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Denied College Admission? Should You Appeal?

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cause, so long as the approach is constructive. The most constructive approach is an information gathering perspective. If the counselor calls, the information gathering can be used to help future students as well as the current applicant. Presumably a counselor will want to understand what would have strengthened the applicant's profile for future reference. Information gathering can be viewed as a way to build a more positive relationship with the school beyond this particular inquiry.

Once you are involved in a conversation and you have some additional information, you must determine whether the information you have acquired indicates an appeal is the right course of action. If so, ask if the college has a set procedure for appealing decisions. Some colleges have a specific form and process and others leave it completely up to the student to decide how to proceed with an appeal.

In general, if you truly feel an appeal is justified and you have new information to support the process, the appeal must come from the student, hopefully with the counselor's support. I suggest the student begin by submitting a letter to the dean or vice president that oversees admission. The letter should respectfully explain the reason for writing, and offer new information with supporting documentation. Essentially, the letter should provide the college new, specific information that it did not have before. It should address any additional honors and awards or describe special circumstances. Concrete and clear documentation must accompany the appeal. If the appeal involves a specific problem, like a downturn in grades and explanation for why it happened, documentation should be provided that demonstrates that the student is on track to be successful in college.

To sum up, if you are denied admission to a college it is best to accept the institution's decision. If you can acquire information that will help you apply to another college with greater success (as may be the case in an Early Decision or Early Action denial), all the better. Generally speaking, denials tend to remain denials. It is best to learn what you can from the experience and move on. In the end, you really do want to go to a college that really wants you.

Paul was denied admission to a private college that he, his parents, and high school counselor all agreed matched his interests and academic profile. The question the parents asked me was "Should we appeal the decision?"

In my experience, appeals are rarely justified. The circumstances that substantiate an appeal generally involve NEW information about the student that was not available at the time the student applied. If you do not have new information to supply, you are essentially telling the admission staff that they made an error in judgment, and misread a file. This tact is unlikely to result in any positive change.

A college must have a compelling reason to reverse an admission decision. For example, new information might be that the student was a semi-finalist for an academic award or scholarship and moved into the finalist category or, better, actually won the award since filing the college application. If there is no new information to provide, there is sometimes a circumstance that was not fully explained in the application. For example, a student might have had surgery and missed a great deal of school in the spring of his junior year. Grades were lower due to an extended recovery process. Presumably the student's grades in the fall of senior year should have demonstrated significant improvement to show the earlier drop in grades was tied directly to the medical problem.

If you believe you have a strong enough reason to appeal, I suggest that the school counselor make a phone call. Few students are mature enough to handle this type of call, and parents are rarely objective enough to make these inquiries. The call should be to the admissions office to ask if it is possible to get some insight into the decision. Some colleges are happy to talk about admission decisions. Others will only give generalities. Be prepared to accept the response you receive, which may well be that the application was not considered sufficiently competitive within the applicant pool. Attempting to glean more information should not hurt the student's

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