



BLUESTARS

admissions consulting

New Trends in College Admissions

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Opening Activity: The Admissions Office

Which of the statements below was issued by Stanford's admissions office?

1. "Every year, Stanford has its choice of the best students across the United States -- around the world, actually," said Samuel Shaw, Director of Admissions for Stanford University. "We look for the students with the highest scores, the best class rankings and highest GPA's, the most AP classes and the best scores on their AP tests -- students who are committed to achieving leadership positions in all of their extracurricular activities. Obviously, we receive many more applications than we can admit -- our acceptance rate is decreasing every year -- so every year the students are simply more and more qualified, and therefore each subsequent class must achieve more and more to be given serious consideration."
2. "There is no formula," Shaw says. "Even perfect test scores don't guarantee admission. Far from it: 69 percent of our applicants over the past five years with SATs of 2400 didn't get in." But applicants are also competing against circumstances. "Whether or not one young person gets in is not necessarily determined by what they've done and what their characteristics are and their abilities and so on," says Provost John Etchemendy. "It also depends on the overall mix of people who have applied that year and bubbled to the top. One year, being a tuba player might be really important. And another year, well, there are already these five even better tuba players and we don't need another."
3. According to Samuel Shaw, Director of Admissions at Stanford University, what really catches the eye of the admissions committee at Stanford is commitment to the community. Stanford looks for leaders who show that they want to change the world somehow -- improve the lives of others, contribute to a change that will address a major worldwide issue. Students who have founded their own nonprofits are given special consideration, and the Stanford admissions committee in particular looks for essays that highlight a student's community service and volunteer work, especially with populations of the less-fortunate. Stanford has always emphasized political engagement and community activity in its curriculum and in the school environment. "Of course," Shaw added with a chuckle, "It doesn't hurt if they also want to start a multibillion dollar startup. We're always open to the next founders of "Google" here at Stanford."



Dr. Amy Morgenstern (Dr. M)...

- Founder and Proprietor, Blue Stars Admissions Consulting
- Track record of student admissions to Ivy League and top schools in the sciences, humanities, and visual arts
- University professor for eight years with a PhD in philosophy
- Former honors program associate director
- MFA in multimedia art
- Published, award-winning writer and editor
- I invite you to check out my [blog posts](#)



Changes on the horizon?



Changes on the horizon?

- Two major initiatives emerged this year aimed at transforming the college admissions process. Will they?
- The Coalition for Access, Affordability, and Success
 - New application
- Turning the Tide
 - Set of recommendations



Will these initiatives ultimately impact the college admissions process as we know it?

To really get at this question and understand how change works, let's take a brief look at the history of admissions. Admissions--negotiating ground/interplay of individual achievement, the democratic quest for equal access, and the cultural dynamics of privilege



Brief History of College Applications -- History of Shifting Sands and Turning Tides

- At first, no application and no universal standards
- Early 20th century: interplay of two dynamics
 - Democratic openness
 - Exclusivity tied to cultural identity



On the one hand....openness

- 1800s: private schools open enrollment to public school students
- 1926: SAT is launched to filter out academically underqualified candidates
- Campuses become more diverse
- Increased Jewish student population



On the other hand....exclusion

- 1919: Columbia releases the first modern college application -- a “character-based” application
- 1926: Harvard, Yale, and Princeton follow, adding an essay
- The personal essay is born!
- And it is used to weed candidates out based on “character,” to counter religious and class diversity



Admissions practices: the result of evaluation tools and methods
interfacing with culture

- Personal statement used to exclude
- SAT used to include



So where are we now? What are the cultural dynamics of admissions today?

- Strong concerns about:
 - Access and diversity
 - The effects of the admissions process on teen character and psychology



Two initiatives launched in response to these concerns

- Coalition for Access, Affordability, and Success
 - A new application launched this year
 - Also a portfolio-building and communications platform for younger high school students
- Turning the Tide
 - A report from Harvard Graduate School of Education's Making Caring Common Project
 - Recommendations for all admissions stakeholders (colleges, counselors, parents, and students) on reforming the admissions process and the messages we give teens about success



Coalition for Access, Affordability, and Success

- 80 member colleges total
- They include every Ivy League university, Stanford University and the University of Chicago; liberal arts colleges such as Amherst, Swarthmore and Williams; and leading public institutions such as the Universities of Michigan, North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Virginia.
- 52 participating this year
- The University of Florida, Washington, Maryland decided to make the Coalition application its sole application in 2017.



Membership

- Open to public institutions with “affordable tuition along with need-based financial aid for in-state residents”
- Private colleges, if they “provide sufficient financial aid to meet the full, demonstrated financial need of every domestic student they admit.”
- Colleges must also have a six-year federal graduation rate of 70 percent (will exclude many public institutions)



The Platform - 3 Parts

- The application, with different essay topics than the Common App (admissions)
- An online student “locker” to store work and keep records (pre-admissions)
- A sharing tool for feedback exchange between students and mentors (pre-admissions)



The Goals:

- Provide a way for colleges to interact with (low-income) students earlier
- Forge a less formulaic approach to applications than has been the norm
- Ultimately, to change the way students, colleges and society think about the admissions process.



