Career Counsellor's Newsletter

Advice to Start a Successful Career with an Economics Major

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University of Houston has shared a detailed list of to-do items for the students who are looking forward to studying and pursuing a career based on their economics degree. This list is not only important when you are closer to graduation, but for all years throughout your bachelor degree to make the most out of your education and make you marketable after graduation. It will give you some guidance about the things you should be thinking, doing and improving. Please do not wait until your last year or two of college to reflect on these points as you will have less time to plan and adjust, making it more difficult to improve; although not impossible. Here are 15 tips to help you start a successful career with an economics major. Again, this is general advice to keep in perspective every semester.

Work on your math skills:

The best paying job positions involve data analysis and knowing your way through numbers is an important skill to dominate. Many positions also require the ability to frame problems and find solutions quantitatively so paying attention to the mathematical exercises studied in economics and how to solve problems is an important part of your training. Take remedial courses if necessary. Take as many math courses as you can if you have strong economic ambitions, are thinking about an MBA or a Masters or Ph.D. in Economics.

Learn software and/or programming language:

Excel, Word and PowerPoint are must. But do not overestimate your knowledge on Excel. Knowing how to manage and analyze data is a very valuable skill for an economics major and it will make you a better job candidate if you master using spreadsheets and other statistical software. Consider enrolling in MIS–3300 where you dedicate a full semester learning important functions in these software.

Get experience:

A paid internship is of course your number one choice. It is the best way to gain hands–on work experience in a professional setting. It can also lead to a job offer or just serve as a way to explore possible careers with little commitment. Internships are hard to find and very competitive (every student wants one). So look hard and apply as many as you can to increase your chances. Also consider unpaid internships which also provide experience and look just as good in a resume.

Be engaged:

Participate in student organizations, industry meetings, civic events, community service, study abroad programs or other non–profit organizations. They all provide different forms of experience and all experiences count. You will learn about working with people, work in groups, be part of an organization and have the opportunity to practice leadership which are all important skills and experiences to have.

Network:

Networking is the best way to make yourself seen and heard. Talk to professors, professionals, alumni, friends, classmates and family. Send an email to a person in a position, industry or specific company that you might be interested in learning more about. Find them through the company website, Facebook or LinkedIn and ask about their jobs or their company. (Worst case scenario you do not get a response). Be bold, but be professional and polite. These are good ways of learning more about your career options, meet people and make you visible in the job market.

Grades matter:

It is easy to get distracted with other things going on with your life. Keep in mind that grades are the easiest single way to tell apart job candidates and it signals employers something about how smart and /or hard working you are. Whatever your grades were in high school, nobody will look at those, you get a clean fresh start in college; so look forward not back. Good time management will always be your best ally. Procrastination is your worst enemy.

Work on building your resume early:

This may well be important career advice. Build experiences and skills that are marketable. Consider the Quantitative Certificate, getting Internship Credit or a Scholarship. They all look great on a resume for a reason.

Look for jobs even before you are really looking for one:

Read carefully the job descriptions, qualifications and requirements This will help you learn about the tasks and responsibilities of various positions and industries. Keep in mind that you are not expected to know how to do all of the tasks listed; there will be in the job training too.

Read:

Be up-to-date. Read news articles: The Economist, Wall Street Journal, Houston Chronicle, BBC News, etc. Be curious: do your own mini research on topics that interest you like current policy issues. Read your textbooks too.

Personality and Character Traits Colleges Look for in Applicants

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Colleges want to see more than just good grades and test scores on your college application. They want evidence that you possess personal qualities associated with success in college. Here are 9 personal qualities colleges look for in applicants.

It's no secret that selective colleges look beyond the numbers when reviewing applicants. They also look for various personality and character traits. In a survey administered by the National Association for College Admissions Counselors (NACAC), 70 percent of college admission officers said character traits were "considerably" or "moderately" important in their admissions decisions.

But some admissions experts think it's even more important for students to demonstrate these qualities in their applications. "Today, with the impact of COVID-19, renewed focus on access and equity, and rapid alteration of the testing world, there is an accelerated movement toward holistic admission, including the elevation of character attributes," said David Holmes, executive director of the Character Collaborative, a nationwide consortium of colleges, high schools, and educational organizations advocating for the use of character in college admissions and a co-sponsor of the NACAC survey.

