

College Plaza

where college is a *verb*

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become*

Deciding Which College To Attend

After all your hard work, you will eventually begin to hear back from the colleges to which you have applied. You may have heard that a thick envelope means ‘yes’ and a thin one means ‘no.’ This is sometimes, though not always, the case – indeed, more and more colleges are notifying students of their admissions decisions electronically. But before you open any envelope or click any email from a college admissions office, remind yourself that *you are more than the message of its contents*.

That is worth repeating. *You are more than the message of its contents*.

You are a grandson, a daughter, a cousin, a brother, a friend. You are a hardworking student. You are a vital, active member of your high school community. You are a dancer, a soccer player, a Spirit Day organizer, a day care center assistant, an activist. Whatever contents a single college admissions envelope may hold, this is still true. That said, it is exciting to receive acceptance letters, painful to receive denial letters and can feel confusing to receive a waitlist letter. A few words on each-

Accept This one is clear. It means you have been accepted and this college or university hopes you decide to attend. Recognizing that this is a decision you must make, you have time to decide (usually, about a month) unless you have completed an early decision application.

Deny This one is also quite clear. It means that you have not been admitted. Given the number of high school students who compete for the same spots, not all students are admitted. Simple as that. What is not so simple is the emotion that comes from this, especially when the letter is a polite but brief form letter, giving no indication of why you were denied. Some students recommend assuming from the get go that you will *not* be

admitted to all of the colleges to which they apply, so that when a denial letter comes, it will not be so painful. Some high schools have even invited students to bring in their denial letters to post on a massive wall – a reminder to students that they are not alone in this moment!

Waitlist This means that you have not yet been admitted, but may still be at a later date. Each year, colleges and universities accept more students than wind up actually entering their first year class, taking into account that students might select another college. With this response, remain hopeful, but also realistic – and thus, continue to weigh your other college options. If you are placed on the waitlist, plan to communicate with your College Counselor. It may be appropriate to write your admissions representative to reinforce your strong interest and to submit any supplemental materials that might be helpful. Similarly, if you have decided you wish to attend another college, it is important to inform the college to which you have been waitlisted to let them know so your waitlist spot can be freed up for someone else.

Once you hear back from your colleges & universities, it is important that you:

1. Share the news with your family;
2. Update your College Counselor;
3. If accepted, write to your admissions representative to thank him/her;
4. Share your news with teachers, mentors etc. who have written letters of recommendation for you.

How to Decide?

Once you have heard back from the colleges to which you applied, it is essential that you review the financial aid package they have provided to you. **ASK QUESTIONS** to ensure that you and your family are clear on the specific costs that you will be required to cover.

It may be that your choice is clear: you have been admitted to the college you believe best for you given your personal, academic and financial needs and goals. And it may be that your choice is not so clear, as you recognize the advantages and limitations of several options. If at all possible, we highly recommend that you work with each college admissions office to plan a *visit to the campus*, whether through a formal weekend

program for accepted students or on an individual basis. Many colleges cover all/part of the cost for such visits.

As you consider your options, here are some questions to consider and talk through with your family and college advisors —

1. **Personal intuition:** *Based on all I know about this particular college, what does my heart/instinct/gut tell me about whether it is the right match?*
2. **Family:** *To what extent will attending this college allow me to honor my parents/family hopes and goals for me?*
3. **Academic opportunities:** *Will this college allow me to successfully pursue my central academic interests and career planning goals?*
4. **Community:** *Will this community support me as an individual beyond my classes through extracurricular areas of interest as well as through the resources I need to be successful?*
5. **Location:** *Is this college in an area of the state/country of interest to me and an environment (urban, rural etc.) that will both nurture and challenge me?*
6. **Financial Realities:** *What kind of financial aid package has this college offered and will this allow me to successfully pursue my studies without unnecessary financial stress and hardship?*

In addition....

1. A college planning decision presently weighing on me is (be as specific as possible)...
2. What is hard about making this decision is....
3. What is most important to me no matter what I decide to do is....
4. Possible steps I might take to make this decision...

5. The information and/or guidance I need to take these steps...