

# New college application questions encourage creative thinking

By LARRY GORDON  
McCLATCHY-TRIBUNE

LOS ANGELES — "So where is Waldo, really?"

That's not the kind of question most high school seniors expect to find on their college admission applications. But it is one of the essay options that applicants to the University of Chicago face this year in their quest for a coveted freshman berth.

It is the kind of mind-stretching, offbeat or downright freaky essay question that is becoming more common these days as colleges and universities seek to pierce the fog of students' traditional self-aggrandizing essays detailing their accomplishments and hardships.

From Caltech in the West to Wake Forest University in the East, more schools are

serving up unusual essay prompts to gain better insights into young people's minds and personalities. Colleges also hope for more authenticity in a process skewed by parental intrusion, paid coaching and plagiarism.

"It's a way to see students who can think differently and go beyond their academic, intellectual and extracurricular comfort zones," said Garrett Brinker, an admissions official at University of Chicago. Those essays also "break up the monotony of the application process" for students and colleges.

The Common Application, the online site used by 488 colleges, offers such generic prompts as: "Discuss some issue of personal, local, national or international concern and its importance to you." The site makes it easi-

er for would-be students to apply, even if some are half-hearted about enrolling.

But an increasing number of schools prefer to hear only from serious applicants "aware of the values of the institution," said Katy Murphy, president-elect of the National Association for College Admission Counseling.

So more colleges are adding online supplements that require head-scratching writing assignments. Examples include Tufts' "Celebrate your nerdy side", Wake Forest's "Think of things that fascinated you when you were 10 years old — what has endured?", Caltech's "Please describe an unusual way in which you have fun", and Brandeis' "A package arrives at your door. After seeing the contents, you know it's going to be the best day of your life. What's inside

and how do you spend your day?"

For some students, the questions may lighten an otherwise burdensome task. But others are intimidated, said Murphy, who is college counseling director at Bellarmine College Preparatory, a high school in San Jose, Calif. "The colleges talk about the creativity of play and the philosophy of Plato. What the students are trying to figure out is: 'What do the colleges want me to say?'"

Judy Rothman, author of "The Neurotic Parent's Guide to College Admissions," said schools like curveball essay questions because "they are sick and tired of reading the same thing over and over again" and because the topics encourage teen authorship without adult coaching.

High school seniors have

mixed reactions, she said. "For a kid who is natural writer, it is relief and a great break from the tedious process of the applications. For the kids who just want to get through all their applications, it's a nightmare because you can't recycle material."

## Sudoku answers

Puzzle appears on Page B7

SOLUTION

2	6	8	1	9	5	7	3	4
3	4	5	7	8	6	1	2	9
1	9	7	4	3	2	5	6	8
7	8	6	9	1	3	4	5	2
4	3	2	6	5	7	9	8	1
9	5	1	8	2	4	6	7	3
5	2	4	3	7	9	8	1	6
8	7	9	2	6	1	3	4	5
6	1	3	5	4	8	2	9	7

Your Name  
Address  
City, State ZIP  
Phone #  
Email address

**EDUCATION:**

List all high schools attended, dates of attendance and expected graduation date:

Ex:

Loveland High School 2010-2015  
Loveland, CO

Graduation: May 2015

**\*HONORS AND AWARDS:**

List all honors and awards received during high school and year they were received

Ex:

Honor Roll Each semester 9, 10, 11, 12 (to date)  
Team Captain 11, 12

**\*EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES:**

List all clubs and activities you participated in during your high school years

Ex:

Student Council 9, 10, 11, 12  
Basketball 9, 10, 11, 12  
Tennis 9, 10  
Art Club 9

estimate  
hrs/wk  
wks/yr

**\*COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:**

List all volunteer service or community involvement you have performed during your high school years.

Ex:

Community Art Foundation 12  
Habitat for Humanity 11  
Sunday School Teacher 10, 11, 12  
Mission Trips 10, 11, 12

**\*WORK/INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE:**

Wendy's June 20XX – present  
Address City, State, ZIP Phone number  
Supervisor:

Briefly explain your duties at work. Ex: Responsible for greeting customers and taking orders, keeping work site clean, preparing drinks and food to fill orders, etc.....

\*For these areas many scholarship committees like to see an estimate of how many hours per week and how many weeks per year you commit to the activity. This is not a measurement of precision, just an average. This helps them determine your level of involvement. This is just a sample of how to do a resume. There is no real right or wrong version. Use what works best for you – word doc, spreadsheet, a file with sticky notes – it is not the tool but the information that is important.