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# Hoping to Attend Elite Colleges, Students Pay Up for Extra Edge

By Samuel G. Freedman

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Consider this situation. An ambitious and talented person, having worked extremely hard for a decade or more, sees a competitor suddenly performing at an inexplicably higher level. That first person comes to believe the second must be obtaining secret, unacknowledged help. So, rather than risk being left behind, he pays for the same stealthy assistance.

Such was the story of Barry Bonds, the baseball slugger who turned to steroids in the late 1990s, according to the detailed account in the book "Game of Shadows." As the authors, Mark Fainaru-Wada and Lance Williams, recount the events, Bonds made a Faustian bargain. be-

stead of reform.

"There's a victim consciousness," said Marilee Jones, the dean of admissions at MIT. "'It's not my fault, it's somebody else's fault.' I hear that over and over again. It's the parents' fault or the admissions officers' fault or the counselors' fault. What I say is, 'Look, it starts right here, right now, with me.' We really mean well and we think we're doing the right thing. It's hard for us to turn around and say that what we're doing is really hurting kids."

To be fair, the fanatical pursuit of admission characterizes primarily the most selective 50 to 100 colleges and universities; the national accep-

*"I hear that over and over*

"It's the same group of schools that are seen as the ticket to the promised land," said Jim Conroy, a counselor at New Trier High School in Winnetka, Ill., a suburb of Chicago. "I call them the 'Plus schools' — people like us. It's not about the quality of education, it's about the connections."

One result is a frenzied search for angles. Parents seek to have their children classified as learning disabled so they can receive unlimited time on the SAT. Children invent clubs so they can list themselves as president of something on college applications. Scott White, a guidance counselor at Montclair High School in that New Jersey suburb, recalls the envy of one student for a classmate with cancer because "he'll have a

## Police Log

*The following incidents were reported to the Cambridge or MIT Police between April 8 and 23. This summary does not include incidents such as suspicious activity, false alarms, general service calls, or medical shuttles.*

**April 8:** ATO (405 Memorial Dr.), 12:30 a.m., report taken of indecent assault and battery [offensive sexual contact]. TDC (372 Memorial Dr.), 11:30 a.m., wallet stolen.

**April 9:** Westgate Lot, 9 p.m., theft of car tires from vehicle.

**April 14:** Bldg. 56 (21 Ames St. Rear), 5:15 p.m., room broken into; damage to desk.

**April 15:** BTP (119 Bay State Rd.), 6:15 p.m., small electrical fire.

**April 16:** Baker House (362 Memorial Dr.), 11 p.m., 2 incidents of larceny of purses and wallets; 11:30 p.m., larceny of purse and camera.

**April 19:** NW61 (282 Mass. Ave.), 12:30 a.m., possible explosion and glass breaking from roof deck area.

**April 20:** Bldg. 7 (77 Mass. Ave.), 4:45 a.m., small fire in machine in architecture room; minor damage.

**April 23:** Student Center (84 Mass. Ave.), 6 p.m., Miguel Morales, homeless, arrested for outstanding warrant and resisting arrest.

**April 23:** E39 (264 Main St.), 5:45 p.m., attempted breaking and entering.

*Compiled by Marjan Rafat with assistance from other members of the MIT Crime Club.*