

College Beat

Wait Lists by Nancy Federspiel

As predicted, this year's applicant pools at colleges across the nation were larger than ever. We thought this would happen because there is a bubble in the population – there are more people that are seventeen and eighteen than there used to be (and will be next year also). And, each student is applying to more schools at once than ever before. The relative ease of applying through the Common Application and the rise in competitiveness has prompted students to apply to 10 or more colleges which is considerably higher than the number of applications submitted a decade ago. Interestingly enough, the fall-out from this has impacted the wait lists.

The colleges and universities are at a loss for knowing how many of their accepted students will actually matriculate. Clearly, the yields are going down because each accepted student has many choices to select from. As a way to “hedge their bets,” schools are putting a larger number of applicants on their wait-lists. And as it turns out, more students than ever are being accepted from those wait-lists.

In addition to the increased number of applications, colleges face other changes this year that make predicting the size of their entering class particularly challenging. Several elite colleges, notably Harvard, Princeton, and the University of Virginia did away with their early admissions plans. According to a recent New York Times article, all three of those schools have increased the size of their waitlists, and have dug deeper into those lists than in years past. They want to make sure that they come up with the right number of students for their entering class. This kind of “wait and see” activity puts many colleges in limbo as the ripple effect of these actions work their way through the schools that the wait-listed students are taken from – effects that extend well beyond the universal deadline of May 1st.

I have to say that I have seen the effects with the students that I work with. In my unofficial anecdotal way, I have observed more students get put on waitlists and more students than normal getting notification that they are being accepted from the waitlist. I still advise students not to get their hopes up if they are on a wait list and instead to focus their energy on carefully weighing the decision of which of their “yes” schools to say “yes” back to – but the chances are improving.

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