



UNIVERSITY CONSULTANTS OF AMERICA

WHY A COLLEGE CONSULTANT IS VALUABLE

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Education is big business. Every year, US colleges see families spend over \$400 billion on tuition alone. Every year, colleges go bankrupt, decide not to teach an entire class of students, or operate at a loss. Even Ivy League giant Cornell University loses money annually. Having lost over \$100 million in fiscal year 2019, Cornell is known as “Big Red” for its poor finances, not just its sports.

As a result, the colleges are strategic. Every year, they adjust their methods in an effort not just to prosper, but to stay alive. Change is constant, especially in college admissions.

Consider some changes that occurred within the last few years:

In July 2015, the University of Pennsylvania removed its requirement of a writing score from an SAT or ACT. A year later, Penn started allowing students to “score choice” and submit only their highest standardized test scores. At the same time, Penn began to “super-score” not only the SAT, but also the ACT. Yet they announced these changes mere weeks before students filed their applications, long after most had planned their admissions strategies.

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In 2018, several universities – including Harvard, Yale, Princeton and Stanford – dropped the requirement that applicants submit a writing score from an SAT or ACT. Several

schools actually made this change in the middle of the admissions season.

Although the Varsity Blues scandal rocked the admissions world, the real scandal happened a year before. In 2018, US News announced significant changes to the algorithm it uses to rank schools. Unless you were a university working with US News, you could not predict the most drastic changes – including removal of the selectivity factor and the insertion of a social mobility factor – until after August 1, when most admissions seasons began. In fact, US News did not announce its changes until September 10, almost seven weeks after students started to file their applications.

The rankings algorithm reflected changes to the kind of applicants the highly-ranked colleges sought. We saw colleges change from a non-binding Early Action to binding Early Decision. We watched one college add a supplemental essay to its application for the first time ever, then remove the essay requirement two months later. One day it was in the application, one day it was not. Schools that were formerly considered “targets” became “reaches” overnight. Unfortunately, most families did not discover these changes until months later, after their students were rejected.

For the 2019-20 season, the previously-unheralded concept of “demonstrating interest” – proving to a college that you actually covet it – became much more important. As part of that strategy, colleges

significantly increased and actively utilized their waiting lists.

Now, with COVID-19 as a worldwide pandemic, leverage has changed from schools to families. The universities are fretting and sweating about whether their campuses will reopen in the fall, how many students will ask to defer their enrollment, whether international students can obtain visas, how many students will choose to study closer to home, and whether families with now-depleted financial assets will choose to pay as much for college as they had originally planned. Virtually overnight, the challenges of the coronavirus created opportunities for students to save money, if only they knew how.

On the other hand, the high school class of 2021 may face the most challenging admissions season ever. College Board has cancelled SAT and Subject Test dates and changed AP testing significantly. ACT has cancelled tests. School after school has announced plans to go “test optional” for the next admissions cycle, but that is not the same as being “test blind.” High schools closed, changed their grading systems, and made students wonder. “How do I continue my extracurricular activities?” Tutors lost significant business, and some laid off employees and contractors.

Many of today’s changes are painfully obvious, but subtle changes happen every year, even every day. Unknown, mistaken or underappreciated variables impact futures



dramatically.

Why is a college consultant valuable? In an industry where the marketing and strategies always benefit the schools, never the student, families operate at a significant disadvantage. Leveling the dominance of the educational institutions – and even tilting leverage in a family’s favor – creates better lifetime outcomes.

Let’s do this. Together.

