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100% increase in applications since 2003 (9,000 applications) so essays much more important now, for liberal arts at least (18,000 applications last year). Spike in the number of college-age students.

Yield Rate: the % of students who accept an offer and enroll. The Ivy League takes over half their admitted students in early decision (Cornell takes fewer early decision) to increase the Yield Rate.

Cornell supplement: This is much more important than the common application personal statement so don't blow it off and polish only the Common App essay. The 100-word essay is particularly vital. Even emails are kept and compared to essay to ensure your writing is your own, and not polished by others. Remember you are writing to people who are middle-aged, your parents' ages, so be careful of references. Think of the addendum portion of the application as a chance for ³extra credit.² A nice way to provide more information, to sell yourself.

Apply to six to eight so that you have the time to research the schools and you know the school is a good fit for you, what classes you might like to take, how you'd use both sides of your brain. What extra curriculars interest you as a follow-up to academic interests (e.g. volunteering at after-school programs). If your school provides a list of the schools you applied to on the back of your transcript, it serves as a red flag if you have applied to more than six or eight schools.

Admissions staff read 6,000 essays in a five-week period and only a handful are memorable; most are very similar so it's not bad to take a risk. Looking for kids they really want! Voice matters.

Avoid:

- pushing-through-the-pain sports essay
- mission trip, service trip to far-off lands, encountering poverty for the first time
- first-generation return to roots
- generic desire for school ³great faculty, research, stimulating program² problematic. Tailor to the college and show you have done your research, go beyond platitudes.

Favorite essays:

- hypnotizing cousin
- failing to learn to drive manual transmission (mother was in car; did fine when mother left)
- humiliation of wearing odd uniform for job (see first example, below; kept him in the pool)

Develop natural voice, don't worry about SAT words, looking for personality. ³No spark² cuts you out of the pool. Tell in your essay that you have met alumni, emailed faculty to gather information. You can find so much about schools on the web, and they expect you to do this.

Examples of outstanding essays:

- Boy in odd uniform. Conveys personality, NO SAT WORDS, clear parallel to life ³ready to wear the next suit that comes my way.² Vivid details (Febreeze spray, green tights)
- Soccer w/native Americans in BC. Set scene beautifully, NO SAT WORDS, sailing around world is in background, implicit.

Final paragraph links skills, attitudes to world at large

- Resilience following death of mother due to breast cancer, centered on family dinner table seating and what her mother would have wanted. Dinner table values focus is what made this special.
- Cross country college trip that reveals curiosity about social mores (class divide, Crackerbarrel, Peachtree Street) and uses vivid details.
- I hate farm work essay family values, NO SAT WORDS, desire to maintain values in succeeding generations despite no desire to return to the farm.

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