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Forget Test Scores: Social Media May Determine If You Get Into



College grads continue to earn more than those without postsecondary credentials, making higher ed a costly – but essential – path for millions of Americans. Grades and test results weigh heavily, of course, on getting into college, although a Harvard report proposes that admissions policies should focus less on grades and more on such aspects as community service. Now it appears that an applicant's social media activity may be as important as the other factors.

According to a recent Kaplan Test Prep survey, fewer college admissions officers are checking social media, but a higher percentage are influenced by what they find.

Kaplan's year-to-year findings from 2016 to 2017 reveal the following:

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS OFFICERS	THIS YEAR	LAST YEAR
Check social media sites	35%	40%
Positively influenced by social media findings	47%	37%
Negatively influenced by social media findings	42%	37%
"Often" use social media to make decisions	25%	11%

The respondents listed examples of social media content that influenced an applicant's chances:

- · "One young lady started a company with her mom, so it was cool to visit their website." · "A young man who had been involved in a felony did not disclose his past,
- which is part of our admissions process. His social media page shared his whole story. If he had been forthcoming, we would not have rescinded his acceptance offer, but we had to." · "One student described on Twitter that she facilitated an LGBTQ panel for
- in her overall and encouraged us to imagine how she would help out the community." • "We found a student's Twitter account with some really questionable language. It wasn't quite racist, but it showed a cluelessness that you'd

expect of a privileged student who hadn't seen much of the world. It really

her school, which wasn't in her application. This made us more interested

- ran counter to the rest of her application." · "One student had won an award and had a picture with their principal on their personal page, and it was nice to see."
- whether to admit the applicant." At first glance, it may seem rather intrusive for college admissions officers to

· "Pictures of a student 'brandishing weapons' gave me pause when deciding

potential job candidates to be affected by their online activity, but the stakes are much higher for employers, and it is assumed that college graduates should operate at a higher level of maturity than those leaving high school. However, Erin Goodnow, founder and CEO of Going Ivy, a college admissions consulting group, believes that this view holds colleges to an unreasonable

standard. "Admit it - you judge people based on what they post; we all do, and

search the internet looking for supplemental data. It's not uncommon for

She supports their right to do so. "They want someone who will fill a spot in their community, and your social media is a big window into who you are probably bigger than your expertly-crafted personal statement."

college admissions officers are no different," Goodnow tells GoodCall®.

While applicants might prefer that colleges base their decisions solely on the material that has been presented, schools want a more complete picture. Yariv Alpher, executive director of research at Kaplan Test Prep, tells GoodCall® that social media posts provide an unfiltered portrayal of the applicant. "The admissions process itself is often packaged and scripted, so social media lets admissions officers see something extra."

Previous research by Kaplan reveals that most applicants understand that schools may search for their social media activity.

"It's really important to remember that an applicant's admissions chances are still overwhelmingly decided by traditional factors such as SAT and ACT scores, GPA, letters of recommendation, personal essay and extracurriculars, but online activities remain a wildcard," Alpher explains.

ON SOCIAL MEDIA, AVOID, DELETE, REPEAT

avoid, but there are other types of activity that should also analyzed. "This is where good judgment and maturity come into the picture," Alpher says. "These are two values you need to put into practice throughout life, so you might as well get started when you are a teen." He strongly advises against posting photos that include such illegal activities as

The survey responses above provide examples of three specific types of posts to

admissions officers think twice about letting you be part of the student body." Alpher says schools take <u>campus safety</u> seriously and they don't want to admit applicants who pose a threat. Also, messages or images that are racially insensitive can also be problematic. "Colleges, in general, place importance on diversity and want students who

drugs or underage drinking: "Don't post anything that is going to make

Applicants may not understand that colleges tend to monitor social media mentions of their school. This is another way to discover what applicants, students, and other people are saying about the institution. "Anecdotally, a couple of schools told us that this is where they've come across issues like an

applicant bragging about how they 'aced' their interview, or tweeted negative

On the other hand, applicants with noteworthy/bragworthy achievements

ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE

comments during a campus visit," Alpher explains.

respect and reflect these values."

consider posting your work on sites like Instagram, and include a link to it on your application," Alpher recommends. "Or if you are a talented musician, record your performances and post to YouTube." Writers should consider linking to their blog. Alpher says college admissions officers may not necessarily click on these links, but applicants are at least demonstrating that they have another side. ADVICE FROM A LAWYER

should consider sharing these activities on social media. "If you are an artist,

Bradley Shear, managing partner at Shear Law, specializes in social media and privacy, and has worked with the NFL Players Association, JPMorgan Chase,

and various corporations, nonprofit organizations, and lawmakers. Shear tells GoodCall®, "Several states ban schools from being able to verify social media credentials, which includes asking for access to usernames and passwords." Currently, these states are Arkansas, California, Delaware, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island, Utah, Virginia, and Wisconsin. But Shear says this doesn't mean that applicants in these states are exempt. "The challenge is that schools should not be demanding access because of these

and investigators to identify social media accounts." And while only 35% of respondents in the Kaplan survey admit to this practice, Shear believes the actual number is closer to 99% of schools. He provides the following tips to students who may have questionable social media content:

laws, but some are circumventing the system by hiring retired police officers

· Scrub your digital profiles clean, and don't create more bad content for people to find. Flood your profiles with positive information to push the negative data

further down. Eventually, the bad stuff will cycle off of the internet.

- Create alternative social media accounts and flood them with positive information.
- · If your account is really bad, just delete it so you can honestly say you don't have an account. JustDelete.me can help with this process. If you insist on doing crazy stuff, do it under a different name.
- "Young people do a lot of things they wouldn't do when they're more mature also, sometimes there are jealous people who may tattle to the school." For example, Shear says that some unsuspecting applicant may brag about applying

to or being accepted to a particular school, and one of their resentful or spiteful social media connections may send an email to the school with a link to a negative post or embarrassing photo. Shear warns students to do whatever they can to protect their privacy. "Facebook is not your friend, and neither are Twitter and GooglePlus." It's

understandable that colleges do not want to admit students who may create a

PR nightmare. "But on the other hand, students have an absolute right to their

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Terri Williams graduated with a B.A. in English from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Her education, career, and business

privacy."

articles have been featured on Yahoo! Education, U.S. News & World Report, The Houston Chronicle, and in the print edition of USA Today Special Edition. Terri is also a contributing author to "A Practical Guide to Digital Journalism Ethics," a book published by the Center for Digital Ethics and Policy at Loyola University Chicago.



Gap Year









8 Tips to Help Recent Grads Gain

Financial Independence





10 Myths Surrounding Financial Aid

and College Affordability



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