency and commitment?

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We know you care about the success of your students. This is a kind reminder of what your role is in this process. You are there to motivate, to help a student dig into their experiences, and to remind them to not be humble about their accomplishments. Your job is not to do this section for them, or to determine which of their activities is the most impressive. We want to know what is important to them, and what has shaped their world. Here are some questions you can pose to your students to help them prioritize what they want to share.

To Wrap Up...

- UC admissions counselors value academic *and* non-academic achievements
- Context and clarity are important
- Students should help us understand their role and responsibility in an activity
- We value leadership, consistency, commitment, and progression, but all activities are welcome
- Students should think beyond what they do at school
- You can help by guiding them and communicating what admissions counselors are looking for in this section



Thank you all so much for joining our session. To wrap up, please remember that every UC campus conducts a comprehensive review. This means that we not only value a student's academic achievements, but their achievements and involvements outside of the classroom as well. You've heard this a lot already, but context and clarity are crucial! Students should help the reader understand their role and responsibilities in the activity. When we review applications, all activities have the potential to add value and all activities should be included, but we do value leadership, commitment and progression. Students can demonstrate this in many ways, as activities come in many forms. Encourage your students to think beyond what they are doing at school and think about what their responsibilities are at home and in their community. As always, we are so grateful for the work that you do and the information you are able to bring to your students!

The logo consists of two overlapping white rectangular boxes. The top box contains the word "COUNSELOR" and the bottom box contains the word "CONFERENCE".

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THANK YOU

The logo is the official seal of the University of California, featuring the words "UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA" in a stacked, sans-serif font.

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