

Published February 14th, 2024

Are summer pay to play programs worth it?

By Elizabeth LaScala



Doing College and Beyond College and Graduate School Admissions Services 970 Dewing Avenue, Suite 202, Lafayette 925.385.0562 (office) 925.330.8801 (mobile) www.doingcollege.com Elizabeth@doingcollege.com Elizabeth LaScala, PhD, brings decades of admissions expertise to personally guide each student through applying to well-matched colleges, making each step more manageable and less stressful. She has placed hundreds of students in the most prestigious colleges and universities in the US. Elizabeth attends conferences, visits campuses and makes personal contacts with admissions networks to stay current on the evolving nature of college admissions. She and her professional team offer resume development, test preparation, academic tutoring, value analysis, merit and need-based scholarship search and more.

with strong business, engineering, or other experiences and an already strong resume that will include activities, a job, internship, or research during the summer following junior year, then it's unnecessary to add on a summer program. I do not think program participation in itself boosts admission probability, but I do think the boost is to their insights, interviews, and college essays.

As a high school student, it's likely that you've been extended an invitation, urging you to consider applying for a pre-college program taking place on a college campus over the summer. Most of these programs are for profit (although some award scholarships and some are even tuition free). But, in general, many summer programs cost several thousand dollars for a week or two on a college campus. The label "pay to play" is commonly used because these programs give students the opportunity to play at being college students. That said, the best programs treat students like scholars and teach college level material as well as give concrete opportunities to develop and practice important hands-on skills.

As much as I guard against allowing my students to attend truly Pay to Play programs, immersion in the best of these programs can strengthen the students' insights into their future major. Also, I like how it can give them the language to express their interests clearly within their college applications and interviews. For example, students with business majors in mind often falter here; they have problems being specific and going beyond the predictable. Engineering majors have similar issues-often starting their essays with how they loved playing Legos as a child and love fixing their bicycles. These kinds of essays are very overdone. Programs with a hands-on project give future engineers the chance to build skills and describe how they worked and what they worked on (teamwork, problem-solving, outcome/results). Future doctors, dentists, and pharmacists who attend a summer immersion program will move them away from the typical "I want to help people" and into some specifics about the different specialties, patient-provider interactions, and hot topics in healthcare today.

For those programs that have an application process, we know they are at least somewhat competitive. Also, preparing the application can help the student understand the college application process. You have to fill out an application, ask a teacher for a recommendation, and write one or more essays. These tasks are similar to the real deal next fall. If the summer program is rolling, they will learn that applying early in the cycle can give them a better shot at getting in, similar to many colleges with rolling applications.

So, is the investment worth it? If you have a student with strong business, engineering, or other experiences and an already strong resume that will include activities, a job, internship, or research during the summer following junior year, then it's unnecessary to add on a summer program. I do not think program participation in itself boosts admission probability, but I do think the boost is to their insights, interviews, and college essays.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA