

THAT WAS THE YEAR THAT WAS: COLLEGE ADMISSIONS IN 2017-2018

CURRENT TRENDS SESSION AT THE MARIST SUPER CONFERENCE

Each year at the AMC, the Current Trends Committee convenes a session at which we invite the participants to inveigh on the admissions year they had just experienced. At the Marist Super Conference in June, 2018, an over-flow crowd filled our meeting room at 8.30 a.m. to talk about the year that was. Here's a brief report on that session.

MANY ISSUES. The first thing to say is that we are in a complicated profession replete with complex issues. When asked to list on notecards the issues of greater concern, high school and independent counselors tended to focus on issues around managing expectations in an atmosphere of greater stress. Earlier (and earlier...and earlier...) deadlines; larger (too long) college lists, higher parental demands were frequently mentioned. They also reported, though, growing issues of communications clarity with the colleges: students' admissions and financial aid decisions unduly delayed; confusion about whether optional test scores were, for the most selective, really optional. These were among the issues noted.

Among the college representatives present, people were concerned about a greater and greater expectation that students could negotiate for merit money: was "merit for all" finally getting out of control? There were a variety of concerns about how colleges' applicant pools were changing (i.e. not in a direction they wanted to see): what could they do about this, what would their institution say about this, and was one's job in danger? Folks were having trouble discerning the size and the shape of their international applicant pool. One counselor voiced this comment which unfortunately accurately foretold the kind of year we are having in 18-19: "My year was crazy because my college closed and was acquired. Will that happen to the school where I work now?"

The discussion then moved into an examination of a few key issues.

MAY 1 was the first. There seems less common about the Common Reply Date than ever. College representatives are finding that more kids are depositing at more than one place without their counselors' knowledge. Counselors report that it seems that waitlists are growing longer because students are using double depositing and other techniques to try to "game" the

system. Financial aid extensions due to on-going negotiations clouds the issue all the more. College representatives find they are more uncertain than ever about how deep they can dip into their waitlist pools. Predicting student behavior is only getting more difficult. Counselors noted that college policies vary a great deal. Some welcome outreach from them; some don't. Some colleges update students weekly; others say nothing until weeks later.

EARLIER APPS, MULTIPLE APPS. Everyone agreed that more students are applying early (decision or action) each year and so, colleges are reporting larger earlier pools. Among the factors driving this seem to be early test dates (SAT in August), the ability to complete FAFSA earlier under the "prior prior" model, the perception that one must apply early because the colleges accept so many in the fall. School counselors said that they are getting more requests for college visits in spring to approach juniors. They also see fall travel wrapping up earlier as AO's are called back to the office to read. November college visits are down. Counselors voiced concerns about how first generation/socioeconomically underprivileged are dealing with this drive for kids to apply early. They find those students are at something of a disadvantage. Sometimes they just aren't ready to make an application in the fall. They need Regular Decision and colleges are making that prohibitively difficult. Counselors are concerned that restrictive Early Action is hurting students. They worry about the adverse impact of "demonstrated interest." Admissions reps asked counselors to remember a college's first order of business was to recruit a class and using early plans was a good way to approach that goal. The question was proffered as to whether it was true that students admitted Early Decision transfer out of a college at a higher rate? Data was requested.

FINANCIAL ISSUES. Counselor wondered out loud how to integrate "financial fit" into their discussions with families. Could the net price calculator be an asset in this instance? Folks said that the calculator's utility varied from college to college and that the calculator was only as good as the information that was entered. Folks are concerned that families saw college as an immediate expense, not something that can be managed over time. Many families struggle to afford college. They say they need more realistic information about the true cost of a college education, "all in".

This is a brief synopsis of a zesty and substantive dialogue among several dozen admissions and counseling professionals in June, 2018

Many thanks to Alyssa Frank, Jim Cristiano, and Kathy Strand for facilitating this session.

See you at the 2019 AMC at URI!