



COLLEGE ADMISSIONS NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2025

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS NEWS:

Staying on top of the higher ed news has been a fulltime job lately! My aim here is not to be Debbie Downer but to make sure that parents and students have a sense of what's going on. Here are the key points:

- Harvard joined UPenn in announcing a hiring freeze given the uncertainty around federal funding. University System of Maryland will cut 400 jobs across its network of schools.
- University of Pittsburgh, Boston University, University of Southern California, and Vanderbilt have all halted graduate admissions.
- Beyond Columbia, the US Department of Justice announced that it is launching investigations into over 60 "leading institutions of higher education in America" on their "pattern or practice" of anti-semitism.
- UPenn and Ohio State (the flagship campus) announced that they'd be reinstating testing requirements. Syracuse and Carleton announced that they would remain test-optional.
- Federal student loans will be processed through the Small Business Administration (SBA). No timeline has been given yet. The SBA currently processes 60,000 loans at \$1 billion, but that number would increase by nearly 7 million loans valued at \$1.6 trillion. Yikes, considering that their workforce will be cut in half.

CONCEPTS TO UNDERSTAND: MERIT AID VS NEED-BASED AID

Merit aid is a real option for families who will not qualify for need-based aid. Depending on the college, merit aid can be awarded to top students or it can be used to entice students to attend. It is not atypical for students to receive \$20-30K per year (or even more!) at certain colleges, such as Case Western, Grinnell, Oberlin, Union, and Denison. Highly selective colleges, on the other hand, typically do not offer merit aid because they don't need to (students are knocking on their doors). The most highly selective colleges (think the Ivies and others like Middlebury, Williams, and Amherst) meet 100% of need and offer 0% merit aid, which means that families without need as shown through FAFSA or the CSS Profile will be expected to pay full freight (remember that colleges care about what you CAN pay, not what you WANT to pay).

Google the Common Data Set and a particular college to figure out what merit aid is offered; here's the formula for you data wonks: $H2An / (H2a - H2c)$. Please reach out with questions about this. Merit aid is a key concept that most families don't really understand.

COLLEGE IN THE SPOTLIGHT: MACALESTER COLLEGE

- Location: St. Paul, MN
- # of Undergrads: 2,175
- Acceptance Rate: 28%
- Student / Faculty Ratio: 10:1
- Returning Freshmen: 91%
- Receiving Merit Aid: 29%
- Forbes Fin Health Grade: B

INTERESTING FACTS:

- Small liberal arts college in the heart of St. Paul that has an international feel (11 foreign languages are offered).
- Strong emphasis on social justice and activism.
- Key academic strengths include international studies, geography, economics, math and statistics.
- Emphasis on research and experiential learning through internships.
- Much of Mac's social life takes place in the city; plenty of bookstores, coffee shops, restaurants, bars, and movie theaters.
- Vibrant campus life, too, despite the absence of Greek life: There is a significant on-campus party culture on weekends, along with popular annual events.
- You can feel the Scottish heritage; you'll frequently hear the sound of bagpipes on campus.
- One of the oldest competitive debate programs in the nation, and the mock trial program is highly ranked nationally.

COLLEGE IN THE SPOTLIGHT: ST. OLAF COLLEGE

- Location: Northfield, MN
- # of Undergrads: 3,046
- Acceptance Rate: 56%
- Student / Faculty Ratio: 12:1
- Returning Freshmen: 90%
- % Receiving Merit Aid: 22%
- Forbes Fin Health Grade: A-

INTERESTING FACTS:

- Small, supportive liberal arts college founded by Lutherans, though only 22% are Lutheran.
- Atmosphere of hard work but without excessive competition.
- Economics, biology, mathematics, psychology, and chemistry are the most popular majors.
- Students can design own major through the Center for Integrative Studies.
- They have a very highly-regarded Music Department with 8 choirs and 7 instrumental ensembles.
- Signature Conversation Programs are interdisciplinary, team-taught, rigorous programs that offer a rigorous exploration of specific topics, such Environmental Conversations and the Public Affairs Conversation.
- Student-run social spaces include the Pause, a student-run nightclub with food and entertainment, and the Cage, a coffeehouse.
- Strong emphasis on study abroad; offers more academic credit for it than any other liberal arts college.
- Excellent large, modern dining hall; students claim that it's like eating at a nice restaurant every day.
- Men's and women's cross-country and swimming and diving teams are consistently competitive.
- Fun winter tradition is playing Broomball (ice hockey played with brooms and shoes).

