

Wellesley College Admission Report

WELLESLEY, MASSACHUSETTS

FALL 2015

Tips (from an expert!) for writing effective college recommendations

Ann Velenchik, Director of First Year Academic Programs at Wellesley College, offers advice from the perspective of a Board of Admission reader on how to make your letter of recommendation a more useful contribution to your students' application dossiers.

Says Professor Velenchik, "We want to admit students who are going to succeed and thrive here at Wellesley. We're trying to find evidence in a student's background that she has the academic preparation, character skills, study habits, and whole package of things that make somebody able to come to a reasonably high pressure environment, succeed,

thrive, and be happy here."

According to Professor Velenchik, each student's application contains two types of information:

(1) objective (test scores, transcripts, school activities, lists of activities) and (2) narrative (counselor report/letter, teacher letters, and the student's essay and other written elements of the Common App).

She anticipates that she'll get an objective data-driven view of each student and then go into the narrative to understand more of the data by virtue of the narrative's context, richness, and perspective. We hope you'll find the following tips to be useful:

- **Provide context.** Counselor letters provide context to a student's list of activities, make it more robust, and help admission readers understand where the student really

leads and shines, as well as where she has invested herself. For example, when other people at the school talk about a student, what things are associated with her? If you have a student who's a fencer and that's what

Continued on page 3.

Class of 2019 Statistics

See page 2

Why a women's college?

See page 4

New admission leadership: Joy St. John, Dean; Grace S. Cheng, Director

Dean of Admission and Financial Aid at Wellesley Joy St. John began this leadership role in May, having previously served as Wellesley's Director of Admission for the last five years. Says Wellesley President H. Kim Bottomly, "In recent years, Wellesley has seen the largest applicant pools in the College's history, as well as measurable increases in the ability and diversity of applicants, and of admitted and enrolling students. Joy has a profound understanding of the College and of the needs of Admission and Financial Aid in particular, and I know Wellesley will benefit from her strategic leadership and broad industry knowledge."

Joy served as Associate Dean of Admission at Amherst, held admission roles at Tufts and Occidental, as well as a college counseling role at The Bishop's School in La Jolla, CA. She earned a B.A. from Stanford and a J.D. from UCLA School of Law. Originally from Portland, Oregon, Joy is an avid runner, having completed many marathons and triathlons.

She succeeds former Dean of Admission and Financial Aid Jennifer Desjarlais, who joined the executive search firm Witt/Kieffer.

Director of Admission Grace S. Cheng began her role at Wellesley in August. Previously she was Associate Director of

Admissions for Staff Development in the Harvard College Admissions Office. Grace worked as a senior member of Harvard's undergraduate admissions team since 2002, taking a three-year professional development leave to serve as a founding member of the Taipei American School's College Counseling Office.

Grace graduated from Harvard College cum laude, is a CPA, holds an M.S. in accounting and an MBA, and is completing an Ed.D in higher education administration at Northeastern. An accomplished chef, she was almost seen on Season Four of MasterChef.



Wellesley College Class of 2019 Profile

Statistics as of 9-10-15

Demographics

Students of color		46%
African American/Black	7%	
Latina/Hispanic	9%	
Asian American/ Pacific Islander	22%	
Native American	<1%	
Biracial	7%	
Multiracial	<1%	
White/Caucasian	39%	
International Citizen	14%	
Unknown/Not Reported	2%	

Geographic Distribution

New England	21%
Pacific & Mountain	22%
South	16%
Mid-Atlantic	16%
Central	11%
International & Americans Abroad	15%

States Represented

44 states plus D.C., Guam, Virgin Islands
States with more than 10 students

California	85	Minnesota	20
Massachusetts	67	Maine	17
New York	45	Pennsylvania	14
New Jersey	36	Virginia	14
Texas	25	Florida	12
Connecticut	24	New Hampshire	11
Illinois	21	Washington	11

Citizenships Represented

31 citizenships represented; dual citizen nations excluded

Australia	Lithuania
Burundi	Morocco
Canada	Nepal
Chile	Nigeria
China	Pakistan
Ecuador	Republic of Korea
France	Rwanda
Ghana	Singapore
Haiti	Sri Lanka
Hong Kong	Thailand
India	Turkey
Indonesia	United Kingdom
Italy	United States
Japan	Vietnam
Jordan	Zimbabwe
Kenya	

Secondary School Type

Public	65%
Private/Independent	33%
Parochial	2%
Home	0%

Mean Test Scores

SAT Critical Reading	694
SAT Writing	703
SAT Math	696
ACT	31

For more statistics on applicant test scores go to www.wellesley.edu/admission/facts

High School Rank

(of those ranked)	
Top Ten Percent	80%
% of Enrolling Class Not Ranked	64%

Alumnae Relatives

Alumnae relatives include mothers, grandmothers, aunts, or sisters

Percent of Entering Class	14%
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First Generation

Neither parent attended college	
Percent of Entering Class	13%

Acceptance Information

	APPLIED	ACCEPTED	%ACCEPTED	ENROLLED
Total	4623	1380	30%	596

Early Decision *	376	166	44%	163
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Early Evaluation **	1953	712	36%	238
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Regular Decision	2286	502	22%	180
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Accelerated Candidates	8	0	0%	0
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Deferred from Previous Year				15
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* Of the 376 ED candidates, 120 were deferred, of whom 20 were admitted in April; 84 ED candidates were refused in December; 28% of the Class of 2019 were admitted Early Decision.

