

# Riley Baker Educational Consulting

www.rileybaker.com

16 Green Bay Road

Winnetka, IL 60093

847.441.8687

rileybaker@rileybaker.com

## Qualities of STEM Applicants

### April 2023

#### 15<sup>th</sup>— ACT

Juniors—Visit colleges

Prepare for AP Exams

Seniors - Final letters of acceptance should arrive by the beginning of April

Compare offers of admission; re-visit top choices

Evaluate financial aid packages and consider college funding options

Notify the colleges that you will not attend and take some time to thank those who wrote your letters of recommendation

### May 2023

1<sup>st</sup> – Common reply deadline for college enrollment

#### 6<sup>th</sup>—SAT

#### AP exams

#### IB exams

Although overall college enrollment numbers have plateaued, or more recently, dropped, the demand for STEM degrees has steadily risen over the years. In the face of the increasing demand for qualified graduates, competition for seats in STEM programs has become far more rigorous. In order to present a competitive application to a strong STEM program, students need to start preparing themselves as early as possible. Desirable STEM applicant qualities can fall under two general areas: hard academic skills and soft interpersonal skills.

**Academic skills:** Above all else, students seeking entry into a STEM program must have strong Math and Science skills, regardless of the discipline they are choosing – Sciences, Technology, Engineering or Mathematics. High school students need to take on the most challenging coursework available at their individual schools and do their very best to succeed in those classes. Students are advised to increase the level of rigor each year with at least at least 4 years of Mathematics; sciences such as Biology, Chemistry and Physics (including advanced science classes whenever possible); 4 years of English; as much foreign language and social studies, including History and Government, as you can fit in your schedule. If available, aim to complete AP/CP/Advanced/Honors-level classes, and if your grades are not as strong as you would like, get help and don't give up. The trajectory of your grades matters, as your admission reader is looking carefully at your transcript to determine the likelihood

of your success in the advanced rigor of the university classroom. Some students may even be able to take additional coursework at their local community college. It is also necessary to check the standardized test requirements of your chosen colleges.

Hands-on participation in a variety of STEM activities is another component part of a successful application. Some examples include participation on a Robotics Team (not one at your school? Start one!), Math and Science Olympiads, FIRST LEGO League, online courses, a STEM club at your school, or a summer program or internship. A part-time job can also give you some extra exposure and first-hand experience. Think outside the box and you'll find a myriad of exciting opportunities.

Tell your science story! Knowing why you want to study a particular STEM major will go a long way towards impressing colleges that you have the right stuff. Use the essay options in your application to share your passion, experience, enthusiasm, depth of interest and excitement about your chosen field. Think about your career goals and explore some of those options by interviewing men and women in the field, reading outside the curriculum and looking for opportunities to job shadow professionals.

**Interpersonal skills:** In addition to the hard skills necessary – challenging coursework, solid grades and test scores, strong extracurriculars and essays – colleges want to see evidence of soft skills. The future depends upon both the proven qualifications of STEM graduates and on the human qualities possessed by the women (continued on p. 3)

## Focus on Majors: Communications Studies

### Career Paths for Communication Studies Majors

- Broadcaster
- Community Relations Representative
- Corporate Trainer
- Customer Service Representative
- Editor
- Event Planner
- Fundraiser
- Human Resources Professional
- Journalist
- Marketing & Advertising Professional
- Media Specialist
- Political Professional
- Sales Manager
- Social Media Manager
- Writer



It's #2 on Princeton Review's List of the Top Ten Most Popular College Majors - Communication Studies. Sounds interesting and marketable, but what is it, and more importantly, can it help you get a job?

Communication Studies is an academic field that examines how people share meaningful symbols. The symbols themselves, the ways in which they are transmitted, and the interpretation of the symbols are all within the scope of this field. This interdisciplinary major encompasses the entire range of communication from face-to-face conversation to mass media and interpersonal understanding.

Communication Studies is a generalist path with a curriculum that can be tailored to work in a variety of industries. Most colleges require students to have some familiarity with the broad spectrum of communication issues. Students are then allowed to concentrate in an area of particular interest. Advertising, Broadcasting, Communication Technology and Production, Journalism, and Public Relations are a few of the concentrations that might be available. Typical courses are likely to include Interpersonal Communication, Group Communication, Persuasion, Mass Media and Society, Cross-Cultural Communication, TV & Film Production, and Ethical and Legal Issues in Media. Courses in economics, finance, management, marketing, political science, psychology and sociology can also help.

Practical experience is critical for Communications students. Whether you host a campus radio program, work as a producer for the university TV station, or write for the campus newspaper, hands-on involvement that you can list on a resume is key. Participating in internships, co-op programs and study abroad will also help you bridge the transition from college to workplace.

There are thousands of undergraduate Communication Studies programs. The challenge is to identify colleges and programs that most closely fit who you are

and what you want to do. Because all types of colleges offer Communications majors, institutional, not just departmental, fit should be your top priority. Some departments include the study of communication disorders, while others do not. Some programs are grounded in the liberal arts, concentrating on analytical, speaking and writing skills, all of which are highly transferable to a wide range of careers. Other departments are more professionally focused, offering curricula that are more workplace driven. You can study communications either through identified majors, or by designing your own course of study, tailored to your specific interests.

Communications Studies is a modern marriage of theory and application, combining liberal arts education with practical, professional training. In our global information age, enterprises from businesses and educational institutions to engineering firms and medical providers all must communicate effectively with their constituents, their customers, and the public. Over \$1 billion is spent annually on employee and membership communications, and even more goes toward external communications. Job competition is strong, with preference given to candidates with industry-specific knowledge, communications training, and appropriate internship or volunteer experience.

