

College Beat

College Admissions: Is it Really Harder to Get in Now?

By
Nancy Federspiel

People say to me all the time, “We keep hearing that it has gotten ridiculously hard to get into college now...is it really harder now than it used to be?” If this were an SAT question it wouldn’t be multiple choice, it would be an essay question. The answer is not simple and it needs some explaining. Here’s my take on it.

Let’s start with the indisputable facts. First of all, there is actually a “baby boomlet” going on. There is a ripple effect - a smaller but still significant escalation in population because the original baby-boomers had babies of their own. These “boomlet” kids happen to be college age now and the numbers in this age bracket are projected to rise until 2009 according to the US Census Bureau. Okay, so there actually are more students competing for the same number of college slots.

Another indisputable fact is that now nearly 300 colleges accept the Common Application as the means for applying for admission to their institution. This means that with the click of a button a student can apply to 10 colleges at once instead of just one. You can bet that this means the number of college applications at each institution is up. High school grads are applying to many more colleges at a time because it is so much easier to do so. Okay, so the applicant pools have increased at many colleges.

Think of the impact of both of these factors on the college admission and high school guidance offices across the country. They have an incredible increase in demand on them in terms of handling and processing data. The high schools have more transcripts and recommendations than ever to get out the door and the colleges have more files to process and review than ever before. Funny how there isn’t a trend of budgets growing in both of these types of offices. This is one of the tragic impacts of the increasing numbers of applicants

But what about the impact on today’s high school senior - is it harder for them to get into a college than it used to be? Probably, but let’s keep the facts in perspective. The change in the number of applications because of students applying to many more schools than they used to is significant. But, let’s not forget that each student can only attend one college at a time. This means that the colleges’ yields (the portion of students that

actually matriculate) are going down. So yes, they have more applicants, but they are also having to admit more students. It is not quite as bleak as it may seem at first blush.

The final piece of good news is that with over 3,600 accredited colleges and universities in the United States there are still more than enough spaces to go around. The challenge of course, is to find the one that is the right fit.

Nancy Federspiel of Bolton is the Director of College Consulting Services. For more information, please visit www.ccs4college.com or call 978.634.1690

