

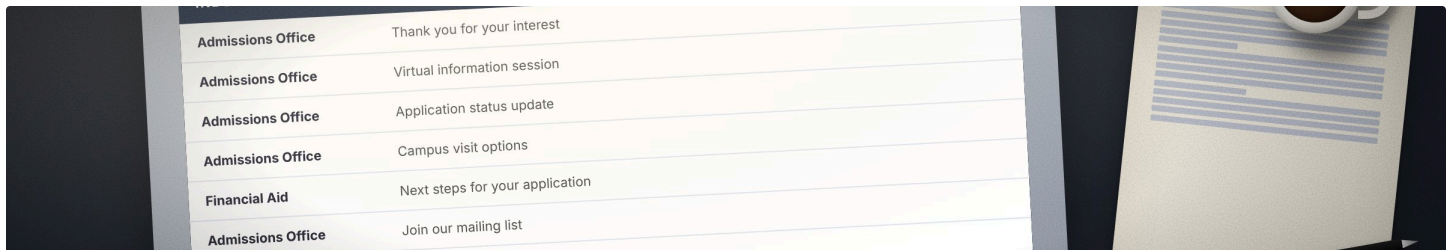
ADMISSIONS STRATEGY

The “Demonstrated Interest” Myth: Which Colleges Track Your Clicks and Which Ignore Them



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A student opens a college's email, registers for a virtual information session, attends a webinar, downloads a brochure, and checks the admissions portal every few days. Has any of this improved the student's chances of admission?

The answer depends on the college. Some universities explicitly say they do not consider demonstrated interest. Others acknowledge that they track prospective students' engagement and use it as one factor in admissions decisions. The difference can determine whether attending an information session is merely useful research or also a meaningful part of an application strategy.

The confusion comes from treating all colleges as though they follow the same admissions rules. They do not.

Demonstrated interest is real at some institutions, irrelevant at others, and rarely worth pursuing through indiscriminate emailing or constant clicking. Families can avoid wasted effort by checking each college's stated policy before investing time in engagement activities.

1. WHAT IS DEMONSTRATED INTEREST?

Demonstrated interest refers to actions that indicate a student has seriously explored a college and may genuinely want to attend if admitted.

Depending on the institution, these actions may include:

- Attending an in-person or virtual admissions information session.
- Taking an official campus tour.

- Meeting an admissions representative at a college fair or high school visit.
- Participating in a college-specific program or event.
- Communicating with an admissions officer to ask a substantive question.

Engaging with the institution's online resources or applicant portal, where the college explicitly recognizes that activity.

Colleges may use this information to understand how seriously an applicant has considered attending. The practice is associated with a concept called yield: the proportion of admitted students who ultimately enroll.

A college that wants to manage enrollment may find it useful to understand which applicants are genuinely interested. But that does not mean every institution uses engagement data in admissions, or that every action has equal value.

Tufts University, for example, explicitly describes demonstrated interest as one factor in its admissions process. Its admissions guidance identifies virtual events, in-person visits, and other forms of engagement as ways applicants can learn about the university and communicate their interest.¹

The crucial distinction is that demonstrated interest is not a universal admissions requirement. It is an institution-specific factor.

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2. WHICH HIGHLY SELECTIVE UNIVERSITIES SAY THEY DO NOT CONSIDER IT?

Some of the country's most selective universities explicitly state that demonstrated interest does not affect their admissions decisions.

MIT's admissions office says it does not consider demonstrated interest. Its published explanation emphasizes a transparent process without hidden advantages for applicants who have more opportunities to contact the institution.²

The University of Southern California made the same point in a January 2026 admissions blog post. USC explains that it does not track demonstrated or continued interest, including campus visits, virtual events, college fairs, and contacts with admissions staff. It encourages students to attend events and ask questions to learn about the university, but says those actions do not earn extra admissions consideration.³

Stanford also states that it does not give preference to applicants who demonstrate interest through visits, regional information sessions, or other contacts with the admissions office.⁴

These examples illustrate why families should resist blanket advice such as “You must attend every webinar” or “Email the admissions officer before submitting your application.”

At an institution that explicitly does not consider demonstrated interest, those activities should be pursued for information—not as a strategy to accumulate admissions points.

A FEW EXAMPLES

COLLEGE	PUBLISHED APPROACH
MIT	Explicitly does not consider demonstrated interest. ²
Stanford	States that demonstrating interest through visits and contact does not give applicants an admissions preference. ⁴
University of Southern California	Explicitly does not track demonstrated or continued interest in admissions. ³
Tufts University	Says demonstrated interest is one factor considered in admissions. ¹
Tulane University	States that demonstrated interest is considered in admissions and identifies several ways students can engage. ⁵

This is a set of examples, not an exhaustive ranking of universities. Policies can change, and the same action may be treated differently by different institutions. Before relying on a college's policy, check its current admissions guidance and most recent Common Data Set.

