

YOUR JOURNEY TO COLLEGE

An Explanation of Admission Options



Colleges offer a number of application programs; often it is a combination of several. Approximately five hundred colleges, including many of the more selective, offer at least one of the early option programs.

Early Action

Early action is a process whereby a student can apply by a specified early application date to a school. This deadline is generally in November or December. The student is likely to receive an answer in January. Some colleges may have a later Early Action date and may also offer two separate dates for an Early Action application. This application process is non-binding, meaning that if the student is accepted to the college, they are not committed to attend that particular institution.

Students can typically apply to a number of Early Action programs and there are advantages to this type of application process. The student is seen as organized and proactive and it is noted that the student has given thought to applying to this particular college. The student receives an answer earlier in senior year, typically in January, and this alleviates some anxiety. Depending upon the institution, they may accept a higher percentage of students from this pool – some colleges may and others may not. It is also important to ascertain whether or not students that are not accepted through this program are placed in the Regular Decision pool.

There are some colleges that offer Early Action but may attach stipulations to utilizing this program. For example, they may call their program “Restrictive Early Action” or “Single Choice Early Action”. It is important to find out what the Early Action term means at that particular institution. Typically, the college will place restrictions on how a student applies to other colleges, even though their program is non-binding. For example, they may specify that you cannot apply “Early Decision” or “Early Action” to other schools. This is important to know as your application may be invalidated if you do not adhere to their policy specifications.

Some students may find that they are not able to apply Early Action to a school if they have to take or re-take SAT/ACT tests and need more time to raise scores. Another reason could be that their

application is not ready and they will be rushing to complete the application if they try to submit by an early action deadline. Other students may want senior year grades to be taken into account and as a result will apply later in the year.

It is a personal decision and the student needs to investigate what that application process means at a particular institution. Generally speaking, if a student is organized and has done their research, applying Early Action to colleges that offer this program gives them advantages in the process.

Early Decision

Early Decision is an application option at certain schools and a student can apply under this program to only one institution, as it is a binding commitment. If a student is accepted, they have committed to attend this particular school and to withdraw all other applications. The application process begins early in senior year, typically in October through November.

This type of application program has certain advantages. The colleges typically admit a higher percentage of students from this applicant pool and if accepted, the student knows early in senior year, possibly by January, where they will attend. Students can apply to other institutions at the same time but of course, not to another Early Decision program. Again, it is important to review the restrictions, if any, placed upon students applying to Early Action programs at the same time. This process will require a parent's signature and school counselor's as well. Students applying for financial aid must adhere to the institution's Early Decision aid application deadlines.

There are several disadvantages to this application program. Students are committed, early in senior year, to attend a particular college if admitted. Senior year is a time of great personal growth and a student may change their mind as a result of this or from the research and visits they complete in senior year. Another disadvantage is that students are unable to compare financial aid packages and they should be certain that they can afford the tuition, room & board and fees that this college requires. The college may offer less grants or scholarship money, as they know the student has already committed to attend. Some institutions allow a student to withdraw their acceptance if the college does not meet their financial needs. Be aware that meeting the financial need may encompass substantial loan packages though.

Only a student who can make a deliberate and well-thought out choice should apply using this type of program. It is important to think carefully about the option to apply Early Decision to a college, but if the student has been focused on one particular school for some time and has the financial means to attend, it could be the right choice.

Deferral

Some institutions may “defer” a student who applied to one of these early programs and place them in the Regular Decision pool. This means that the applicant is now placed in this pool for reconsideration later in the year. It is important to forward senior year grades and any additional accomplishments/accolades to the Admissions Office in this case. Send mid year grades if strong, updated SAT/ACT testing scores, if improved, and ask your school counselor to write an additional letter to send with these documents. Communicate your interest with an Admissions contact, meet with representatives visiting your school or area and set up an interview if it is offered. Revisit the campus and meet with faculty. Send a new letter of recommendation from a teacher that could speak to your fit for that particular school. Continue to show interest but have a back-up plan.

Regular Decision

Colleges that offer a Regular Decision application process specify a date where all application materials are due, which typically is December through March 1st. The Admissions Office will not start to review materials until this date. They may offer other application programs in conjunction with Regular Decision, such as Early Action or Early Decision. If the Regular Decision deadline is February 1st, a student’s materials will not be reviewed until that date. Rushing to submit materials in October does not serve any purpose. It is better to take time to do an outstanding job on the application and submit at least several weeks before the deadline to ensure all supporting materials are received in a timely fashion. Students applying to Regular Decision programs can expect to receive an answer in early to mid March.

Rolling Admissions

Colleges with Rolling Admissions programs accept applications as they arrive and review them after all information is received. Students can expect to receive an answer from the college approximately six to eight weeks after their application file is complete. Many public and private institutions offer this program, in addition to the other programs reviewed. It is advantageous to apply to these programs early in senior year as programs and quotas fill up quickly. Some students mistakenly believe that, because a school does not specify a deadline, they can wait until late in senior year to apply to this school and they will be granted admission. This is never true-as freshman programs fill up quickly and although a student may meet or exceed admission requirements, there may not be room to admit the student. Applying to these programs early in senior year gives the student a better chance of receiving scholarship consideration as well.

Wait List

The Wait List is an admission's decision used by institutions to protect against under enrollment of their freshman class. Students placed on the Wait List have been found to meet the criteria specified by the college but have not been granted acceptance at this time. The colleges will request the student to communicate with them to let them know if the student is still interested in attending the institution and they will notify the student, possibly in July, if they have been accepted. The student must make other arrangements and place a deposit to another school by May 1st, the National Reply Date. The student cannot assume they will be granted admission to the Wait List school. The student should communicate their interest by sending in a letter of intention and supplying any updated information that may improve their chance for admission. The student should expect to hear by August 1st. The student should be provided with past Wait List history – this will help them ascertain their chances of being admitted from the Wait List to that particular college.

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