

A Perspective from the University of Washington

by Jenni Cole, Admissions, School of Music

It's no secret that the University of Washington is a very selective college. For Fall 2008, we received almost 20,000 freshman applications and only offered admission to slightly more than 12,000 of these students. That made for a 61 percent acceptance rate – competitive by any standard!

What, then, can a prospective student do to stand out in this sea of applicants? Is participation in music enough to separate music students from the crowd? I met with Paul Seegert, Associate Director of Operations for Undergraduate Admissions, to seek answers to these questions.

What does the UW look for in freshman applicants?

The UW uses a holistic approach in the admissions process. This means that every student's application is read carefully and thoroughly by at least two people, and every part of a student's application is taken into consideration.

In this process, the first thing we look at is academics. The UW's curriculum is rigorous, and Admissions screens every applicant to make sure that he or she will be academically successful. To do this, we consider the courses a student has taken, the grades he or she earned and SAT/ACT scores. Admissions also considers other factors, like the writing sample and extracurricular activities.

Will participation in music help me get into the UW?

Involvement in extracurricular activities is a must on any college application, but is one kind of activity better than another? Not really, according to Mr. Seegert. Rather than being picky about the *kind* of extracurricular involvement in which students are engaged, the UW wants to see *how* they were involved in that activity.

Music is a great activity in which to be involved, but it's fairly common for students to participate in music in high school. Participation in and of itself isn't enough to make a student stand out. There are three aspects that Admissions looks for when assessing a student's musical participation:

- 1) Depth of involvement: Participation in music throughout high school, or participation in multiple related activities (i.e., choir and musical theatre) shows commitment.
- 2) Leadership: Serving as section leader or a teaching assistant, or taking on another leadership role shows an even greater level of participation and makes an applicant stand out a bit more.
- 3) Achievement: Placing or receiving a superior rating at solo/ensemble competitions and playing in All-State or All-Northwest ensembles show that the student is accomplished at his or her instrument, which makes an applicant even more appealing.

Quantity vs. quality

In recent history, the general consensus on extra-curricular activities was that the more activities students list on their applications, the better. Not so anymore! In fact, the UW application only has room for students to list five activities – and it's just fine if all five of these activities are music-related! “There's this myth of the ‘well-rounded student,’” says Mr. Seegert. “We're trying to build a well-rounded *class*.”

The bottom line?

Music is a wonderful addition to an application, but just participating isn't enough. To really stand out, a student needs to show depth of involvement, leadership, and achievement in music; however, even the most accomplished musician won't get into the UW without excelling in academics. When asked what piece of advice he would give to high school music students interested in the UW, Mr. Seegert says, "Pursue your passion in music – we love to see that – but don't forget academics!"

If you or your students have any questions about the UW admissions process or just want more information, please feel free to contact me at jcole2@u.washington.edu.