3. THE FASTEST WAY TO CHECK: COMMON DATA SET SECTION C7

Families do not have to rely entirely on admissions blogs, counselor anecdotes, or online lists to investigate demonstrated interest.

Many colleges publish a document called the Common Data Set, which standardizes information about enrollment, admissions, financial aid, and other institutional characteristics. Section C7 asks colleges to rate the relative importance of several admissions factors, including “Level of applicant's interest.”

The possible ratings are:

- Very Important
- Important
- Considered
- Not Considered
- The Common Data Set initiative publishes the standardized forms and supporting information.⁶

Here is how to use it:

Step 1: Search for the college's name followed by “Common Data Set.”

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Step 2: Open the latest available document published by the institution. Confirm the academic year rather than assuming the first result is current.

Step 3: Find Section C7, often labeled “Basis for Selection.”

Step 4: Locate the row called “Level of applicant's interest.”

Step 5: Record the college's rating and compare it with the college's own admissions guidance.

A rating of “Not Considered” is a strong signal that the college says applicant interest is not a factor in its general first-year admissions decisions. “Considered,” “Important,” or “Very Important” indicates that the institution assigns some level of relevance to the factor.

There are two limitations worth understanding. First, the Common Data Set rating does not reveal the exact weight an institution assigns to individual actions such as email opens, campus visits, or virtual sessions. Second, it may not describe every specialized program or exception to the college's general admissions policy.

The document is a starting point for targeted research—not a formula for calculating admission probability.

4. DO COLLEGES ACTUALLY TRACK EMAIL OPENS AND WEBSITE CLICKS?

This is where the title's reference to clicks needs a careful distinction.

Colleges can collect digital engagement information through their websites, event-registration systems, email platforms, and applicant portals. But the fact that a system can record an interaction does not establish that admissions officers use that information to make admission decisions.

For example, an email platform may record whether a message was opened or a link was clicked. Such measurements can also be imperfect: privacy features and automated systems may register activity that does not accurately represent a student's attention. An email open is not necessarily evidence that an applicant carefully read the message, and a failure to register an open does not necessarily mean the applicant ignored it.

More importantly, there is no universal public list showing which colleges use each individual click, email open, or page visit as an admissions factor.

A college that considers demonstrated interest may rely on attendance at official events, contacts with admissions staff, or participation in programs rather than treating every website visit as meaningful. Its admissions team may also have access to data that the public policy does not itemize.

Tufts, for example, publicly says it tracks engagement through in-person, email, phone, and virtual interactions. Its guidance describes the practice at a broad level rather than publishing a scoring system for every digital action.¹

USC provides the opposite example: its admissions office explicitly says that it does not keep a tally of prospective students' movements for admissions purposes.³

Parents should therefore distinguish three questions:

- Can the college collect this data? Its technology and event systems may be able to record interactions.
- Does the college use engagement as an admissions factor? Its published policy and Common Data Set help answer this.

Does a particular click or open change an applicant's outcome? That level of detail is rarely available publicly, and it should not be inferred from the mere existence of tracking technology.

Do not assume that every marketing email is a hidden admissions test.

5. WHY SOME COLLEGES CARE MORE ABOUT INTEREST THAN OTHERS

Colleges have different enrollment goals and admissions processes. Demonstrated interest can be useful to institutions that want to understand whether an applicant is seriously considering enrolling, particularly when students apply to many colleges and have several offers.

But it is too simplistic to say that all elite universities ignore demonstrated interest while all mid-sized private colleges track it. Institutional selectivity, size, and public or private status do not reliably establish a school's policy on their own.

The more dependable approach is to check what the college actually reports.

Some highly selective institutions do consider interest. Others explicitly do not. Some colleges that consider interest provide multiple ways to demonstrate it, including

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online events, so that students who cannot afford to travel are not limited to a campus visit.

Tufts, for example, has published guidance explaining that students have multiple opportunities to engage with the university and that an in-person visit is not the only way to learn about the institution.¹

That distinction matters for families who live far from a campus, have limited travel budgets, or are balancing school, employment, and family responsibilities. A student should not assume that a costly campus tour is necessary when the college offers virtual opportunities and recognizes them as meaningful engagement.

The objective is not to manufacture enthusiasm. It is to learn enough about the college to determine whether it is a genuine fit—and, when the institution considers interest, to communicate that interest through appropriate channels.

6. WHAT SHOULD STUDENTS ACTUALLY DO?

The most efficient strategy is to divide colleges into two groups based on their stated policies.

GROUP A: COLLEGES THAT DO NOT CONSIDER DEMONSTRATED INTEREST

At these schools, prioritize the application itself.

Research academic programs, courses, and opportunities to write specific, informed supplemental essays.

Attend virtual or in-person events when they help you decide whether the college is a good fit.

Contact admissions only when you have a legitimate question that cannot be answered through published information.

