

College Beat

Wait-Lists “Undo” Decisions By Nancy Federspiel

There is a wonderful rule in the world of college admissions known as the “Universal Acceptance Date”. This date happens to be May 1st and it is the date which every college must use as its deadline by which accepted students must decide which college they will choose to attend the following fall. What makes this so wonderful is that every college is forced to abide by this rule so that one college may not force a student to make a decision before she knows all of her options. She gets to receive all of her decision letters before she must commit to a particular college.

Many families spent stressful days just prior to May 1st making their final choices. I have students fill out a lengthy preference sheet that forces them to rank-order the fine details of one accepted college versus another accepted college. This process works well and eventually leads to a satisfying decision on the part of the family. This year however, more than ever before, the family was thrown right back into decision-making turmoil when they were notified at the eleventh hour that they had been chosen to receive acceptance off of a wait-list.

While the wait-list news is exciting and often is the student’s “dream school”, it certainly can bump the stress level right back up to a near-deafening decibel. Just when the family was breathing a sigh of relief because the decision was behind them they get thrown right back into the fray. It certainly can be a bitter sweet experience. This year acceptances from the wait-list were at an all-time high. The reason for this is two-fold. One, colleges made longer-than-usual wait lists because there was more uncertainty than ever about what their yield (ratio of accepted students to matriculating students) would be due to the increased number of applications and the economic climate. And two, there was a shift in popularity of public universities and highly endowed private colleges due to changes in family finances that had repercussions on the institutions that cross applications with these colleges. Suddenly they were able to draw from their wait-lists when their final numbers came in.

All in all, the wait-list was good to many students that I know this year. While there was some angst surrounding the decision date, most of them were elated with their new-found choices. In the end, the best part is the student’s excitement about the start of his college career. The stress of the decision making process will be a distant memory by the time they start packing their bags.

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