** Of the 712 EE applicants admitted, 124 were designated as Possible Admits and admitted in April.

% Receiving Financial Aid

60% of the Class of 2019 received a financial aid award: www.wellesley.edu/sfs

Class of 2019 Snapshot

4,623	applicants
1,380	admitted (30%)
596	enrolling (43%)
44	states represented (+ DC, Guam, Virgin Islands)
31	citizenships represented
46%	students of color
60%	received a financial aid award

Wellesley College Admission Staff

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Tips (from an expert!) for writing effective college recommendations *continued from p.1.*

everybody says, and it's one of 10 things on her list, the counselor letter makes me find out what her priorities and passions really are, what she's really engaged in, and how she is as a person.

- **Add something new.**

That's really important. Frequently letters from counselors and teachers say the same thing. They all list the students' activities, so now I don't know anything that I didn't know before. I understand you cannot control the teachers, but if we can help them to understand that if what they bring to the party is different, we can get a broader perspective. The best situation is where every piece draws on the writer's specific expertise and experience with the student.

- **Encourage teachers to provide academic examples and insights.**

Teacher letters can provide broader and deeper understanding of academic performance than grades alone. Concrete examples and anecdotes are more helpful than quantitative measures, adjectives, or generalizations. Tell me about a term paper, an exam, or a presentation in which a student excelled. When she participates in class, what is that participation like? Is she the kid who asks the question that everybody else is thinking about but nobody else has dared to ask? Is she the one who turns the conversation in different ways? Does she always have something to say? Highlight areas of particular strength and explain gaps or weak spots in her record. We're less interested in the narrative of what her grades are than in how much she challenged herself.

- **Discuss intellectual attributes and personal qualities.**

I want that very specific context of "this is how I know her." What is her mind like? What is she passionate about intellectually? How does she think? How is she creative? Is she articulate? Is she a leader? Show us evidence of why she will thrive here. Give us examples of what her peers think about her. We want to hear about intellectual attributes. Is she an incisive thinker or solid writer? Does she have a dynamic

personality? Academic strengths and skills are more telling than lengthy descriptors of her work ethic. All Wellesley students are conscientious and diligent; that's assumed, so it's not terribly useful information.

- **Avoid gender bias in language and content.**

Frequently letters to Wellesley refer to a student as "polite." "Polite" is a minimum requirement of college success, but tells us nothing about intellectual power or force of personality. While female students are often described as "polite," "helpful," "cheerful," or "cooperative," male students almost never are. My son is at an all-boys' school and his college counselor tells me they never describe a student as polite. Take a moment to think about such adjectives and whether they offer anything beyond the bare minimum.

- **Don't tell us what we already know.**

For example, "Susie expects to graduate in June," an explanation of what precalculus is, information we can find in the school report, or a duplication of the lengthy list of a student's activities that she has already provided isn't helpful. However, substantive information on her participation or perspectives from coaches, faculty, or peers is. If she has a particular strength or had a lousy 10th grade, an explanation would be helpful.

- **Share, but not unnecessarily or overly.**

If a student has overcome obstacles or dealt with family turmoil, that's enough information for now. She may talk about it in her essay or elsewhere in her application. If she has confided in you that she had a brief depressive episode, but it didn't affect her academic record, it's not essential to share. And it may also be inappropriate if the student doesn't know you're divulging such information.

- **Remember that letter length is not related to letter quality.**

Don't feel your recommendation needs to be a tome. We're looking for vivid language, specific examples, insights, and context; nonetheless, it can be brief.

Development Opportunities

Interested in seeing Professor Velenchik's full presentation on Writing Effective Recommendations?

Wellesley is offering a series of videos and webinars (including Writing Effective Recommendations) to provide guidance counselors with helpful insights from our side of the desk.

If you would like to receive these professional development offerings for guidance and college counselors, as well as other relevant updates, please contact Molly Morrow via email at mmorrow@wellesley.edu.

Visit us on campus, on the road, or virtually

Visit Wellesley's campus

For information about campus tours, information sessions, class visits, lunch visits, or overnight visits, call the Admission Office (781-283-2270) or visit our website: wellesley.edu/admission.

