

# The Common Application vs. The Universal Application

The differences between the two leading generic application providers

With so many students applying to a bunch of colleges these days, one-size-fits-all applications are starting to take off.

A full 33% of applicants last year sent off packets to six or more colleges – an extremely time-consuming affair if you must fill out each application individually.

But, with the Common Application accepted at 414 colleges, and the Universal Application processing 4 million submissions last year, things are getting easier.

Of course, many students have questions – foremost of which is, will my generic application be as strong as an individualized one?

The short answer is: yes, mostly.

## **Common Vs. Universal: When to use them**

The Common Application consortium isn't just a group of 414 colleges that accept the form. It's also a bloc of schools dedicated to viewing applications holistically. That is, they consider other things besides grades and test results. A Common Application won't lower your submission a notch at almost any school that accepts it.

The Universal Application doesn't promote any philosophy, but there's a decent amount of crossover with schools that accept The Common Application. For those that don't, you need to investigate how they handle admissions. For example, the Universal Application may not be the best choice for a more traditionally minded university.

Why does the school bother accepting it then, you ask? Well, schools that accept generic applications tend to get an immediate bump in applicants, and a more diverse pool as well. Both those things help increase a school's standing in lists like the *US World and News Report* college rankings.

## **Other key differences between the Common and Universal Applications...**

- The Universal Application is run by a for-profit company. The Common Application is run by the colleges themselves.
- The Universal Application doesn't require an essay, and if you write one, it will only appear to schools that require one, or have space for an optional essay.
- The Universal Application suggests a maximum of 500 words for the essay. The Common recommends a minimum of 250 – but has no upper word limit. If you've got a lot to say, the Common will let you say it.

All told, the most important thing to consider is the attitude of the college accepting your generic application. Even some Common Application schools haven't signed on to the holistic philosophy (though the vast majority have).

If, after looking through a school's admissions material, you feel confident they'll view a generic application the same as an individual one, then you shouldn't feel timid about applying with one. Save yourself time on busywork – and spend it honing your essay.