THOUGHTS FOR SENIORS...

Well, it's been quite a month. Lots of ups and downs with acceptances, denials, and waitlists--a whole lot of waitlists.

We usually talk about college acceptance rates, but sometimes it's useful to think about the denial rates. Think about Emory University. They had an 10% acceptance rate this year. They received 33,000 applications, which means that 90% of them--30,000 students--were denials. I love to use the umbrella/rain analogy to think about this. When the forecast shows a 90% chance of rain, most everyone will head outside with an umbrella because we know it's going to rain. But when it shows an 10% chance, it's fair to say that few, if any, would bring along an umbrella because we can be quite sure that it will not rain. Given this analogy, ***it shouldn't be a surprise that most everyone who applies to a highly unlikely college will not get in.*** Be sure to check the Common Data Set (section C2) if you've been waitlisted. Get a few year's worth of data to see how many were offered the waitlist, how many accepted a place on the waitlist, and how many were eventually admitted. If it's a tiny percentage, you gotta move on.

There are many life lessons during college decision season, namely that things don't always go our way and that there is so much that we don't and can't control. And that brings me to the concept of ***institutional priorities***. I've discussed this concept in my newsletters before, but it's worth repeating. College admissions is not necessarily about you. Colleges are mandated by their boards to meet certain priorities, and we do not--and never will--know what they are. There is simply nothing you can do to increase your chances if you do not meet their priorities. Here are some examples of institutional priorities:

- Colleges need to manage their yield. If their yield keeps going up, they have to accept fewer students because more students are choosing to enroll.
- Colleges might have to admit fewer students because they have over-enrolled in the past and are now experiencing a housing shortage.
- Colleges may need to admit more full-pay students to help balance their budget.
- Colleges may need to prioritize in-state students; UNC takes only 18% of a class from out of state.
- Colleges might need to fill athletic positions, or they might need trumpet players or altos.
- Colleges might need students to fill certain majors, or they might need to limit some majors if they're over-subscribed (otherwise known as "impacted").
- Colleges might need to diversify their student body. They might need more Pell-eligible students. They might need to fix the skewed gender balance (many colleges are 60% women/40% men). Some, like Tufts, are focused on welcoming first generation students.

Colleges are focused on building a class and meeting these priorities, so if you receive a denial, it really ***has very little to do with who you are and what you will bring to college***. What I know to be true is that who you are as a person determines the trajectory of your life way more than where you go to college. So, please don't fixate on the denials. Embrace your acceptances, and ***bloom wherever you are planted!***

THOUGHTS FOR JUNIORS...

I hope that you are finding time during your busy schedules to research and visit colleges so that you can start creating a balanced list. I promise that the time that you spend up front on research will pay off down the road. As you research academic programs, you will probably discover areas of study that you knew nothing about beforehand, and you will slowly learn more about what you might want to study (and you'll start to see the differences between a major at one college compared to another). You'll also be more likely to apply to the colleges that are right for YOU, and your applications will be stronger from understanding what sets certain colleges apart. And perhaps most importantly, you'll be less likely to find surprises when you land on campus as a first year.

When you're doing your research, be sure to focus on the following:

- Does the college's academic program meet your needs? Drill down to the course level if you can. Does the college offer the kinds of classes you are seeking? Are they available every year? What are the requirements of the majors that interest you? Not doing this research for every college you apply to is, imo, quite dangerous. You don't want to show up and then realize that you can't study what you want.
- Is the style of instruction in line with the way you want to learn? Large class sizes mean lectures. Small class sizes often, but not always, mean discussions. Are Teaching Assistants teaching instead of full professors? A mismatch here can make for an unsatisfying and potentially stressful college experience.
- Is the level of rigor in line with your abilities? We want you to be stretched but not stressed!
- Does the environment feel comfortable to you? Are the students involved in things that you'd want to be involved in? What kind of community is there? Going on Instagram, YouTube, Reddit, and even TikTok (try searching on pros and cons for a particular college) can be useful here. Can you picture yourself with the people you see?

**PLEASE FORWARD THIS NEWSLETTER TO OTHER FAMILIES WHO
WOULD BENEFIT FROM MY APPROACH AND PERSPECTIVE!
(They can subscribe on my website)**

I help students and their families navigate the college admissions process while decreasing confusion and stress. I empower students to figure out who they are and where they belong, and I provide structure, insight, and enthusiasm as they apply to colleges that are the best fit academically, socially, and financially. Contact me for a 30 minute complimentary session to learn more!



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