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College Essay & Admissions Coaching

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6/9 → College Admissions News:

[What College Admissions Will Look Like Next Year In Light of Covid-19](#)

5/5 → What's new in standardized testing? See below.

[APs](#) - College Board is offering test-at-home

[SATs & SAT IIs](#) - The June test date has been cancelled. The SAT will add more test dates in the fall and registration will open in May. There may be a test-at-home option for fall/winter 2020.

[ACT](#) - offering a flexible schedule for summer 2020 test dates and a test-at-home option for fall/winter 2020.

[SSATs](#) - have cancelled all upcoming test dates

[ISEEs](#) - have announced a potential test-at-home option. They say this will roll out later this spring.

4/14 → NEW COVID COLLEGE ADMISSIONS UPDATES BELOW.

If you have questions on how to proceed with the college admissions process, check out this resource I created: [How to Make a Final College Decision in the Wake of a Pandemic](#)

The latest news: [Yield and Admit Rates Are in Flux](#)

Here's a spreadsheet of [Colleges That Have Announced Test-Optional Policies Due to Covid-19](#)

[Secondary Schools Guidance Department Updates \(on transcripts, grades, college resources\)](#)

SAT UPDATE (Including Subject Tests)

- March, April, and May SAT and Subject Tests have all been canceled.
- May 2, 2020 SAT and Subject Tests have been cancelled
- June 6th, 2020 test date - it is projected this test date will be cancelled or severely disrupted because it is reliant on the infrastructure of school districts to give out the exam which are now all shut down.
- You can reschedule for the June 6th test date or get a refund (it will automatically be sent to your payment method)
- It is not recommended reschedule to June 6th because there is so much uncertainty
- It is recommended to wait until the fall 2020 to schedule for the August exam or even later than that.

ACT UPDATE

- April 4th, 2020 test - reschedule to June 13, 2020 (it is projected this test date will be canceled or at least severely disrupted).
- July 18, 2020 test is still scheduled. It's looking like this test will be held as planned.
- April registrants can accept the rescheduled date in June or reschedule to a new date in July or in the fall once those test dates are released.

AP EXAMS

- In-person exams (May 4-15th) are canceled.
- Replace with 45-minute take home exams (free response questions only) and will still count for college credit.
- You can take them on a computer, tablet, or cell phone. You can take a picture of hand written work if needed.
- These tests will only cover material in classes taught before March 10th to make it a fair playing field
- The College Board is offering two exam dates. Additional details will be released today.

IB EXAMS

- May exams have been cancelled.
- Students will be awarded a diploma or course certificate based on your work in class.
- Your school will need to upload your coursework to the IB's system. The deadline is April 20th. So, reach out to your school to make sure that they are taking the necessary steps and are submitting on time.

COLLEGE CLOSURES

- More than 800 colleges around the country have shut down indefinitely

- Expect the majority of colleges to shut down as shelter-in-place orders become more widespread.
- About 100 colleges are still open to admissions visitors, but that is expected to reverse course within the next couple of weeks.
- Admitted student events cancelled at the vast majority of colleges

PROJECTIONS FOR CURRENT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Impact on Current HS Seniors

Admissions Decisions - Likely No Delay.

- More than 100 colleges still haven't sent out their admissions decisions
- Don't project any delay in releasing admissions decisions
- At many colleges >95% of decisions are made. In the time remaining they are figuring out financial aid packages and filling last/special spots in the class.
- If you applied for financial aid, we do expect substantial delays from colleges.

Financial Aid - Expect Delay

- Colleges use the last few weeks of March to finalize and fine tune financial aid packages and scholarships
- Some colleges still use legacy systems that take time to spin up working from home
- Colleges are experiencing financial turmoil because of the drop in markets affecting their endowments - less money to give out in financial aid
- Colleges **will not revoke a financial aid offer that has already been sent out to you.** The impact is only on upcoming rewards.

Negotiate Financial Aid

- Colleges will give out less in initial financial aid offers
- However, colleges are also worried about filling their class - especially with uncertainty about international students
- This gives you an opportunity to negotiate, especially if you are at least partial pay tuition or close to full tuition
- If you can still afford to pay full sticker price, reach out to the schools that waitlisted you and let them know you are still interested in their college. You don't have to say anything about your ability to pay full price. Just let them know they are still one of your top choices and you'd like to hear back if spots open up.

Advocate

- Collegevine.com online tool that helps you negotiate financial aid.
- Check out the video on how to negotiate
- 100% free for families

Deposit Deadline Extensions

- The flip side, is that colleges are likely to be much more forgiving this year with that deposit and enrollment deadline (normally May 1st)
- Close to 300 colleges have extended their deadline to June 1 because of the uncertainty
- The vast majority of schools will probably join them
- If we are still dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak in Late May, there will likely be a further extension.
- Not every school will make this move so as to secure their class beforehand. If one of your schools chooses not to extend their deposit deadline, then consider doing a double deposit (a housing deposit with two colleges and if you can afford to). Choose a May 1st school that you want to keep as an option and send them a deposit. Then assess and choose your June 1st school and negotiate with them. Then make a final decision before June 1st. This is not an ideal situation because these are \$300-400 deposits. But if you can, it ensures you have options.

