

Record Numbers of College Applications

As colleges face an avalanche of applications, what can you do to stand out from the crowd?

College applications are up this year, and the numbers are staggering.

UCLA tops the list with the most applications, with over 60,000. Columbia University saw a jaw-dropping 32% increase in hopefuls with the acceptance of the Common Application this year, while other Ivies like Harvard, Yale, and the University of Pennsylvania all saw double-digit increases. (Other Ivies fared more modestly.)

For countless years running, the number of applicants has well outpaced population growth. Even many years when the pool of potential applicants shrank, applications rose nevertheless.

For some time, growth was attributed to more and more high school graduates pursuing a college education. However, that number hasn't moved in quite awhile.

Now, the number is growing because each student is applying to *more and more colleges*. It's part of a vicious cycle. As more students apply, a college can be more selective. As colleges grow more selective, students must apply to more schools to ensure placement at one. As the applicant pool grows, colleges can become more selective still. And on and on it goes.

So as you can see, applications aren't slowing down, but there is an important consideration here...

As you spread yourself thinner applying to a dozen or more schools, you actually can start to *decrease* your odds. Work on too many applications, and you won't have the time to make any of them truly excellent.

Truth is, your core credentials only get you into the discussion – the top schools have plenty of students who satisfy their GPA and SAT demands – and well exceed them.

To emerge from the pack, you've got to have an exceptional application in some way. Extra curricular activities used to be a great separator – and they still are enormously useful. But so many have stellar out-of-class activities, that most won't get you noticed the way they would have in the past.

Now, things like your short answers and essays have greater impact than ever – they are one of the few ways your application can stand out. And, if you are writing 6 essays for 13 applications, it may be difficult to make *all of them* stand out.

Here's one strategy: Focus on just a few schools, with a few applications. Choose one or two "reach" schools. Pick three to five schools where you have a solid shot at admission. Moreover, you may find you only need one safety school. If you think you need more than one, then you may not have chosen your safety school well.

By all means, if there are eight colleges you like and they all accept the same version of the Common Application, go wild. But be careful not to use that as a basis for picking the schools you apply to. Consider narrowing your choices down by personal fit, and go from there. In today's hyper-competitive world, showing a school a lot of interest can be one of the best separators of all.