



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: WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC (WPI)

- Location: Worcester, MA
- # of Undergrads: 5,300
- Acceptance Rate: 60%
- Student / Faculty Ratio: 13:1
- Returning Freshmen: 94%
- Receiving Merit Aid: 41%

INTERESTING FACTS:

- Innovative and undergraduate-oriented with a project-based, humanistic view of engineering: "We all want to design, build, and innovate to make the world better."
- Curriculum is remarkably broad and flexible; emphasizes teamwork. 6 humanities/arts classes and 2 social science classes required. GREAT robotics opportunities.
- Has a surprising devotion to music and theater (offered as minors).
- \$49M innovation studio features high-tech classrooms, makerspaces, and labs.
- Students required to complete an Interactive Qualifying Project where they work on professional-level problems, often abroad, as well as a Major Qualifying Project (many do infrastructure projects on campus).
- Academic year has 4 terms, each lasting 7 weeks, with 3 classes per term. Intense & fast paced. Failing grades don't show on transcript; GPA isn't calculated. One wellness day per term.
- "Extroverted nerds" have fun on and off-campus: coffeehouses, improv nights, game nights, Greek parties. 62% live on campus. Lots of traditions. Serious spike ball. Underwater hockey!
- Looking for students who play well with others.

COLLEGE IN THE SPOTLIGHT: CLARK UNIVERSITY

- Location: Worcester, MA
- # of Undergrads: 2,325
- Acceptance Rate: 40%
- Student / Faculty Ratio: 9:1
- Returning Freshmen: 88%
- % Receiving Merit Aid: 33%

INTERESTING FACTS:

- Liberal arts college for students who want hands-on, interdisciplinary learning and seek to be active and involved.
- Clark Core hones critical thinking skills and understanding of others.
- Problems in Practice courses let students tackle real-world problems in Worcester.
- Proactively restructuring academic offerings around 3 areas: Climate, Environment, and Society; Media, Computing, and Design; Health and Human Behavior.
- Historically strong geography and psychology departments. #3 game design program in world.
- Sophomore Summit: connecting majors to careers and creating meaningful pathways.
- 4+1 accelerated Masters programs; tuition discount depends on GPA (anywhere from 50-100% off); 1 in 3 Clark students takes advantage of this opportunity.
- Spree Day: classes are canceled and students enjoy live music, food trucks, and mechanical bulls!

THOUGHTS FOR SENIORS...

Decisions are in! Another unpredictable year is in the books! Here are just a few thoughts to help you make sense of what just happened:

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 12% acceptance rate this year. They received 43,000 applications, which means that around 90% of them--38,000 students--were denials. I love to use the umbrella/rain analogy to think about this. When the forecast shows a 10% chance of rain, it's fair to say that few of us would bring along an umbrella because we're pretty darn 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, with less than a 20% chance of admission, will not get in.*** If you've been waitlisted, you'll need to figure out if you should stay on the waitlist or not. Check the Common Data Set (section C2) and get a few years' worth of data to see how many were offered 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***. 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% 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 or fix the skewed gender balance.

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!***

Once you've made your decision, please say "No, thanks" to all of the rest of your colleges. And if you're ready to find a roommate, please take a look at this article:

https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/18/opinion/roommates-college-strangers.html?unlocked_article_code=1.lk8.zOx-.41C9cJ-B2iBI&smid=url-share

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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