



Conducting a mock admissions case study

Help students better understand the holistic college application review process

What is an admissions case study?

Admissions case studies are exercises that simulate one type of college application review. Using fictional college and student profiles, counselors and advisors can demonstrate how colleges review applications holistically.

What is the purpose of a case study?

Admissions case studies use an interactive, immersive experience to show students and families how a college might evaluate applications in a holistic way. Participants act as admissions committee members, reviewing fictional student applications. This hands-on exercise shows how academic, extracurricular, and personal factors may be evaluated in admissions reviews.

What is holistic review?

Colleges that use holistic application review consider many things when making admissions decisions. They often look at academic, extracurricular, and personal sections of a student's application to better understand the student as a whole person.

Tips for conducting an admissions case study

Getting started

- Decide whether you'll host case studies in-person or virtually
- Choose volunteers, ask for help with logistics, and plan for at least 2 hours to complete the exercise
- Make materials available both in print and online, and share in advance (use Common App's pre-made materials or create your own)
- Reserve a meeting space and print your materials if you host an in-person event
- Decide which students you'll invite and whether you'll include their families or other supporters. High school juniors may benefit the most from the exercise
- Send invitations early to help ensure attendance
- Partner with college representatives whenever possible
- Include families or plan a separate case study for them

Gather your materials

The Common App case studies materials might not reflect all students and situations. You can use our materials or create your own to better reflect your students.

Your fictional materials list:

- College profile
- Student applications
- Rubric for review
- Guide sheet

Things to consider if you create your own materials:

- It takes time, and a lot of it! Work with others to create materials and complete tasks
- Successful case studies should authentically reflect your students
- Ask your students if they can share their applications from previous years (be sure to remove all identifying information)
- You can use Common App's practice student account to create sample applications
- Edit your materials and generate content using free online resources



Download our case study materials

Lead your case study

Every event is different. You decide how you'll lead the exercise, your method for dividing students into groups, and how to encourage conversation. We suggest that you:

- Start by defining "holistic review" and the purpose of the case study
- Review the fictional college profile and rubric.
- Divide participants into groups, and assign a conversation leader
- Allow time for participants to read the application materials and take notes
- Review the first application as a group to build confidence
- Discuss what you notice about the fictional student's academics, writing, extracurricular activities, and personal stories
- Ask groups to vote on an admission decision for each fictional application (admit, waitlist, or deny)
- Discuss the differences and similarities in how participants voted

Keep in mind

Case studies are tools for showing how colleges may review applications. Personal experience and bias can impact the exercises and discussion. That's okay, there are no right or wrong answers.

