

The GPA Game

(Selective Colleges or Scholarships)

This game, which was developed by Mary Lee Hoganson from Homewood-Flossmoor High School in Illinois, demonstrates how selective colleges view the different qualities of their applicants. It is important to note that at less selective colleges many of these same qualities are considered when making scholarship decisions.

Getting Started: The game starts with ‘admissions candidates’ in front of the room lined up from highest GPA to lowest. As other factors of their applications are weighed by the admissions committee, the applicants move up and down in the pool.

- Ask for nine volunteers to be admissions candidates.
- Hand out the GPAs in random order and then instruct volunteers to organize themselves at the front of the room in GPA order from highest to lowest.
- The ‘students’ should not show the audience their GPA information.
- A volunteer “director of admissions” (usually the liaison or teacher) reads the qualities and tell students to move up or down in the competition.

Scenario of Play:

Phase 1: Introducing the Game

- The audience is told that they are the admissions committee from “Highly Prestigious University” (or pick a funnier name).
- The committee is at the very end of the admissions cycle and still has nine great applicants from which they can admit only three.
- All have very appealing qualities, but there is simply not enough room in the class for all nine.
- Before the committee are the candidates, standing in order from highest GPA to lowest.
- They are all great candidates and the committee has to select them based on their personal qualities and qualifications.
- **Point out that if the task were to be decided based on academics only, the three with the highest GPAs would get in.**

Phase 2: Playing the Game

- Each personal quality/qualification (listed on the next page – “The Play”) is read aloud and the volunteer with that quality/qualification takes one step forward.
- The “students” exchange places (move up and down in the order) based upon what is read.
- **IMPORTANT:** If more than one student is moving down at the same time, the lowest student must move first and vice versa—if more than one student is moving up, the highest student must move first.
- You may choose to alter the qualities/qualifications and the weight given to each.
- After each quality is read, stop and discuss why this helped or hindered the candidate. For example, ask, “Why do you think it might not be helpful to declare your major as premed or psychology?”
- Generate discussion of the information when possible but in parent meetings you might want to offer explanations rather than solicit a discussion.

Phase 3: Ending the Game

- After all qualities have been read and candidates have been “sorted,” have the candidates turn over their cards to reveal their GPA.
- Read out the GPAs and point out that the top three as they are now sorted will be admitted.

GPAs and Qualifications for the Nine Admissions Candidates

(FYI – This is the information on each laminated card)

4.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You did not write the optional essay for your college application (-1) • You have participated in NO extracurricular activities (-3) • Your ACT composite score is 22 (-1) • You are a legal resident of Montana (+2)
3.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your intended major is premed (-1) • You wrote your essay on “What I Learned Playing Sports” (-1) • You participated in an enriching summer program between your junior and senior years (+2) • Your ACT composite score is 29 (0)
3.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have taken an exceptionally strong academic program (+2) • Your SAT score is a 2000 (0) • When you word processed your college essay, you forgot to change the name of the college to which you were applying (-4) • Your intended major is psychology (-1) • You plagiarized an AP American History paper and got caught (out)
3.7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You play the viola (+1) • You do not know any of your teachers well and had trouble finding someone to write your college recommendation (-2) • You did not write the optional essay for your college application (-1) • Your combined SAT score is above 2100 (+1)
3.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You clearly stated that this college was your first choice by making an Early Decision application and commitment (+2) • The topic of your college essay was “My Trip to France” (-1) • You have been involved in a significant community service project (+1) • You attended the college information session at your college and introduced yourself to the college representative (+1)
3.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You play the oboe (+1) • You plan to major in Greek (+2) • You do not know any of your teachers well and had trouble finding someone to write your college recommendation (-2) • You are a legacy (+2)
3.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have taken an exceptionally strong academic program (+2) • Your combined SAT score is 1550 (-1) • You have been involved in a significant community service project (+1) • You never gave your counselor any personal information to use in writing your college recommendation (-1) • You will be the first in your family to attend college (+2)
3.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You wrote the essay of the year—the one that was passed around the entire admissions office because it was so remarkable (+3) • You are a varsity athlete and took second place at regional in your sport (+3) • You got a “D” in an academic course at the end of your junior year (-3) • You attended the college information session at your HS and introduced yourself to the college representative and explained the D (+1)
3.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You are a legacy (+2) • You are an Eagle Scout (+2) • Your ACT composite score is a 32 (+1) • Your last name is Bush—the name on the college library is Bush and it is NOT a coincidence (to top)

The Play:

These are the qualities to read aloud and the number of places players move up or down in the line. For example, you or the “dean of admissions” says, “If you have taken an exceptionally strong academic program, step forward. Once the players have taken a step forward, then say, “Move up two places.” PLEASE NOTE: The GPAs listed in parentheses are for your information only.