WAITLIST - Longer and More Acceptances

- It is expected colleges, and particularly more selective schools, to put more students on the waitlist than normal due to uncertainty
- We also expect colleges to accept more students off the waitlist, but mainly students who are full pay or high partial pay
- If you need a lot of financial aid and are on the waitlist, colleges might give you as much of a boost

WHEN TO TALK TO COLLEGES

- Admissions Officers and college employees are just as freaked out as everybody else
- They are currently overwhelmed with trying to shift to work from home and scrambling to finalize decisions
- Once decisions come out and things settle into a “new normal” (think late next week / early April), you can start to reach back out to colleges. Give them another week or so to settle into a new normal and adjust to the situation.
- This will give you a better chance to get the outcome you want

WILL COLLEGES BE ONLINE IN THE FALL?

- Right now, colleges are planning to be in-person in the fall (including summer orientation). They have back-up options if there is another outbreak of COVID
- However, there are some risks → the second wave in the fall or if the current wave doesn't get resolved till late summer.
- If those risks occur, colleges are much more likely to postpone than go online
- Gap Years - Ask as soon as possible! If too many students start asking for gap years, colleges will be less likely to approve those requests. Get them in as early as possible.

DROPPING GRADES (Otherwise known as ‘Senioritis’)

- There will be more flexibility, but the key is to comfortably pass your classes and graduate

- Make sure you don't run into any weird diploma issues because of an elective in second semester senior year → make sure to fulfill requirements online. Reach out to your school counselors. Find information on that at your State Department of Education website where they have course requirements for getting your GED in your state. Don't let weird diploma issues hold up your ability to matriculate in the fall.
- You should still take AP Exams. They will still confer credit. They are only 45-minutes long and potentially a strong reward.

Impact on Current HS Juniors and Underclassmen

Overview

- Juniors → the highest impact. This is the most important time in the admissions process. Now, Spring semester grades and activities have been severely impacted.
- Sophomores → moderate impact
- Freshman → low impact
- 8th grade and below → virtually no impact (as of now)

Standardized Tests

- Colleges are going to get more flexible → especially about SAT Subject Tests (SAT IIs)
- Remember: Everyone is in the same boat as you. Fewer people will get the benefit of taking the test multiple times, so overall scores will be lower.
- College Board and ACT will likely add extra exam dates to make up for the cancellations.
- It is projected that most colleges will go test optional for 20-21 application cycle *ONLY*
 - Even highly selective schools
- Already a general trend towards test optional
- Some colleges that were on the fence are doing a longer trial (3 years is the most common)

What Does Test Optional Mean?

- Historically, students with strong ACT/SAT scores have had an advantage at test optional schools.
- We think this will still be the case, but if you have a strong GPA + coursework (AP or Honors), you will get more flexibility than normal.
- You should still plan to take the SAT and ACT, then if your score isn't what you hoped for plan around test optional admissions then
- Colleges will still look at your test score if you have it, and you won't be penalized for having high test scores
- Test Optional does NOT mean tests will be removed from the admissions process

Exam Curves

- We do not project that the curves for the SAT and ACT will be more difficult
- These tests have scaled scores and they are keeping the same format, so the same % of students will score 36, 35, etc. → There will just be more students for each test date.
- AP Exam → the curve will get harder. Two reasons: shorter exams will mean fewer students get burned out from the original 3.5 hour test and free response means more students will receive partial credit.

AP Exams

- Will be given less weight in the applications process due to the change in format
- You should consider taking a subject test as well to back up to the AP score
- AP *Classes* will still have the same weight in admissions

Academics

- We expect colleges to either throw out or reduce the weight of your grades from this current semester / the second semester of this year (e.g. Jan - June 2020)
 - This will reduce the impact of your school switching to pass/fail
- **To replace this missing semester, your GPA in your first semester of senior year will become even more important → *so try to get more application work done over the summer. Build out your EC profile and your essays.**
 - Effect will be strongest for seniors, but applies to all underclassmen. Make sure your GPA in your first semester of senior year is higher. If you're a junior, this means you should start researching your school list and put together a college list now. By June and July start working on your Personal Statement, supplemental essays and activities list.
- Colleges will be more understanding of weaker grades in current (spring semester) of junior year

Summary of Changes to Admissions

- More Important → essays, first semester senior year grades, coursework (i.e. level of courses taken, alumni interview)
- Less Important → second semester junior year grades, AP exams, recommendation letters, SAT & ACT
- Same Importance → Extracurricular Activities, Demonstrated Interest (where applicable such as in essays, visits, follow up, interviews), grades from all other periods (freshman through first semester junior year that were not affected by COVID)
- Recommendation Letters and Alumni interviews are used to assess your personality, ability to create a connection with adults and people. Normally, the teacher recommendations are weighted more heavily. The recommendation for families is to pick your teachers from junior year. Now, due to the year cut short with those teachers, those rec letters will be weighed less by colleges. Now, the alumni interview will be weighed more.