What are some character traits colleges look for?

Increasingly, colleges look for personal qualities that foster cooperation, community, and compassion, explained by Dr. Amy Morgenstern who is the former associate director of the honors program at Wright State University . As per her observation, "It's no longer the individual leader at the helm; now it's the collaborative team member who attracts attention; students' self-centered career ambitions are not as appreciated as much as sincere personal and professional aspirations to make the world better.

Morgenstern advises her students to highlight "7Cs" in their essays and applications: collaboration, commitment, character, curiosity, cultural intelligence, challenge, and creativity.

Colleges may look for a different set of character qualities or define these traits in different ways. But when colleges describe their ideal candidates, they often mention some qualities more than others. Here are 9 character traits that colleges often cite when they describe what they are looking for in students.

Curiosity: Colleges want to see that you are passionate about learning – not just about a single academic area, but about the world around you. "We want to see the kind of curiosity and enthusiasm that will allow you to spark a lively discussion in a freshman seminar and continue the conversation at a dinner table," states Stanford University's website.

Show colleges how much you love to and want to learn and what excites you intellectually. If you can demonstrate that you have a "growth mindset", the belief that one can enhance intelligence, abilities and talents through hard work that is also a plus, according to a report from Harvard University's School of Education.

Persistence: Some colleges want students who not only challenge themselves, but who also persevere through those challenges, set goals, and achieve them. You might hear this quality described as "grit" or "commitment." A study by University of Pennsylvania psychologist Angela Duckworth indicates that "grit" might be a more effective predictor of success than IQ.

You might have demonstrated persistence by sticking with challenging classes or activities even though you didn't excel in them at first, or any time you worked hard to accomplish a goal, despite obstacles or setbacks. The key is to show that even when you faced obstacles, you maintained your energy, enthusiasm and passion for what you set out to achieve.

Risk-taking: Here, risk-taking doesn't necessarily mean engaging in high-risk activities like bungee jumping or mountain climbing, it means venturing out of your comfort zone, be it in the classroom or other areas of life. Taking a risk can be joining the debate club even though you have a fear of public speaking, trying a new activity, or taking a challenging class. Colleges want students who are not afraid to make mistakes and who understand that mistakes are part of learning.

As set forth on the website of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, "When people take risks in life, they learn resilience because risk leads to failure as often as it leads to success. The most creative and successful people and MIT is loaded with them, know that failure is part of life and that if you stay focused and don't give up, goals are ultimately realized."

Compassion: Some colleges also look for students with compassion. According to the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley, "Compassion literally means 'to suffer together.' [It's] …the feeling that arises when you are confronted with another's suffering and feel motivated to relieve that suffering." Research shows that college students who show a higher level of concern for their peers and classmates have higher levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Georgia Tech lists "compassion for others" as one of eight character traits it values. Syracuse University states, "You are a strong candidate if you strengthen and support those around you, even as you are working to develop yourself." UCLA looks for " demonstrated concern for others and for the community." Showing compassion is not just about expressing empathy for others, it's also taking action to help them. Engaging in community service work, tutoring struggling students at your school, willingly taking care of siblings to help a parent working multiple jobs, or political activism can all be fueled by compassion.

Open-mindedness: College can be a great opportunity to engage with people from different backgrounds and cultures and to consider ideas, perspectives, and opinions that might be new or different from your own. Colleges want to see that you can respectfully consider different points of view and that you welcome the chance to consider these perspectives. For example, Pomona College's website states that it values "an openness to new ideas and rejection of easy answers.Critical thinking, another skill that colleges value requires the ability to consider all arguments and ideas even those with which you may disagree.

Social Consciousness: Many colleges say they are looking for students who hope to apply their academic and career interests to improve the world around them. "Our ideal candidates are inspired to emulate our founder Benjamin Franklin by applying their knowledge in service to society, to our community, the city of Philadelphia, and the wider world," states the University of Pennsylvania on its admissions page. Oberlin College says it seeks "individuals who care about the world, who believe they can make it a better place, and who have the courage to try." Does your academic area of interest intersect with a cause that you truly care about? For example, you might want to major in engineering and use the skills you acquire to combat global warming. You might also show your sense of social responsibility through consistent volunteer work or activism.

