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Does applying to more get you through the door? Why more is not better in college

By Elizabeth LaScala



Doing College and Beyond College and Graduate School Admissions Services 970 Dewing Avenue, Suite 202, Lafayette 925.385.0562 (office) 925.330.8801 (mobile) www.doingcollege.com Elizabeth@doingcollege.com Elizabeth LaScala, PhD, brings decades of admissions expertise to personally guide each student through applying to well-matched colleges, making each step more manageable and less stressful. She has placed hundreds of students in the most prestigious colleges and universities in the US. Elizabeth attends conferences, visits campuses and makes personal contacts with admissions networks to stay current on the evolving nature of college admissions. She and her professional team offer resume development, test preparation, academic tutoring, value analysis, merit and need-based scholarship search and more.

It should be noted, however, that each admissions office considers how these achievements and strengths relate to the type of class that college is constructing that cycle. Most highly selective colleges craft classes with eyes towards having a diversity of students with a variety of academic interests and talents. When so many applicants have the same interests, for example, going pre-law or pre-med or pursuing a degree in engineering, it would not be surprising for an admissions office to choose those who present the best credentials as well as the strongest hooks.

College advisors can best help their students by analyzing and understanding admissions trends as well as the cultures at highly selective schools. They can also help them to understand that, even when their credentials are strong, they must present them well and with authenticity in essays and interviews. College advisors can help their students to understand the level of competition that they face from peers nationally and world-wide that they do not know. Most important, independent educational consultants can help their students to understand that their best matches will include colleges where the odds of gaining admission are far more in their favor, and they can enjoy four happy, successful and productive years.

As a college admissions advisor in Lafayette I am often asked some version of this question: "If 5 - 10% of applicants are accepted to the most highly ranked schools, will I have a better chance of getting into one of them if I apply to all of them?"

Many college-bound high school students and their parents would like to think this was true, but unfortunately applying to more schools with ultra-low acceptance rates does not increase your chances of being accepted to one of them. If we college advisors could dispel the 'more is better' myth and guide students toward selecting colleges that are their best matches, families would enjoy far less stress and far better results every spring.

College admissions rates have little to do with the probability you will be admitted to any school. If a college has a 10% admit rate and someone applies with a 3.7 GPA or even a 4.0, middling essays, a few extracurricular activities but nothing remarkable, and no legacy, athletic or other 'hook,' he would not have a 1 in 10 chance of admission. This student likely would have a zero chance of admission. No matter how many schools with low admit rates that student applies to, there is very little chance of admission. A 10% admit rate does not mean every applicant has a 1 in 10 chance of admission.

Each college application is unique. Each application to each college that a student has on her list is independent of each of the other applications submitted. Admissions officers at highly selective colleges will expect to see high quality as a foundation to any application. A serious candidate is expected to provide a very strong high school transcript, test scores that positively correlate with the excellence achieved on the transcript, well-written, well-conceived essays that show an authentic voice and respond fully to the prompt and sincere, consistent demonstrated interest in their school. Other factors include a very strong record of extracurricular involvements that build upon the applicant's special abilities and talents (sometimes known as "hooks") and/or personal and career-related interests. For the most selective schools in the U.S., talents and achievements should be recognized beyond the local and regional levels.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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