Will Admissions Get Easier?

- Not at selective schools → they will have less data, so admissions will get more random
- If you are aiming for selective colleges → apply to more colleges
- Yes, for nonselective schools. Test Optional will increase the number of qualified students on GPA and academics alone

College Research Alternatives

- Schools have formal information sessions online
- Informal vlogs on Youtube and Instagram (a biased sample, but it will give you a sense of what life is like)
- Independent research - app.collegevine.com
- College Vine will be hosting Q & A sessions with current students - planned to start next week.

College Visits - Demonstrated Interest

- College visit help you research and send a signal to the college of your interest
- Even at colleges who don't consider demonstrated interest in admissions, visiting is still considered valuable. Colleges tend to want to give more financial aid to students who seem more likely to enroll.
- Visit in the fall if you can (student will be back on campus), attend online events, reach out personally to colleges you plan on visiting after this initial craziness calms down. Let them know you were planning on visiting before the COVID-19 outbreak, but couldn't obviously. So, ask them to direct you to resources to learn more about their school? This is a good way of demonstrating interest.
- Reach out to the regional admissions officer for your part of the country → You can find this out on the admissions website at the university

Application Timeline

- Any changes to the deadlines are dependent on how long COVID outbreak continues
- If things wrap up by the beginning of the summer, expect a relatively normal timeline (e.g 11/1 and 1/1 deadlines)
- If things get further impacted in June or July, we expect colleges to push back early and regular application deadlines.

Choosing An Early Application.

- Schools can give you a boost if you apply early.
- If you were planning on relying on your junior year grades and Spring ECs to boost your profile, you should consider switching to ED II or EA II (December/January Deadlines vs October/November Deadlines). The reason is that you will get a full semester of senior year grades to boost your profile and to do some senior year extracurriculars or improve your ECs to boost your chances.
- If your profile is in good shape already and you can afford to go to the school regardless of financial circumstances, consider applying Early Decision (ED 1)

- We expect colleges to accept more students ED than normal, but give out smaller financial aid packages than normal

Writing An Essay About Covid

- Don't do it.
- Every single student in this country is going through this situation together → lots of students plan to write about it
- Even if you write an excellent, creative essay about the topic, admissions officers are going to be so tired of reading about it that it won't be as effective

Financial Aid

- Colleges will be much less generous with financial aid because of the impact on their endowment
- If you are lucky enough to be able to afford full pay even after everything that has happened, then consider applying to a few more "reach" schools
- Keep documentation of every financial change or expense that you faced due to Covid → It will be useful in the financial aid applications and negotiation process.

Extracurricular Activities

- EC Value Components:
 - Accomplishment level (leadership position, award, placing well in competitions)
 - Depth of commitment - How much of your free time are you giving to this activity? (hrs/week)
 - Breadth of commitment - How long have you been doing this continuously? (years?)
- Colleges get that you won't be able to maintain continuity or commitment with in-school clubs or stuff affected by COVID-19 (like volunteer work) → so redirect that passion elsewhere. You are only limited by your creativity here!
- You will stand out if you find ways to engage *DESPITE* COVID

Get Creative With ECs

- Reach out to school officials and see if there is anything you can do to help
- Do work for clubs that can be done offline or asynchronously (e.g. creating training materials or a resource hub)
- Take initiative to organize virtual meetings for clubs and organizations
- Work on self-driven projects (fix a car, take up wood-working, build a mini golf course in the backyard)
- Take an online course (e.g. [Yale's free, and most popular, course on The Science of Happiness](#) or Stanford's course on Bitcoin and Digital Currency.)
- Learn a new skill (coding, web design, modern marketing, sewing, knitting or pattern making, grow a microgreens garden indoors, composting)
- Study an unusual field of study (like permaculture, animation, astronomy)

- Create content or do research and write a paper on a subject that interests you and that you are passionate about
- Reach out to people in your community who are elderly, alone or isolated, and keep them (virtual) company → maybe they have a story, background, skill set that you can learn from.
- Organize a food pick up for donation to a senior food bank and continue it over the summer.
- Bonus - [Check out these Weird, But Cool College Majors](#)
- Start a Podcast
- Create a YouTube Channel and interview people aligned with your interests and focus of the channel. People have lots of time right now to do Zoom interviews :)
- Get entrepreneurial and start an online business
- Traditional options likely will not be readily available this year to students so you'll have to create your own opportunities based on need and location.

Impact on International Students

- Depends on the length of the outbreak (travel restrictions)
- Colleges may get more flexible with TOEFL, SAT or other requirements
- Colleges will not get more flexible about visa issues or finances. You may see capital controls occurring. So, convert your currency to US Dollars. Make sure you have enough US Dollars to pay full tuition at your school of choice.



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