1. If you have taken an exceptionally strong academic program (3.8 & 3.4) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colleges and scholarship committees like to see that students challenged themselves academically. Taking 4 years of math, honors courses, extra classes rather than study hall, etc. will be noticed in a positive way. 	+2
2. If you play the oboe or viola (3.7 & 3.5) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colleges like to see involvement in extra-curricular activities; additionally not a lot of high school students play these instruments or have an appreciation for orchestral music. This makes the student unique and attractive to college admissions officials. 	+1
3. If you clearly stated that this college was your first choice by making an Early Decision application and commitment (3.6) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applying to a school “Early Decision” indicates that if admitted, the student will attend; it is binding. Many colleges give preference to students who apply early decision. If a student applies “Early Action”, that is non-binding, but still a good way to be admitted to schools. 	+2
4. If your intended major is psychology or premed (3.9 & 3.8) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many students apply to schools as psych or premed majors and many of these degree programs are overcrowded. Colleges will be more interested in a student who is seeking an under enrolled major such as philosophy or religious studies. Also, for a program like engineering that has traditionally been dominated by white males, minorities and females receive extra admission and scholarship consideration. 	-1
5. If your intended major is Greek (3.5) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greek is an under enrolled major at many schools (see #4) 	+2
6. If you do not know any of your teachers well and had trouble finding someone to write your college recommendation (3.7 & 3.5) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building positive relationships with teachers and other adults is not only good for a student’s social skills but can also lead to positive recommendations for college admissions or scholarships. Remind students to have an up-to-date resume to give to those asked to write recommendations. 	-2
7. If, when you processed your college essay, you forgot to change the name of the college to which you were applying (3.8) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oops! It is easy to make this type of mistake but because of the competitive nature of selective college admissions/ scholarships, such a mistake will most likely take a student out of consideration. 	-4
8. If you are a legacy (3.5 & 3.2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A student is considered a legacy if he or she attends the school their parents attended. 	+2
9. If your combined SAT score is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> --between 2000---2400 (3.7) --between 1600—2000 (3.8) --below 1600 (3.4) Most colleges and scholarship committees consider a combination of a student’s grade point average (GPA) AND standardized test scores. High test scores + a lower GPA tends to be rated stronger than low test scores + a high GPA. This is due to grade inflation at some schools. 	+1 0 -1
10. If you did not write the optional college essay (4.0 & 3.7) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A student should always go the extra mile to make certain his/ her application stands out. 	-1
11. If the topic of your college essay was “My Trip to France” or “What I Learned Playing Sports” (3.9 & 3.6) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seemingly EVERYONE writes essays on these topics. Colleges like to see unique essays...these are not unique. Other than sports, what are you passionate about? 	-1

12. If you wrote the essay of the year—the one that was passed around the entire admissions office because it was so remarkable (3.3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>See #11 and #23.</i> 	+3
13. If you plagiarized an AP American History paper and got caught – sit down, you’re out of the competition entirely (3.8) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Plagiarizing is a form of cheating and is not tolerated at the college level.</i> 	Out
14. If you will be the first in your family to attend college (3.4) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Colleges give additional consideration to first generation college students, as they may not have had many of the benefits of students whose parents attended college. However, once enrolled in college, these students sometimes have a difficult time adjusting to and being successful in college because of their lack of role models and support systems.</i> 	+2
15. If you participated in an enriching summer program between your junior and senior years (3.9) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Shows initiative, willingness to try new things, and dedication to academics. Encourage students to attend GEAR UP summer camps and programs.</i> 	+2
16. If you have not participated in any extracurricular activities (4.0) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Get involved! Colleges are looking for “well-rounded” individuals who will contribute to the college community.</i> 	-3
17. If you have participated in a significant community service project (3.6 & 3.4) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Shows leadership and a desire for improving your surroundings. Also, many colleges are becoming increasingly interested in students with a passion for social justice.</i> 	+1
18. If you are an Eagle Scout (3.2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Highest level of Boy Scout. Shows leadership and commitment.</i> 	+2
19. If your ACT composite score is: --30 to 36 (3.2) --between 25-29 (3.9) --24 or below (4.0) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>See #9.</i> 	+1 0 -1
20. If you are a varsity athlete and you took second place at regionals in your sport (3.3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Shows leadership, dedication, team work, etc.</i> 	+3
21. If you got a “D” in an academic course at the end of your junior year (3.3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Many colleges and scholarship committees look at every grade a student receives, NOT just the cumulative GPA. Also, once a scholarship or admission is granted, it doesn’t mean that grades don’t count. Many colleges will review final transcripts to make certain that students maintained high standards related to grades, attendance, behavior, etc.</i> 	-3
22. If you came to the college information session and introduced yourself to the college representative (and, in the case of the student who just got the “D,” explained the extenuating circumstances) (3.6 & 3.3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Every applicant is assigned to a college representative who can be a great advocate and resource (answering questions, monitoring paperwork, informing you of opportunities, etc.).</i> 	+1
23. If you are a legal resident of Montana (4.0) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>There aren’t a lot of Montanans applying for college (especially out-of-state) so this makes the student VERY unique. Especially to schools further away. Additionally things that makes a student unique (background, culture, family, experiences, etc) is a major benefit.</i> 	+2
24. If you never gave your counselor any personal information for use in writing your college recommendation (3.4) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>See #6.</i> 	-1
25. If your last name is Bush—the name on the college library is Bush—and it is not a coincidence, move all the way to the front and stay there (3.2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sad but true...sometimes it isn’t what you know but who you know!</i> 	Go to #1