Do not spend hours opening every email, sending unnecessary messages, or attending events solely to create a record of engagement.

USC's published guidance is particularly direct: the university does not award extra admissions consideration for these activities. Its advice is to focus on the application and use events to learn about the institution.³

GROUP B: COLLEGES THAT CONSIDER DEMONSTRATED INTEREST

Here, it makes sense to engage thoughtfully and consistently.

Register for an official information session or virtual visit.

Attend events that address your academic interests or questions about campus life.

Meet an admissions representative at a school visit or college fair when convenient.

Ask specific, substantive questions that show you have researched the college.

Read the college's application instructions to determine whether it offers an optional interview, supplemental response, or other recognized opportunity to communicate your interest.

If the college provides an official portal or event-registration system, use it as instructed. Do not repeatedly contact admissions staff simply to increase the number of recorded interactions.

The quality of the interaction matters to the student even when the admissions office does not assign it a formal score. Thoughtful research helps a student write a more specific application and make a better enrollment decision.

7. DOES DEMONSTRATED INTEREST MATTER AFTER YOU APPLY?

Some students believe that a letter of continued interest can improve their chances after being deferred or placed on a waitlist. The answer again depends on the college's policy and the student's application status.

At USC, the admissions office says it does not consider continued interest and advises deferred applicants to follow the university's instructions rather than sending additional expressions of enthusiasm.³

Other colleges may provide a form for deferred applicants or allow waitlisted students to submit an update. The appropriate action is whatever the college's current instructions permit.

A useful update should communicate meaningful new information, when updates are allowed. Depending on the institution, this might include a significant new achievement, a substantial change in academic performance, or another relevant development. Repeating that the college remains a first choice, without any new information, may add little where the institution does not consider continued interest.

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Students should also distinguish between a deferred application and a waitlist offer. These are different admissions statuses, and colleges may provide different instructions for each.

Before sending an update, answer three questions:

- Does the college accept this type of communication?
- Is the information new, relevant, and permitted under the college's instructions?
- Does the institution say that continued interest is considered?

If the answer to the first question is no, do not send the update. If the college has provided a specific form, use it rather than improvising a separate process.

8. A PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATED-INTEREST PLAN FOR PARENTS

A simple spreadsheet can eliminate much of the confusion. For each college, record the following:

ITEM	WHAT TO RECORD
Common Data Set C7	Very Important, Important, Considered, or Not Considered
Official admissions policy	Whether the college explicitly says it considers demonstrated interest
Recognized engagement	Events, interviews, visits, or contacts the college identifies
Accessibility	Available virtual events or other alternatives to travel
After-application rules	Whether updates or continued-interest letters are accepted
Last verified	Date the family checked the policy

Review the list at the beginning of the application process and again before important deadlines. Policies can change, and older online advice may not reflect the current cycle.

Most importantly, allocate effort according to the college's actual policy. If a university says demonstrated interest does not matter, use your time to improve the essays, strengthen academic preparation, and complete the application accurately. If a college does consider interest, engage in ways that genuinely help you understand the institution.

The best admissions strategy is not to do the maximum number of activities. It is to spend time on the actions that matter for the specific college.

HOW SCHOLAR COACH HELPS FAMILIES USE THEIR TIME STRATEGICALLY

Scholar Coach helps families build college application plans around each institution's actual requirements rather than generic admissions folklore.

1. Audit the college list. We identify which institutions publish demonstrated-interest policies and where the Common Data Set can clarify their stated approach.
2. Separate useful research from unnecessary activity. We help students decide which information sessions, campus visits, and admissions contacts serve a real purpose.
3. Improve college-specific writing. For colleges where supplemental essays are required, we help students connect their interests to specific academic programs, opportunities, and experiences rather than relying on generic expressions of enthusiasm.
4. Organize application and follow-up requirements. We help families track deadlines, optional interviews, permitted updates, and instructions for deferred or waitlisted applicants.
5. Keep the focus on the application. We prioritize academic preparation, clear writing, authentic extracurricular descriptions, and accurate submissions over activities that a college says it does not consider.

Demonstrated interest is neither a universal myth nor a universal requirement. It is a policy that varies by institution. Once families know which colleges consider it, they can stop guessing, avoid unnecessary work, and concentrate on the parts of the application that each college actually evaluates.

SOURCES

- ¹ Tufts University Admissions, "All the Different Ways to Show Demonstrated Interest".
- ² MIT Admissions, "About MIT Admissions".
- ³ USC Undergraduate Admission, "Why We Don't Track Demonstrated and Continued Interest", January 21, 2026.
- ⁴ Stanford University, "Top Application Questions: Admission to Stanford University".
- ⁵ Tulane University, "Admission to Tulane: Thoughts from Our Dean of Admission".
- ⁶ Common Data Set Initiative, "Common Data Set 2025–2026".

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