Meet us on the road

See if a Wellesley admission officer is visiting your region this fall. Go to https://travel.wellesley.edu/secure/on_the_road/

New! Meet us virtually

Beginning in October, Wellesley will offer several Virtual Information Sessions via WebEx. Topics will include the first-year experience, the classroom dynamic, faculty mentoring, research opportunities, internships, study abroad, and the admission and financial aid process. There will also be time for Q&A. Go to: www.wellesley.edu/admission/visitus/virtual/.

WELLESLEY COLLEGE

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Student Financial Services

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Why a women's college?

The world's preeminent college for women, Wellesley is known for intellectual rigor, its belief in the enduring importance of service (and putting that belief into practice), and its cultivation in students of an inclusive, pragmatic approach to leadership. How does the fact that we are an all-women's institution factor into what makes Wellesley unique?

Differences in students' college experiences—whether geographical, socioeconomic, ethnic, or religious—allow them to have a “lived” understanding of diversity. The sense of agility in a fast-paced and ever-changing world is only part of why Wellesley women are pioneers in so many different industries.

WELLESLEY STATISTICS

- **100%** of Wellesley's 13 presidents have been women
- Almost **60%** of tenured faculty are women
- **100%** of student leadership positions are filled by women
- **100%** of institutional resources are dedicated to female undergraduates

1. The all women's thing? Don't believe the rumors

Yes, attending a women's college will undoubtedly be different than the coeducational experience. We are aware of the stereotypes and recognize the preconceived notions of single-sex institutions as antiquated finishing schools or convent-like environments. Yet when you ask a current Wellesley student, or an alumna, she will tell you that it was perhaps the most enriching and fulfilling aspect of her educational experience. Students at women's colleges explore and embrace their talents as individuals and graduate with a strong sense of themselves as a person, before giving thought to gender.

2. The learning environment: statistics don't lie!

The National Survey of Student Engagement has found what Wellesley graduates have said for years: Students at women's colleges are more

involved with active and collaborative learning. The way women discuss, engage, and learn from one another is different in the coeducational environment. In the single-sex classroom women are more likely to engage in integrative activities that lead to deeper learning.

Most women's colleges provide a tight-knit classroom setting with a low student-to-faculty ratio, and research shows that there is a greater amount of student-faculty collaboration at women's colleges. The personal support and mentorship gained through these experiences enriches learning and builds confidence. All of this means that women are ultimately getting more out of their college experience.

3. Personal development: with a little help from your friends (faculty)

It comes as no surprise that students get more out of college when they engage with their community in and outside of the classroom. One study (*Hardwick-Day, 2012*) found that students at women's colleges were more likely to participate in service work, extracurricular activities, and varsity athletics than their peers at public flagship universities.

With the highest percentage of female-

MORE STATISTICS

What women's college alumnae say:

- **81%** said they say their college was extremely or very effective in helping prepare them for their first job
- They are almost **twice as likely** to complete a graduate degree as a public university alumna (**51%** women's college alumnae versus **27%** public university alumnae)
- **90%** of women's colleges alumnae believe the financial investment was worthwhile
- **72%** were completely satisfied with the quality of their education (versus **41%** of flagship public university alumnae and **60%** from coed liberal arts colleges)

*Comparative Alumnae Research Study
Hardwick-Day, 2012*

tenured faculty anywhere, a history of only female presidents, and young women in every student leadership role, women are at the helm at Wellesley. Having highly visible and accessible female role models, particularly in traditionally male-dominated roles, allows students to observe female leadership in action. In a single-sex environment, young women cultivate a sense of leadership in themselves and in turn become well prepared for their entrance to the professional world.

4. A powerful, passionate, and lifelong alumnae network

Steeped in tradition, the atmosphere at a women's college is one that is rich with history. Women's colleges are intentional communities that foster life-long friendships (*Women's College Coalition*). Similar to the strong ties to tradition, women's colleges are also dedicated to maintaining strong alumnae networks.

Wellesley's 34,000 active alumnae contribute to what has been referred to as the most powerful women's network on the planet. Evidence of their passion and commitment to continuing to provide future opportunities for women includes their ongoing commitment to funding internships, building buildings, and starting genius projects. Most importantly, they give back to the place that played a significant role in helping them become successful. Last year, more than 16,000 dedicated alumnae and friends made gifts ranging from \$10 to \$250,000.

5. Impressive outcomes

Experiencing college in an environment that is rich with student-faculty collaboration, centered on interactive learning, and conducive to personal growth means that those who graduate from women's colleges are not only well prepared for life after college but also are poised for success. It is no coincidence that many of the most well-known female pioneers are alumnae of single-sex institutions.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Women's college graduates make up **2%** of the college graduate population, yet comprise more than **20%** of women in Congress and **33%** of the women on Fortune 500 boards.