“The idea isn't about how you should pad your résumé, but about how you should have significant experiences as part of your education.”

- Pamela T. Horne, vice provost for enrollment management at Purdue University



Challenge to the Common Application?

- Most coalition members will offer, but not require, the coalition application
- They expect to continue having a majority of applicants (certainly in the coalition's early years) apply through the Common App
- Predictions, such as from Seth Allen, vice president and dean of admissions, Pomona: the new application will be considered highly successful if, in a few years' time, it's responsible for 15 percent or so of his college's applications.
- University of Florida, Maryland, Washington plan to use exclusively, 2017
- Nonetheless, there are challenges to the Common App
 - Tech glitch, 2013: schools reluctant to rely on one application
 - Some find it too homogenizing and limiting
- Several members of the Common Application board are admissions officials at colleges joining the coalition



Turning the Tide

- A report with recommendations
- Participants: college admissions officers, university administrators, school guidance counselors and principals, character education experts, individuals representing national organizations of school guidance counselors, admission professionals, and independent schools
- Backing of nearly 100 admissions professionals and other higher-education officials, including Brown, Amherst, Purdue, BU, and Swarthmore.



Triggered by results of a 2014 survey of 10,000 middle- and high-school students asking them about their priorities

- 48% prioritized their own achievement
- 30% prioritized happiness
- 22% identified caring for others as their top priority

“Too often, today’s culture sends young people messages that emphasize personal success rather than investment in others or our collective future.”

- Turning the Tide



Recommendation #1: Promote meaningful contribution to others

- Authentically chosen, sustained for one year
- Collective action responding to a community challenge
- Authentic, meaningful experiences with diversity
- Develops gratitude and responsibility for the future



Recommendation #2: Assessments for ethical engagement and contributions to others across race, culture and class

- Admissions process should convey to students that contributions like caring for a sibling or getting a job to supplement family income are valued
- Admissions process should assess ethical responsibility of student, and do so more through a sense of day-to-day behavior than “a stint of service”



Recommendation #3: for reducing undue achievement pressure, redefining achievement, and leveling the playing field for economically diverse students

- Prioritize quality, not quantity of extracurriculars
- Encourage limiting AP/IB classes; the aim is sustained achievement in concentrated areas
- Discourage overcoaching
- Alleviate pressure around standardized testing
- Expand students' thinking about good colleges
 - [Frank Bruni on University of Maryland in Sunday NYT](#)



Reactions, Results, Effects

Yale has already changed its Common App supplement in response to Turning the Tide.

- Who or what is a source of inspiration for you? (35 words or fewer)
- If you could live for a day as another person, past or present, who would it be? Why? (35 words or fewer)
- You are teaching a Yale course. What is it called? (35 words or fewer)
- Most Yale freshmen live in suites of four to six students. What would you contribute to the dynamic of your suite? (35 words or fewer)



Strong support from University of Virginia

“We support Turning the Tide because we philosophically agree with...promoting, encouraging, and developing good citizenship, strong character, personal responsibility, [and] civic engagement in high school students.”

- Gregory Roberts, dean of admissions



Over the next two years, Making Caring Common will work with college admissions officers, parents, high school guidance counselors and others to further implement the report's recommendations.

There is still more to unfold.....



How can we assess potential future impact?

- 2011, USC/Educational Conservancy held a conference for 200 higher ed officials and partnered on a report recommending reforms with virtually no impact.
 - Some argue admissions has only gotten worse
- Wesleyan president, Michael Roth: “I do worry about trying to create a new system that will measure qualities that will supposedly make people better people.”
 - Also worried about applicants gaming the system
- According to Inside Higher Ed founder, Scott Jaschik, “Efforts to reform college admissions are difficult to pull off for a number of reasons. One is that institutions find it difficult to move together, as institutional interests may not always align.”
 - Malcolm Gladwell, Revisionist History, Food Fight



How can we assess potential future impact? The culture or ethos of admissions....

- The higher ed and admissions community is signaling changes in what they value
- This is already translating into the way students are approaching their admissions presentation; they are getting signals from all of their mentors on new developments
- It serves as a strong message to younger high school students about how to shape their high school years



How can one heed the message?

At Blue Stars, we've encapsulated the admissions expectations of the times.

5 Core Attributes (5 Cs)

1. Challenge: Growth as a result of challenge or hardship
2. Creativity/Initiative: Introducing something new to the world
3. Curiosity: A seeking nature, genuine curiosity, and intellectual development
4. Character: A generous, ethical character
5. Commitment: Demonstrated dedication to what you find important







For further discussion and exploration.....

Initial Admissions Strategy Consultation
90 minutes

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