Creativity: Based on a recent Adobe study, 95 percent of admissions decision–makers believe in the value of creative skills. Creativity is listed among the top qualities considered by Duke, MIT, and UCLA and it doesn't necessarily have to be expressed through activities in the arts. Colleges often look for creative thinkers, problem solvers, innovators and entrepreneurs. To demonstrate creative thinking, you might include an experience in which you came up with a creative solution to a problem or took a unique approach to an assignment.

Collaboration: Colleges want to know that you can collaborate well with students and faculty, and that you are able to put the needs of your team over your own. If you had a leadership role on a team, it's important to demonstrate that you were an effective leader of a cohesive group even if your team ultimately fails. "You might think colleges look for leadership skills," explained Morgenstern. "They do. But they're most interested in leaders who bring people together." Sports isn't the only area where you can illustrate teamwork. Collaboration can also be found in lab or other classroom assignments, volunteer work, or the performing arts.

Cultural Intelligence: Colleges want students who appreciate cultural diversity and are eager to engage with and learn from people from a wide range of cultural backgrounds. In describing successful applicants, USC has said "They are interested in the world, in other peoples and cultures, and enjoy examining important issues from a global perspective." To express this trait, you don't need to have traveled extensively or lived in a foreign country. You might discuss your interest in mastering a foreign language, your experience advocating for an international issue you care about, or your participation in local projects where you worked with people from different cultures.

How Are Colleges Using AI in the Admissions Process?
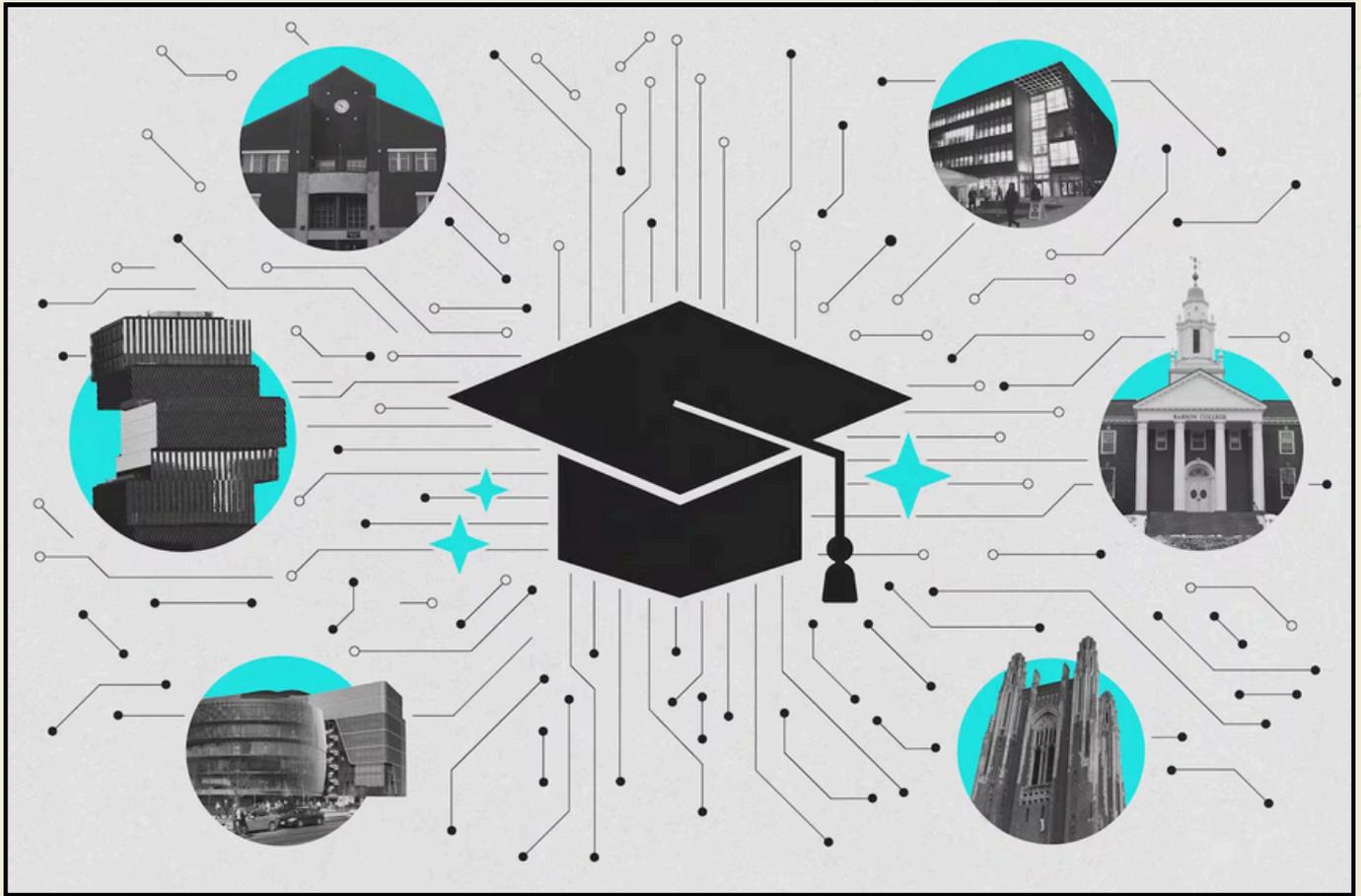
Colleges are increasingly using AI to streamline admissions processes, from automating outreach and reviewing essays to predicting applicant yield and spotting AI-generated content. Understanding how AI is integrated can help applicants prepare stronger, more authentic submissions

