



P.S. | Personally Sacha

Welcome to the weblog of Sacha Millstone, where you'll find wide-ranging and well-reasoned considerations for your financial life – and life in general.

Part 7: Paying for College - The College Dating Game

By Barb Kostanick

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Nobody likes to be turned down. Students and parents worry about whether colleges will say, "Yes!" – but colleges are also biting their nails to see how many students accept their offers of admission. *Yield Rate* is one of the key measures used in many college rankings, and colleges spend a lot of effort trying to improve the percentage of students who accept admission offers.

So think about dating. What's the chance that the person you'd like to date will give you the "yes" you want if that person doesn't know much more than your name? What if you've never talked with the person before, never met, never even exchanged an email? Are your chances good?

I didn't think so.

Well, the college dating game works the same way. Did you know that many private colleges carefully track every visit, email, request for information, attendance at high school presentations by the admissions officer, and even interactions on social media and the number of logins to student's admission account? Quite a few ask right on their supplemental applications if you visited, and if so, on what date. *They can even see in which order you listed colleges on your financial aid application.*

It's a big data world, and more and more colleges are mining that data. They call it *degree of interest*. Are you the student who is seriously considering their school, or are you just looking at it as a safety or a Hail Mary? It isn't too hard to tell.

Take Megan, who applied to the college fifteen minutes before the final deadline with no prior contact with the college, and Sarah, who'd visited, come to the session at her high school with the college's admission rep, been in contact with the admissions rep asking questions about interview opportunities, scholarships,

academic opportunities and campus life. (Good questions, not the kind that could have been answered if she'd spent two minutes on the college's website.) Sarah applied in October, set up her account on the college's website and has checked it every couple of weeks, and "liked" the college on Facebook. Now the Admissions Committee is sitting around the table and deciding on offers. If everything else is about equal, which student gets the offer? Is this even a question?

Don't believe me? A few years ago a NY Times reporter got to sit in on admissions committee decisions for a selective college. The discussion was interesting, but even more interesting was the associated picture – a shot showing the corner of the cover of one applicant's admission file, with a checkbox for each possible way the applicant could have been in contact with the school. The front cover of the admissions file – it is that important.

What's your plan to demonstrate interest?

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