

Some 2012 college admissions rates hit new lows

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Ivy League schools along with some other highly selective colleges and universities have been proudly announcing historically low admissions rates for freshmen entering next fall — as if the figures actually have real importance and meaning.

Thanks to the rise of the college rankings, led by the powerful U.S. News & World Report rankings, colleges and universities have been bending over backwards to find ways to make their “selectivity rates” — that is, the percentage of students they accept vs. the number of applications they get — look as low as possible. It is one of the criteria that helps push schools up in the rankings.

Harvard University just announced an all-time low rate of 5.9 percent and, it seems important for people to know, is the seventh consecutive year that Harvard’s admission rate has fallen! It so happens that the applicant pool of 34,302 was down 1.9 percent from 2011, but yet, a total of 2,032 offers were made to freshmen, 100 fewer than last year.

At Yale University, the admissions rate of 6.8 percent was announced for the Class of 2016, along with the news that the season had been the most competitive in university history, with a record 28,974 applicants.

Some other Ivy schools also proudly announced the smallest admissions rates ever — Princeton (7.86 percent), Dartmouth (9.4 percent) — as did schools such as Northwestern University (15 percent), Georgetown University (16.5 percent) and Barnard College (21 percent).

Oh joy. More kids than ever got rejected.

It’s important to remember a few things about these admissions rates.

For one thing, at most schools in America, most kids who apply get in, and many of these schools are terrific.

For another, the selectivity rates have been driven down by the rising number of applications to individual institutions, partly a result of the use of the Common Application, which makes it easier to apply to more schools than in the days when each school had entirely different applications.

More kids who don’t have a prayer of getting into some of these schools apply anyway, but schools still get to brag that they have a record number of applications. As a result, some admissions counselors note that the percentage of kids who have a real shot at getting into some of these schools doesn’t go up much — if at all — from year to year.

Related to this is what may be a growing number of applications, many of them international, and many of those from China, that have elements that ring false. This story done jointly by The New York Times and the Chronicle of Higher Education says that a growing number of applications from China are at least partly fraudulent. In fact, one consulting company that advises American schools about China did a study and concluded that 90 percent of Chinese applicants send phony recommendations in with their applications, and that 70 percent send in essays written by others; and half have phony school transcripts.

Then there is the issue of how schools use wait lists. Some under-invite in the regular admissions season so they can fill out later from the wait list — after they have announced just how selective they are. Others may not do it deliberately, but wind up taking a lot of kids from the wait list anyway.

Vanderbilt University’s Undergraduate Admissions blog makes it clear that lots of students get off the wait list. In this post, it says that in 2010, several thousand students were offered spots

on the wait list though only 35 percent chose to keep their names on it. Of those, 19 percent earned admissions, and, ultimately 10 percent of the next freshman class came off the wait list.

So when you look at really low admissions rates, remember they may not be all that they seem.

Fonte: The Washington Post, Washington, 4 Apr. 2012, International, On-line.

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