

Demonstrated Interest: A Brief and Practical How-To Guide

This article was inspired by podcast Episode 108 with Monica James, in which we discuss everything from how to find out which colleges track demonstrated interest to whether you should or shouldn't like a college's Facebook page. You can find that episode [here](#).

This is an excerpt from a longer article, which you can find [here](#).

Why are we talking about demonstrated interest in the first place?

Demonstrated interest (which I'll explain in a moment) has become an important factor that some (keyword: some!) colleges consider when deciding whether to admit students or not. In fact, take a look at this NACAC survey from 2015 asking colleges which factors most influenced admission decisions:

TABLE 7: PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACTORS IN ADMISSION DECISIONS: FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN

Factor	N	Considerable Importance	Moderate Importance	Limited Importance	No Importance
Grades in College Prep Courses	231	79.2%	13.0%	6.9%	0.9%
Grades in All Courses	229	60.3	31.0	8.7	—
Strength of Curriculum	231	60.2	26.8	10.0	3.0
Admission Test Scores (SAT, ACT)	228	55.7	32.5	7.9	3.9
Essay or Writing Sample	231	22.1	39.0	21.6	17.3
Counselor Recommendation	231	17.3	42.4	27.3	13.0
Student's Demonstrated Interest	231	16.9	33.3	26.8	22.9
Teacher Recommendation	230	15.2	43.5	27.8	13.5
Class Rank	228	14.0	37.7	32.0	16.2
Subject Test Scores (AP, IB)	227	7.0	35.2	32.6	25.1
Portfolio	229	6.6	10.0	30.6	52.8
Extracurricular Activities	231	5.6	43.3	34.6	16.5
SAT II Scores	226	5.3	8.4	23.0	63.3
Interview	229	3.5	23.1	28.4	45.0
State Graduation Exam Scores	228	3.5	11.0	25.4	60.1
Work	230	0.9	21.3	44.8	33.0

That's right, it's #7. TWO SPOTS BELOW ESSAYS.

For the entire 2015 NACAC state of college admission report, [click here](#).



In short, demonstrated interest can play a big part in increasing your chance of admission. Want more proof? [Here's a 50-page report](#) that concludes that, for the colleges mentioned in the study (those that track demonstrated interest), “off-site contacts [such as sending an email to a rep or requesting info from the school] increase the probability of admission by 10-13 percentage points,” while making both an on-site contact (like taking a campus tour) and ALSO making an off-site contact “increases the probability of admission by 21-24 percentage points.” [Source](#). (Heads-up: There's a lot of math in that report.)

And get this: according to a 2012 NACAC report, between 2004 and 2011, the percentage of colleges that rated demonstrated interest as being “considerably important” rose from 7% to 23% (see page 23 of [the report](#)), although since then it has stayed right around the 20% mark.

Demonstrated Interest: What is it?

Simply put, demonstrated interest is something that many colleges and universities use to track a) how much you (prospective student) like their school and, more importantly b) how likely you are to enroll if they admit you. In short, colleges want to know:

Who really loves us?

Okay, so you may be wondering: How do I demonstrate interest? I'll tell you in a sec. First, I want to share with you...

A Few Ways That Colleges Track Demonstrated Interest (DI)

Note: this info is from a presentation given at a conference in 2015 by a few college admission counselors who track demonstrated interest. [Click here](#) for the presentation--if you're really into this stuff, it's totally worth it, as it shows screenshots from the computers of actual reps showing the details. In short, here's what they track:

- Interaction and inquiry card submission (or scan) at college fairs
- Campus visit during junior year or summer after junior year
- Early application
- Supplemental essay: showing your particular interest in that college and how you have researched that school specifically
- Speaking with alumni or students who may share information with admission office
- Campus info session/tour in fall of senior year
- Interview with admission rep/alum
- Second visit to campus in senior year
- Overnight program
- Contacting admission rep
- Meeting with faculty on campus or by phone
- Oh, and you know [those 42 questions](#) that you answer when you sign up for the SAT? Some colleges pay for that info too. So those are, y'know, 42 other things they track.

Okay, given this information, what should you do? A couple options:

1. **Nothing.** That's right. You can just keep getting good grades and participating in the activities and projects you love and keep living your awesome life. So there is literally nothing that you have to do differently now that you know this. For real. You can still get into a great school without demonstrating interest.



But if you've read this and you're thinking, "Okay, I could probably go to a college fair, and maybe reach out to an admission rep, and I could maybe even like the college's Facebook page," then here's what you should do first:

2. **Spend some time developing your college list.** Why do this first? So that you don't stress yourself out trying to "demonstrate interest" for like 20 schools, some of which you may not apply to anyway. [Here's a resource for creating a great college list](#), for free.

Once you've done that, and by the way that may take some time, then...

