

January 17, 2008

## Applications to Colleges Are Breaking Records

By [KAREN W. ARENSON](#)

Applications to selective colleges and universities are reaching new heights this year, promising another season of high rejection rates and dashed hopes for many more students.

[Harvard](#) said Wednesday that it had received a record number of applicants — 27,278 — for its next freshman class, a 19 percent increase over last year. Other campuses reporting double-digit increases included the [University of Chicago](#) (18 percent), Amherst College (17 percent), [Northwestern University](#) (14 percent) and Dartmouth (10 percent).

Officials said the trend was a result of demographics, aggressive recruiting, the ease of online applications and more students applying to ever more colleges as a safety net. The swelling population of 18-year-olds is not supposed to peak until 2009, when the largest group of high school seniors in the nation's history, 3.2 million, are to graduate. The rise in applications at three universities — Harvard, Princeton and the [University of Virginia](#) — came about as they ended early admissions policies, which had allowed students to receive decisions by mid-December, months ahead of others. The universities said early admissions benefited more affluent and sophisticated students and required students to commit without being able to compare financial aid offerings from various colleges.

The application figures suggested that the end of early admissions did not hurt. Princeton received a record 20,118 applicants, up 6 percent. The University of Virginia received 18,776 applications, a 4 percent increase. Like other campuses, Virginia said its final count was likely to increase slightly, because applications were still trickling in.

Scott White, the director of guidance at Montclair High School in New Jersey, said the school's college counselors found students tenser than ever.

"There is a pure level of panic and frenzy like they've never seen before," Mr. White said Wednesday. "There are some people who say that with some schools having ended early admissions, the frenzy must be subsiding. I don't think that's so."

Even at colleges, there was surprise over the surges, in part because they followed strong gains in previous years.

"These are amazing numbers," said William R. Fitzsimmons, dean of admissions and financial aid at Harvard, speaking of his university's flood of applications.

He said Harvard's announcement in December that it was sharply increasing financial aid even for families earning up to \$180,000 probably spurred applications, but, he said, the rise was visible even before that.

He said that the elimination of early admissions encouraged more interest, too, and that joint information sessions by Harvard, Princeton and the University of Virginia drew “astonishing crowds. ”

The reasons for the swelling numbers — not all colleges have reported yet — go beyond the growth in the college age population and the preoccupation with name-brand schools. Recruiting by elite colleges among low- and middle-income students and in new regions are bringing in more applications.

California, for example, has become a bigger source of applicants for [Cornell](#) since the upstate New York university created a West Coast regional office in Los Angeles several years ago.

“Ten years ago, California was not among our top eight feeder states,” said Doris Davis, an associate provost at Cornell. “Now it is among our top five.” Cornell applications rose 8 percent.

At the University of Chicago, international applicants grew 23 percent, to 1,826, and early admissions applicants rose 46 percent, to 4,430, Theodore A. O’Neill, dean of admissions, said.

Janet Rapelye, dean of admission at Princeton, attributed some growth to outreach “to more students from many backgrounds, including lower socioeconomic backgrounds.”

Some of the application increases undoubtedly come, too, from students applying to ever more colleges, in hopes of increasing their chances.

“There was a time when kids applied to three or four schools, then to six or seven schools, and now, 10 or more is not uncommon,” said John Maguire, a higher education consultant.

Mary Beth Fry, director of college counseling at the Savannah Country Day School, a private school in Savannah, Ga., said she had held the average number of college applications at her school to five last year, but expected the number to climb this year because students were so nervous.

Michael E. Mills, associate provost at Northwestern University in Illinois, said the 14 percent growth this year had sent the number of applications to more than 25,000. To help it winnow the field, he said, it hired a new admissions dean, Christopher Watson, from Princeton, who was accustomed to rejecting many good applicants.

“We anticipated having to go down the path of having to make more difficult choices,” Mr. Mills said, adding that Mr. Watson helped with “making very fine distinctions among very similar applicants.”



01/14/2008

## Largest high school crop in history competes for admission

BY SARAH HOFIUS HALL  
STAFF WRITER

It has never been harder to get into college.

With a record high 3.3 million high school students graduating this spring, universities across the country are receiving a record number of applicants. With a limited number of spaces on college campuses, schools have to be more selective than ever.

"It's a matter of supply and demand," said Tony Pals, spokesman for the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities. "Institutions that in the past may have been safety schools may now be moving up to students' first-tier selections. That's because of increased competition."

The University of Scranton and Marywood University, both of which are on track to break application records for next year's class, are experiencing the same trend.

Since fall 2000, Marywood has seen a 52 percent increase in applications, More students are visiting Marywood, too. In one year, there has been a 15 percent increase in campus visits, said Robert Reese, director of admissions at Marywood.

At the University of Scranton, applications will likely be 6 percent to 7 percent above last year's totals. That means a smaller percentage of students will be admitted. With the acceptance rate down at the University of Scranton, the average SAT score and grade-point averages have increased, said Joseph Roback, the university's associate vice president for admissions and undergraduate enrollment.

Other area schools, including Lackawanna College, Keystone College and Baptist Bible College and Seminary, have also seen increases in applications and inquiries.

### A waiting game

Frank Tutella is one of the record 3.3 million students graduating from high school this year. A Holy Cross High School student, Frank has worked hard to make sure he stands out.

"There's a lot of pressure with that. There's a lot of stress," said Frank, who plans to major in biology or physics and possibly go into pre-med.

The athlete and honors student has applied to eight schools, including Cornell University and the University of Scranton.

So far, he's only heard from the University of Scranton, where he was accepted, but said he'd probably like to attend school farther from home so he can gain independence. Cornell officials want to see his midterm grades and updated class rank before they make a decision.

"The worst part is the waiting," Frank said. "It's killing me."

### National factors

The estimated 3.3 million students Frank is graduating with this year are part of the "Echo Boom," meaning they are the children of baby boomers.



Frank Tutella, a senior at Holy Cross High School, has applied for admission to eight colleges, including the University of Scranton. JASON FARMER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

When the baby boomers were in high school in the 1960s and 1970s, a high of 3.2 million graduated in one year. The big difference between then and now is in the 1970s, fewer than 50 percent of graduates went on to college, said David Hawkins, director of public policy and research for the National Association for College Admission Counseling.

Now, two-thirds move directly into post-secondary education, he added.

In addition, each student is submitting more applications than ever before. That has an inflation effect and can make students unintentionally “shoot themselves in the foot,” Mr. Hawkins said.

After the number of high school seniors peaks next year, there will be a slow decline, Mr. Hawkins said.

That’s something officials from local schools say they will be able to handle with a combination of marketing and planning.

And for students who are still in the process of applying, there is hope.

Although many schools’ acceptance rates have decreased, there are still spots around the country for those who want to go to college, Mr. Hawkins said.

The same is true in Scranton.

“We are the office of admission, not rejection. There is still room for good students,” Mr. Roback said.

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