The career choices for communications professionals are incredibly diverse. Degrees in Communications lead to a wide range of career paths including advertising, broadcasting & film, marketing, media relations, personnel, and sales. Less obvious career options include community relations, customer service, corporate training, international relations, and publishing. Communications graduates also work in fundraising, social media management, tourism, website management, and risk management. For more information visit the National Communication Association at [www.natcom.org](http://www.natcom.org).

## Financial Matters: Appealing Financial Aid Awards



If your first choice college offers everything you want, but the price tag is daunting, don't give up hope; consider appealing the award. While colleges and universities won't encourage it, the financial aid officers are empowered to make adjustments, if warranted.

To appeal, do the following:

Do not deposit until you've settled the financial aid discussion. Once they have your money, colleges will be less motivated to offer a better deal.

Be realistic. Show the college that this is a partnership that you want to be part of, but need just a bit more assistance. Know exactly what you CAN afford. If your Expected Family Contribution (EFC) is more than the cost of

tuition, then make sure that your request makes sense. Do your homework and negotiate in good faith.

Be informed. Make sure you have researched the specific financial aid policies at each college before entering into a conversation with them. Don't contact a college, touting fabulous grades and awesome SAT scores, only to find out that the school offers only need-based financial aid but gives no merit aid awards.

See if the college offers "preferential packaging" – a practice in which they will meet a larger share of financial need based on the academic stats of the student, i.e., stronger grades and test scores will receive more money. Take a look to see if your test scores are in the "middle 50" or in the "top 25." There will be more money at schools where the student's scores raise the school's profile.

Be prepared. Colleges will generally reconsider awards for just two reasons: 1) the EFC from the FAFSA (Free

Application for Federal Student Aid) was incorrect due to a change in the family's financial situation because of an illness, unemployment or 2) there is a competing offer from another college. If you plan to mention the competing offer, be prepared to fax a copy of the award letter to the financial aid office.

Ask about "second chance" or conditional aid. See if the college is willing to add any additional aid if your child pulls through senior year with straight A's.

Send a letter. Put all of your reasons down in writing and ask for a follow-up meeting, in person if possible or by phone or Zoom.

Financial aid administrators have the authority to make adjustments to the financial aid package on a case-by-case basis. Documentation will be required, but parents should contact the financial aid office at their child's college to present their case. They may want to do this for each of their child's top choices, since each college administrator may present a different package.

## Qualities of STEM Applicants (continued from p.1)

and men entering these specialized fields. As high school students build upon their academic records, they should always be open to opportunities that showcase their problem-solving, creative thinking and collaborative abilities; their proficiency in communication, adaptability, flexibility and balance; and their sense of social responsibility. Think Humanistic Engineering – the production and design of things that are useful to people. As you consider how to demonstrate these qualities, think about ways to showcase your collaborative abilities by perhaps or-

ganizing a school club or working on the school paper and creating a new column to include a STEM article in every edition.

Ways of demonstrating leadership skills during your high school career could include being STEM Club President or taking the lead on directing the school play, getting a group of students together for a community service project, or asking your AP Physics teacher if you could tutor the younger physics students. All STEM fields require the development of new ideas. How can

you show that in action? Spearhead a recycling effort in your school, present solutions to the traffic problems in the school parking lot to the School Board or get a group together and design something to be used by fellow students.

Again, explore opportunities that you can show an admission officer: list them on a resume, let them be shared in a recommendation and/or write about them in your essays. Balance the hard with the soft, stay focused and you'll be successful.

**Riley Baker**  
**Educational Consulting**

16 Green Bay Road  
Winnetka, IL 60093

Phone:

847.441.8687

E-mail:

rileybaker@rileybaker.com

Website:

www.rileybaker.com

## Dealing with Denial

Everybody wants the euphoria of college acceptance and the sense of pride generated by the college sticker on the back windshield of their car. But what happens when you have to settle for Plan B, when there will be no euphoria, just resignation. How do you help your child deal with reality?

Advice in these kinds of situations always sounds so cliché, but the truth is that, as resistant as your child may be, it works. Encourage your child with ideas such as these:

**Don't take it personally.** Encourage your child to understand the big picture. If sharing stats of the number of students who applied to Stanford and were denied helps, then use them. Not being accepted is not the equivalent of “failure.” Colleges are consumed with fulfilling their institutional priorities—they may need sociology applicants and trombone players, or discuss throwers and students from Hawaii. Perhaps your child is a classic “over-represented” student. There just isn't much you can do to change your demographics.

**It didn't happen only to you.** There are lots of other students whose dreams also weren't realized. You're not alone. Reach out to friends and commiserate together and then try to move on together. You will all appreciate the support.

**Don't get caught up with the prestige factor.** It's important to recognize that brand name doesn't equal success, and more importantly, doesn't equal happiness. Your performance during your undergraduate experience will be the biggest factor that determines your job placement, not the college's “name.”

**Don't obsess about the denials** and do your best to be positive about your other options. Don't spend a lot of time agonizing, but instead, use the time and your energy to identify another school that you will like as much or more. Often not being accepted can send a student to a different school or down a different path and unexpected opportunities can crop up. Some students think they want big schools and realize they'll have more opportunity to shine at a smaller school. Be positive about other institutions. Celebrate your acceptances!

The big picture here is that for many students the “denial letter” may be the first time they have experienced serious disappointment. Their egos are bruised and the truth is, as all adults know, they'll grow and they'll get over it. Handling this denial will make them better prepared for future obstacles. College rejection happens to most students, but it doesn't need to define the rest of their life.