3. **Pick a small number of schools to which you'd like to demonstrate some interest.** How many? I don't know, pick three or four schools. But...
4. **(Heads-up: this is important!) Make sure that each of these schools actually tracks demonstrated interest.** Otherwise it's like you're buying gifts for someone whose [love language](#) isn't even gifts! (Okay, pretty obscure reference for this crowd, maybe.)

How do you find out which schools track demonstrated interest? Here, [lemme Google that for you](#): "Does [school's name] track demonstrated interest?"

Once you do, you might learn that, for example, [Brown does not track demonstrated interest](#). (In fact, none of the Ivies do.) So make sure you're spending your time wisely.

If You Decide You Want to Demonstrate Some Interest (and It's an Important "If" Because We're About to Go Down the Rabbit Hole!), When and How Should You Do it?

Okay, with all those qualifiers in place, here are 13 ways you can demonstrate interest, adapted from a [great article](#) by Lisa Rubin-Johnson. I've added how much time each one should take because a) the word "practical" is in the title of this post, and b) it's the best way to help you make sure you're doing this with ease, joy and purpose.

13 Ways You Can Demonstrate Interest (in order of the college process)

- Adapted from [this article](#) by Lisa Rubin-Johnson

1. **Get on the school's email list. (2 min.)** You can do this by Googling the name of the school and filling out an "information request" form like [this one](#).
2. **Open the emails you receive from a school and click on something in the email. (3-5 min.)** That's right: actually read the emails they send you, then consider clicking on something in the email (if it's interesting to you), and maybe even spend a few minutes reading what's on the web page that it sends you to. (Some schools track these things.) But mostly do it because, hey, you may learn something! While you're on the site:
3. **"Click deep" on the school's website. (15-30 min.)** This is my friend Michelle's phrase; it basically means spending some time researching to learn, for example, if the school has a rad program that may be right for you. This will not only help you eventually write your ["Why us" statement](#) (assuming the school has one), but will prep you for a potential conversation with your regional rep when you...



4. **Attend a college fair. (2-3 hrs.)** For tips on making the most of a college fair experience, check out [podcast episode 107](#) with Maria Furtado and read the accompanying blog post.
5. **Contact your regional rep. (10-30 min.)** More tips on developing an authentic relationship with your rep below.
6. **Follow the school on social media. (5-10 min.)** Google to find out what social media platforms the school is on, and follow or like their pages, then maybe even share or re-Tweet something from the school.
7. **Visit campus. (Time spent depends how far away you live.)** This isn't possible for everyone, but if you're within a couple hours from the school, it's a good idea (if you do live close to the school and never visit, a school might wonder why). Make sure they've got some record you were there by signing up for a tour or meeting with a rep.
8. **Interview. (1 hr prep + 2-3 hrs for driving to and doing actual interview)** Some schools have interviews, some don't--you can find out by Googling--if yes, do the interview. An alumni interview is fine; an interview with your regional rep (i.e. the person who will read your application) is better. More tips on interviews [at this link](#). Note that part 1 of this post asks, "Does the interview matter?" For schools that track demonstrated interest, the interview matters.
9. **Supplemental essays. (You'll have to write these anyway if you're applying; time will vary.)** The big one is the "Why us" essay, where essentially you get a chance to show the school why you feel you'd be a great fit for one another. If the school is (actually) your #1 choice, say that in your "Why us." Lots more tips on how to write that essay [at this link](#).
10. **Apply Early Action or Early Decision. (Takes pre-planning, but no extra work to do this beyond actual application.)** Early Decision (ED) is something you can do for only one school and means that, if you get in, you have to go. Early Action (EA) is something you can do for several schools and, if you get in, you don't have to go, but shows you're interested enough to apply earlier than most students. A few schools have something called "Restricted Early Action"--make sure to check the school's website to see who offers what and what it means. Why might you apply ED or EA? Because the EA and ED acceptance rates are often higher. How much higher? Wouldn't it be great if a resource existed that compared the difference between regular decision and early decision numbers?

Behold: [a PDF that compares Regular Decision and Early Decision percentages for 2016](#). You can thank Jennie Kent and Jeff Levy for the time it took them to call all the schools on this list and put together all this info. (Thanks, Jennie and Jeff!) Keep in mind that students applying early often have higher GPA and test scores (and, sometimes, have gotten help on their essays and have great counselors who tell them about things like EA and ED), so the applicant pool for EA and ED is often stronger. But still: look at the difference in acceptance percentage for applicants to American University. (Spoiler: 32% for RD and 82% for ED.) Think it matters? Uh huh.

11. **Submit your application before the deadline. (No extra time required.)** This is especially true for schools that read their applications on a rolling basis (in other



words: in the order applications are submitted). As Monica James says on the podcast, better to be the first oboe player that a reader reads than the sixth!

12. **Thank you notes and emails. (10-15 min.)** Hello, life skill. Spend a few minutes following up after an interview or college fair meeting with a little, “Thanks for talking with me!” You can ask a follow-up question, if you’d like to keep the conversation going, but don’t go crazy with this (see tips below).
13. **Follow waitlist instructions. (10 min-2 hrs, depending)** If you’ve been waitlisted by a school, make sure you do whatever they tell you to do--including the optional stuff. They may for example just ask you to fill out a simple form declaring your interest (10 min.), or they may say that you can submit one additional recommendation letter or a short letter detailing any additional information not included on the original application (if they do, send the one--not six--rec letter, and only include new information in that letter). The school website will tell you what to do; if you can’t find the info, give the school a quick call to ask what to do and take careful notes.

All right, at this point, you might be saying...

Hey Ethan, this all sounds exhausting and I don’t feel like doing it.

Great, then don’t! You do *not* have to do any of the 13 things mentioned above. Colleges will still read your application and you will be considered for admission. Assuming you have good grades and test scores, have followed all the directions on the application and (this is important) assuming you have developed a [balanced college list](#), you will still end up at a great school where you can get a great education and find happiness.

But before you decide not to do anything, remember: You don’t have to do all 13 things for all 9 or 10 schools you’re applying to and you certainly don’t have to do them all in one day or even one week. You could just pick a couple schools that you’re 100% certain actually track demonstrated interest, then pick a few things from the list of 13 things and do those.

Here’s the key:

Focus on building on authentic relationship with your regional rep from 2-3 schools on your list.

How? Here are...

Four Practical Tips for Building an Authentic Relationship with Your Rep

1. **Search the school’s website to find out who your regional rep is.** This is as easy as Googling, for example, “Davidson College regional reps.”
2. **Email your rep and ask a question you are genuinely interested in.** If, for example, you’ve looked on the school’s website (important if!) and have been unable to find out if your rep will be in your area sometime soon, you might write briefly to say, “Hi! I’m wondering if you might be in the Bay Area (or wherever you live) sometime soon, as I’m really excited to apply to your school and I’d love to meet you.” Or you might ask something really specific like, “Hi! I’m writing to find out if it’s easy for freshmen



enrolled in the School of Speech to easily take advanced courses in Journalism, as I know that they're separate schools. But I'm really passionate about both, and I'm especially excited to apply to your school, since I know it has great programs for both of my interests: Communication Studies and Journalism." Then sign off with a simple, "Thank you!" and your name and name of your high school. (Pro Tip: I've even seen some students create a simple signature for their emails where they pop in a headshot so reps can attach their name to a face.)

- 3. Keep the email conversation going (for a little bit).** Not forever, just a couple emails. How? Ask a question at the end of each email. Careful: this can get annoying after awhile, so don't go crazy with this. And make sure you don't email until you have a good and real question. You might, for example, ask if they're going to be in your area visiting other schools and see if they might have time in your schedule to visit your school (make sure to check with your counselor first!). But treat this like you're having an actual, in-person conversation at a college fair. Speaking of which:
- 4. If the rep is coming to a college fair near you, go and meet them!** Especially if you won't or may not be able to visit the campus. And if you've already met the rep because they visited your school, still go and just say hello.

Why do this?

Quick personal story: A few years ago I was chatting with a rep at a selective school and a student came up to him and said hello and reintroduced himself. The rep said, "Oh, yeah, I remember you!" and they chatted for like 90 seconds, then the student said good-bye. Once the student left, I asked the rep, "What do you think? Good chance of getting in?"

"Oh, he's in," the rep said.

"Really?" I said? "If he's got As?"

"Oh, even Bs. He's a great kid; he was my student ambassador when I visited his school--we'd love to have him."

I don't know if that student ultimately ended up at that school, but his demonstrated interest game was on point.

Okay, that's enough for you to do and think about so I'm gonna' cut this off here and let you either get to work or get back to your life.

If I had to re-cap the most important things from this post, I'd say:

1. that [PDF that compares Regular Decision and Early Decision percentages for 2016](#) is worth checking out (to help you decide if you want to apply ED or not) and
2. get to work on your [college list](#), if it isn't finished, so you can decide which schools you may like to apply some of the 13 tips to.

That's all. Now go back to having an awesome life.

Links referenced in or researched for this post:

- [NACAC 2015 State of College Admission Report](#)
- [Demonstrated Interest: Signaling Behavior in College Admissions](#)
- [Powerpoint presentation: Measuring Demonstrated Interest in College Admission--A Life Skill](#)
- [The College Admission Landscape, 2012 \(CollegeBoard\)](#)
- [Wiki of Common Data Sets for a number of different schools](#)



- [How Do I Love Thee? Demonstrated Interest and How Colleges Count the Ways](#)

