



April 1, 2008

Elite Colleges Reporting Record Lows in Admission

By [ALAN FINDER](#)

The already crazed competition for admission to the nation's most prestigious universities and colleges became even more intense this year, with many logging record low acceptance rates.

[Harvard](#) College, for example, offered admission to only 7.1 percent of the 27,462 high school seniors who applied — or, put another way, it rejected 93 of every 100 applicants, many with extraordinary achievements, like a perfect score on one of the SAT exams. Yale College accepted 8.3 percent of its 22,813 applicants. Both rates were records.

Columbia College admitted 8.7 percent of its applicants, [Brown University](#) and [Dartmouth College](#) 13 percent, and Bowdoin College and [Georgetown University](#) 18 percent — also records.

“We love the people we admitted, but we also love a very large number of the people who we were not able to admit,” said William R. Fitzsimmons, dean of admissions and financial aid at Harvard College.

Some colleges said they placed more students on their waiting lists than in recent years, in part because of uncertainty over how many admitted students would decide to enroll. Harvard and Princeton stopped accepting students through early admission this academic year; that meant that more than 1,500 students who would have been admitted in December were likely to have applied to many elite schools in the regular round.

Many factors contributed to the tightening of the competition at the most selective colleges, admissions deans and high school counselors said, among them demographics. The number of high school graduates in the nation has grown each year over the last decade and a half, though demographers project that the figure will peak this year or next, which might reduce the competition a little.

Other factors were the ease of online applications, expanded financial aid packages, aggressive recruiting of a broader range of young people, and ambitious students' applying to ever more colleges.

The eight [Ivy League](#) colleges mailed acceptance and rejection letters on Monday to tens of thousands of applicants. Students could learn the fate of their applications online beginning at 5

p.m. on Monday, so three of the colleges said they were not ready to make public their admissions data. But the expectation was that they would also turn out to have been more competitive than ever.

“For the schools that are perceived to have the most competitive admissions processes, there has been this persistent rise in applications,” said Jeffrey Brenzel, dean of undergraduate admissions at [Yale](#).

Ten years ago, slightly fewer than 12,000 students applied to Yale, compared with the 22,813 who applied this year, Mr. Brenzel said. Yale’s admittance rate — the proportion of applicants offered admission — was nearly 18 percent in 1998, more than double the rate this year.

“We’re really happy with the class,” Mr. Brenzel said of the students offered admission. “On a day like today it’s also easy to be aware of the incredible number of fantastic students who you have to turn away, because you know they would be successful here.”

At Harvard, as at Yale, the applicant pool included an extraordinary number of academically gifted students. More than 2,500 of Harvard’s 27,462 applicants scored a perfect 800 on the SAT critical reading test, and 3,300 had 800 scores on the SAT math exam. More than 3,300 were ranked first in their high school class.

Admissions deans and high school guidance counselors said they spent hours at this time of year reminding students who had been put on waiting lists or rejected entirely that there were other excellent colleges on their lists — and that rejection was often about the overwhelming numbers, rather than their merits as individuals.

“I know why it matters so much, and I also don’t understand why it matters so much,” said William M. Shain, dean of admissions and financial aid at Bowdoin. “Where we went to college does not set us up for success or keep us away from it.”

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