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WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU GET IN...and WHEN YOU DON'T!

By Dr. Heather Ricker-Gilbert

Remember last Fall? You worked hard in your classes; you asked your favorite teachers to write you recommendations; you sat through 3 ½ hours of the SAT; you wrote some great essays and you sent in all your applications, along with a lot of money, on time. You waited all winter and now you have been accepted to a number of colleges where you applied, and waitlisted or rejected by some others.

It is the time to take a deep breath and look at your choices. Successful college admission is about ending up with a choice with which you are happy. You may have been searching through the mail the past few weeks looking for those large envelopes. You may be disappointed about not getting into a particular school you had your heart set on. But it is important to remember that it is not just about you or your qualifications. It is much more about what colleges call “enrollment management” and about the fact that more students are applying to colleges than ever before. It is true that there is a college for everyone. It is also true that there are many colleges and universities where you will thrive and be successful. So regain your confidence and move ahead with the choices you have. It is now your turn to decide.

As a college admissions advisor, let me suggest several actions you may take to help you with your decision making:

- 1. Make a list of the pros and cons of each school to which you have been offered admission. Consider location, academic majors, size, the type of students who go there, the political climate, etc. While making this list, talk to anyone you know who currently attends or has graduated from the**

colleges you are considering. They will be glad to share their impressions and experiences with you.

2. **If you think you have decided upon a major, learn as much as you can about what each college offers in the field you have selected. How many and what kind of courses are offered? How many full-time faculty are in the department along with the number of part-time faculty? Do the schools you are considering offer you a variety of other academic choices if you change your mind about a major?**
3. **Make sure you and your parents really understand the “aid packages” you have been offered by each school. Is a particular school offering you unsubsidized or subsidized Stafford loans? Is it offering you scholarships and grants or just loans? How much are you really getting, compared to the cost of tuition? Be sure you know what fees you will be charged in addition to tuition. For example, the University of Connecticut charges over \$1000.00 per semester in “fees.” Don’t forget that there are other costs besides tuition and fees that you will incur such as books, travel and recreation. Determine how you will afford these expenses. What if you no longer want to, or can play that sport for which you were offered a scholarship? Would you still want to be at that college? Could you still afford to be there?**
4. **Go visit again. It is important to try and attend the “open houses” and other events such as “overnights” that colleges have in the spring for their admitted students. If you can’t make these events try to go at another time this month. You may want to arrange to attend a class.**
5. **Be honest with yourself. Think about your own interests, values, and preferences as you make your decision. Where will you feel most comfortable and challenged? For example, if you have grown up in a small suburban town outside Hartford, a large urban campus in a distant state may look**

appealing and sound glamorous to you and your friends, but do you visualize yourself happy there six months from now? Conversely, a smaller rural college in the mountains may seem more to your liking now, but will it allow you to grow in the ways you want to in the next four years?

- 6. Once you have decided on a college, thank your teachers, your school counselor and other professionals who have helped you along the way, so they can celebrate with you as you look ahead to new experiences.**

You only have about a month to consider your decision since you will need to send in your deposit confirming your place in the freshman class at the college of your choice by May 1, 2009. Jay Mathews, the educational columnist for the *Washington Post*, writes in his book, Harvard Schmarvard, “The best college to attend is the one that looks like an adventure, a place that will take you where you have always wanted to go.” You may want to keep these words, and my suggestions, in mind as you make your decision. Good Luck!

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