

College Beat

All I want for Christmas by Nancy Federspiel

“All I want for Christmas is a decision letter.” Indeed all of the early application options at colleges are popular and understandably so. Who wouldn’t like to shorten that anxiety-ridden waiting period? Early Decision and Early Action application options abound and are being utilized by many students. Just make sure you think through very carefully that Early Decision option. As you may know, Early Decision plans are binding agreements where the applicant promises to enroll at the college if they are accepted. Early Action plans, on the other hand, are non-binding options where the applicant is free to enroll or choose another school if s/he wishes. In either case, if you get your application in by the November deadline, you can have a decision letter in hand by Christmas.

Recently, a few heavy-hitting institutions in the selectivity department eliminated their Early Decision plans; namely, Harvard, Princeton and the University of Virginia. They eliminated the option because it was considered to be discriminatory against candidates with financial constraints. In other words, those without financial hardships were given an unfair advantage because they could apply Early Decision. Those with money concerns could not take advantage of the Early Decision option because it does not allow them to choose based on which school offers the best financial aid package...they would be locked into the Early Decision school whether the aid was generous or not.

Now that the early application deadlines have passed for the first time since the three bold institutions have changed their policies it is time to see the effects they have had on the admissions scene. Some predicted that many other institutions would be inspired by the leading institutions’ altruistic motives and follow suit by eliminating their Early Decisions plans. So far, this has not happened.

We have seen, however, changes in the number of Early Decision candidates applying to other schools in the competitive tier of colleges. According to a Chicago Tribune report by Jodi Cohen, ED applications were up significantly last month at the University of Chicago (+45%), Notre Dame (+18%), Northwestern (+17), and Brown (+6%).

What does this tell us? People want an answer by Christmas! Perhaps people are choosing their first choice school for some inappropriate reasons? I’m thinking there must be a little, “I’ll commit to college A if college B won’t let me commit,” going on. I can see the temptation but ideally our students should have more conviction about their college choices based on issues of “fit” rather than application options. There are so many factors to consider in this difficult choice. Please, let’s promote responsible decisions.

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