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## How to Be Artsy Smartsy

By Elaina Loveland

You think the average college applicant has to jete through hoops? Consider the student who wants to pursue the arts. In addition to worrying about grades, standardized tests, and essays, an applicant for a selective program must often act, sing, or dance before judgmental faculty members. Or submit a portfolio of drawings or fiction.

That's a lot of stress for a college career that could lead to a life of waiting tables.

Nonetheless, the number of students who want to study the arts seems to be increasing. Philadelphia's University of the Arts, for example, received 2,771 applications this year, up from 2,081 in 2001. Potential applicants need to ask themselves a few questions. Do you want to prepare for a career right after college? Then you might consider arts conservatories or professional art schools, which usually offer a B.F.A. degree. If you aren't sure about your commitment or have other academic interests, a B.A. or B.S. program at a liberal arts or public university may be a wiser option.

Arts students also need to ask the right questions to size up a college program.

**For all disciplines.** Is an audition or artistic or creative writing portfolio required? (If so, the program is clearly competitive. Are you up for the challenge?)

Are courses you want to take offered on a regular basis and at several levels (beginning, intermediate, advanced)?

Is there a minor in your discipline? (In case you decide not to major in the field.)

Can you double major?

Can you take classes in a department or perform/exhibit/publish without declaring a major?

How many performance/exhibition/publishing opportunities are offered a year? (Obviously, the more the better.)

Can you perform/exhibit/publish as a freshman or must you wait till you are an upperclassman?

If you're interested in the practical side of the arts, are there courses or a minor in arts administration?

Ask students at the school about pros and cons of their program and if the faculty's teaching style helps them make artistic progress. Do they have trouble getting access to studio space or practice rooms? And if they were to make their college decision again, would they make the same choice?

For actors. What types of actors have alums become--stage, television, or film?

Is there a musical theater program?

Do you have industry contacts--casting directors, theaters, film production companies--to help with internships or post-college gigs?



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Find out if a school lets you sink your teeth into the arts.

**For artists.** Does the program require a freshman "foundation year" of required art courses? (In other words, you have to take Drawing 101 before, say, computer animation.)

Do faculty exhibit (and win awards) in local or national shows?

**For dancers.** Which technique is emphasized: ballet, modern, jazz, or a combination?

How many class and rehearsal dancing hours will you log each week? (Ten is a decent number to maintain and improve technique.)

Do guest artists regularly teach and choreograph? Do they create original choreography for undergrads?

**For musicians.** Can you take a private lesson with a faculty member before making your admissions decision?

How many faculty members specialize in your instrument? (At least two gives you different teaching perspectives.)

Does faculty perform professionally?

Is there a music ed certification program for a potential teaching career?

**For writers.** Is there a creative writing-only major or a degree in the English department emphasizing creative writing? (The former usually offers more opportunities for writing.)

How many lit courses must you take besides creative writing courses? (Just fyi.)

Do writers-in-residence teach undergrads? If so, how often?

Do you have to submit a portfolio to take classes in creative writing? (It can be a headache but also means a more selective program.)

#### TIP

Even if the "creative college" of your dreams does not require its applicants to submit SAT or ACT scores, take the tests anyway to keep all your options open.

*In her new book Creative Colleges: A Guide for Student Actors, Artists, Dancers, Musicians and Writers, Elaine Loveland highlights schools with strong programs in the arts. Her list is at [www.usnews.com/extras](http://www.usnews.com/extras). More information is available at [creativecollegesbook.com](http://creativecollegesbook.com).*

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