Advice to New Readers

The reading process, like everything else in the college admission process, is not generalizable. Reading evaluation guidelines will vary from institution to institution. Most readers will tell you it's a privilege to glimpse into the young lives of our candidates. Making admission recommendations is a heavy responsibility, and we may become deeply moved by these “short stories” we read. It’s easy to lose sight of the larger picture, and every effort should be made to keep in mind:

**Your Institutional mission** – how will your decisions help fulfill your institution’s mission?

**Your Institutional priorities** – these help your office put together the mosaic that is your campus community, fill institutional needs, and are subject to change each year. Where’s the fit?

**Your biases** – recognize your biases; we all have them. Ask yourself if and how your biases are influencing your recommendations. Then revisit your institutional mission and priorities!

It is not uncommon for admission officers to try to read five or more applications in an hour (don’t worry; you will get faster with experience). The temptation to take shortcuts may seem overwhelming, especially given the sheer numbers of applications pouring into many admission offices these days. But you should Make every effort to give each candidate his/her due. Fred Hargadon, former dean of admission at Swarthmore, Stanford and Princeton, urges readers “to be sure to give each application the same thorough reading you’d want an admission office to give the application of your own son or daughter.”

What we see should be what we get, but, in the hypercompetitive environment of selective college admissions, this is not always the case. If you are reading holistically, you will want to keep an eye out for red flags, and if you find any, dig deeper, making phone calls when warranted. As you read, pay close attention to:

**School Profile** – secondary schools vary widely in their rigor, course offerings, schedules, and reporting practices. You need to read each school profile carefully, taking note of minimum passing grade and grade scale; course offerings, designations (AP/IB/Honors/College Prep/Remedial, etc.) and weighting; grade distribution; and schedule (is the school on a block plan), as these will help you evaluate what you see on the transcript.

**Transcript** — if the student has been absent or tardy numerous times, is this addressed anywhere in the application?

**Essays** — voice – is it consistent throughout the application? Does the student take the same care in answering their short answer questions as they do their personal statement?

**Signature** – is the application signed? If the application is an ED application, have you received the signed ED Agreement form?

**Disciplinary information** – if your institution requires the student to check if they have been suspended, expelled or arrested, does the student address this and provide an explanation?

**Recommendations** — again, are they consistent with what you are seeing elsewhere in the application? Are they consistent with the ratings given the student?