Predictive Analytics for Admissions Decisions:

Colleges use AI to predict a crucial factor: your likelihood of enrolling if accepted. This is known as "yield forecasting." Sophisticated AI models analyze patterns from years of admissions data, looking at academic profiles, geographic origins, demonstrated interest, and more, alongside your application details to estimate how likely you are to choose their institution.

This predictive insight is vital for colleges as they aim to build their ideal incoming class and manage resources. For instance, admissions teams use these yield probabilities to:

Shape the Admitted Class: Make more strategic admission offers, balancing qualifications with the likelihood of acceptance.

Personalize Outreach: Tailor acceptance packages, communications, and potentially financial incentives to encourage enrollment from high-probability candidates.

Optimize Financial Aid: Allocate scholarships and aid more effectively to meet enrollment goals and support students likely to attend.

Some educational institutions are already leveraging these AI tools to refine enrollment strategies. For example, Columbia College Chicago saw a 34% rise in new student enrollment, a $1 million tuition revenue boost, and increased diversity after adopting Othot's AI platform. The tool helped personalize outreach and optimize admissions decisions.

Chatbots and Virtual Assistants: Prospective students will find that many colleges now feature AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants on their websites. These digital helpers are programmed to manage a wide array of routine inquiries. Available around the clock, they provide instant answers to questions about application deadlines, financial aid details, specific program requirements, campus life, and more.

Why is this an advantage?

For the Applicant: This means getting immediate, reliable answers whenever you need them, day or night. It also means less waiting for email responses and a smoother, more informed journey through the application process.

For Admissions Staff: By handling common questions, these AI tools free up human admissions officers to concentrate on more complex applicant situations, personalized counseling, and in-depth application reviews.

Enhanced Campus Connection: These bots improve the overall user experience on college websites, making it easier for students to find information and feel supported from their very first interaction.

All of which are beneficial. For example, Georgia State University's chatbot, "Pounce," impressively reduced "summer melt" (admitted students who don't enroll) by 22%. This success was largely attributed to its ability to proactively answer admitted students' questions, keeping them engaged and on track.

AI-Powered Outreach and Marketing: Colleges are using sophisticated AI and machine learning to personalize their outreach to prospective students. This means tailoring communications, from emails about specific programs to event invitations, based on your digital footprint (such as website browsing history), demographic information, and even your progress in the application.

Why this matters for your application journey: More Relevant Information: AI helps colleges pinpoint students who are likely a strong fit for particular programs or the campus culture, ensuring you receive communications that are genuinely relevant to your specific interests and academic background.

- Personalized Engagement: Instead of generic mailings, you'll likely receive messages highlighting aspects of the college that align with your expressed interests, making the interaction feel more tailored and helpful.
- Timely and Informed Follow-Up: By tracking engagement (such as email opens or webinar attendance), AI enables admissions teams to provide context-specific follow-up, helping ensure you receive crucial information and reminders. This intelligent approach, similar to advanced AI-driven digital marketing in other sectors, ultimately aims to create a more efficient, personalized, and supportive journey for applicants, guiding you toward colleges that truly match your aspirations.

Essay Review and Plagiarism Detection: While human judgment remains paramount for final decisions, AI now plays a significant role in:

Screening for Authenticity: This is a primary use. AI diligently checks for plagiarism and, crucially, flags content that appears to be substantially AI-generated. Expect this level of screening.

Initial Content Triage (in some cases): Beyond detection, some advanced tools may assist in preliminary sorting by looking at structural elements, ensuring alignment with prompt keywords, or even assessing general sentiment.

Highlighting Essays for Human Attention: AI can flag essays that require closer human scrutiny, whether for authenticity concerns, unique content, or aspects needing nuanced understanding.

Why this is evolving and what it means:

- Integrity of the Process: With sophisticated AI writing tools widely available, colleges are leveraging AI detection to ensure a level playing field and maintain the focus on your genuine voice, experiences, and analytical abilities.
- Managing Scale: For institutions handling vast numbers of applications, AI provides an initial layer of review, helping human readers focus their expertise where it's most needed.

- Ongoing Ethical Dialogue: The use of AI in essay evaluation, especially for anything beyond straightforward detection, continues to raise vital questions about transparency for applicants, potential algorithmic bias, and the irreplaceable nature of human judgment in truly holistic reviews.

Ethical Concerns and AI Bias in Admissions: While AI enhances efficiency in college admissions, it presents critical AI ethics challenges. Institutions are actively addressing:

- Algorithmic Bias and Fairness: A primary concern is algorithmic bias. AI, learning from historical data, can perpetuate societal inequities, impacting equitable access and fairness for underrepresented applicants.
- Transparency and Explainable AI (XAI): The "black box" nature of AI demands true transparency beyond privacy policy mentions. Understanding AI-driven recommendations is key, driving investment in Explainable AI (XAI).
- Accountability and Human Oversight: Establishing clear accountability for AI-influenced decisions is crucial, necessitating robust human oversight in the admissions process.

To promote responsible AI and admissions equity, proactive colleges are:
- Implementing "human-in-the-loop" systems ensuring human oversight.
- Mandating rigorous algorithmic audits for bias mitigation.
- Improving transparency about AI use.
- Investing in XAI and tools for fairness.
- Establishing strong AI governance and ethical frameworks.

These evolving practices are vital for maintaining trust and ensuring fairness in college admissions.

Practical Tips for Today's Applicants:
- Be Authentic: Never submit AI-generated work. Colleges use AI detection to find your voice. Genuine content stands out.
- Write for Humans & AI: Assume both review your application. Prioritize clarity, strong structure, error-free writing, and original personal insights.
- Demonstrate Interest: Colleges track engagement (emails, events, website use) which signals genuine interest and may inform AI predictive models.
- AI Detection is Standard: Yes, colleges check for AI content. The use of sophisticated detection tools are widespread to ensure fairness and originality.

How Should People Choose Careers?

Emily Carpenter | TEDxNazarethCollege · September 2022

How Should People Choose Careers? | Emily Carpenter | TEDxNazarethCollege

Chance plays a role in your career path but there are steps you can take to make your own luck and improve your results. In this TEDxNazarethCollege talk, Emily Carpenter, associate vice president for experiential impact at Nazareth College in Rochester, New York, explores how career choices are influenced by what we're exposed to and how career steps aren't always linear. She advocates for more equitable approaches to the college experience, highlighting research-backed ideas and practices that higher education institutions should integrate for all students.

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