

# COMMON COLLEGE MYTHS

Thanks to all of the IECA consultants who sent in their favorite college myths.

Next Issue: School Myths

**MYTH:** Only students with high GPAs receive merit awards.

**REALITY:** Students with average GPAs may receive merit awards at a number of colleges and universities.

**MYTH:** Only families who have demonstrated need should fill out the FAFSA.

**REALITY:** Every family should complete the FAFSA. There is no automatic income level cut-off for financial aid eligibility. This is because a variety of factors, in combination with family income, are used to determine a student's financial need. The only sure way to determine whether a family is eligible for need-based financial aid is to file the FAFSA. The likelihood of being eligible for some form of financial aid may be better than the family thinks.

*Marilyn Emerson (NY)*

**MYTH:** Because the coach says he/she wants me, I'm guaranteed an acceptance.

**REALITY:** I've seen many clients dangled along being told that they have been "vetted" through the admission office liaison to the athletic department and "all is fine." And then, sometimes because a coach finds a "better" player for the position, or the admission office liaison and the admission office aren't on the same page, or the coach, who has claimed that the kid is the coaches' "number one" recruit, doesn't have enough clout with the admission office, the student gets either a call, or a rejection letter and nothing from the coach.

**MYTH:** Freshman year grades in high school don't count toward college admission.

**REALITY:** Every year counts towards a student's overall GPA.

**MYTH:** Going to a pre-college summer school at the college I want to attend gives me a leg up in the admission process.

**REALITY:** At many summer school programs the faculty are not winter faculty and come from other colleges and universities, so they have absolutely no "sway" in the admission process.

*Michael Spence (MA)*



**MYTH:** The SAT test in January is easier than any other SAT test.

**REALITY:** A statistical process called "equating" ensures that a score for a test taken on one date or at one place is equivalent to a score for a test taken on another date.

*Peggy Baker (PA)*

**MYTH:** If you apply to enough Ivy League schools, one of them is bound to admit you. (Like the Disney song, "Wishing will make it so...")

**REALITY:** Instead, start with places that are a good fit, where you are fairly confident you'll be admitted. Then add other schools that interest you. Even if some of them are long shots, you lose nothing by trying. The

worst that can happen besides a bruised ego is getting a "no" on classy letterhead.

**MYTH:** The secret is packaging yourself, meaning portraying yourself as somebody you aren't.

**REALITY:** Wrong! Colleges, like the rest of us, have a pretty good nose for bovine by-product and an inconsistent picture, where program, grades, essays, and recommendations don't mesh can really hurt a student. Instead, show your best self, your unique self. Colleges fall in love with real people, not manila folders.

**MYTH:** If I've heard of the college, it must be good. If everybody says 'ooh' and 'aah' every time the name is mentioned, that's the place to strive for.

**REALITY:** In fact, the place to start is by defining what you really want from a college. Then focus on places that meet those criteria. If a college also happens to be prestigious, that's a nice bonus.

*Dodge Johnson (PA)*

**MYTH:** If an applicant requires need-based financial aid, she cannot apply to any school under the binding Early Decision plan.

**REALITY:** A major disadvantage to applying Early Decision when requiring need-based financial aid is that the applicant will not be able to compare financial aid offers from different schools. Since schools do package aid differently, which can include the total amount and its distribution between loans and grants, depending on institutional priorities, policies and more, being able to compare different offers can be very important.

On the other hand, many schools will grant the identical amount of need-based financial

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aid to an applicant whether or not she applies to that school under regular decision or early decision.

*Jane Hoffman (NY), IECA Associate Member*

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**MYTH:** Private colleges are more expensive to attend than public colleges.

**REALITY:** Many private colleges have endowments (even in this economy) that allow them to provide grants/scholarships which reduce the “sticker price,” sometimes equal to or lower than the price of a public college. This year tuition rates rose at 6.5% at public colleges as opposed to 5.9% at private colleges, due to cutbacks in state funding.

*Judy Zodda (MA) and Lisa Temkin (IL), IECA Associate Member*

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**MYTH:** Applying Early Decision always means you have a better chance of getting in.

**FACT:** Applying Early Decision does not always help your chances of getting into a school. While colleges and universities do like to hear that you are willing to commit yourself to them through that signed agreement, they are still going to save those spaces for the top performing candidates and wait to see who else applies later to fill the class. That means that if you apply early to a reach school, you are still likely to be deferred or even rejected. Then you have wasted your one chance to use that Early Decision. The best way to use Early Decision to your advantage is when you are right on the line as a candidate and that commitment can tip you over the edge. For example, a “hard target” school. And students should never apply early unless they are certain they want to attend.

**MYTH:** The more recommendations I have, the better I will look.

**FACT:** The phrase goes something like this: “the thicker the folder, the thicker the child.” What are you trying to compensate for by adding so many recommendations? What is your candidacy missing and how can you show yourself more completely on your own merits? One or two extra recommendations is debatably okay, as long as the recommender knows you well and can share something that no one else would otherwise be able to say about you.

**MYTH:** The more activities I have on my resume, the better I will look.

**FACT:** The days of the “well-rounded” student with a laundry list of (meaningless) activities under his/her belt since freshman year

are over. Now colleges are looking to round out their classes with passionate, focused individuals who have delved deeply into one or two areas of genuine interest and shown leadership in those areas.

**MYTH:** A really strong essay will fix any problems with my academic profile (poor grades or SAT scores).

**FACT:** Grades are always the best indicator of who does or does not get accepted to a school. SAT scores count more or less at different schools. While good writing is important, it will not make up for poor academic performance. In fact, colleges might wonder why such a good writer performed so poorly and will presume that you will continue that trend at their school.

**MYTH:** My classmate got in and he/she had worse grades/profile than I did, so I’ll definitely get in!

**FACT:** No matter how much you think you know about your friend, you don’t have all the information. The fact is, you have no idea why that friend got into a given school. Even if you saw every detail of his/her application, read the essay, saw the transcript, and sat in on their interview with the college admissions representative, there is no way to know what that college was looking for in a given year and who else was applying/competing for spots. Every year is different, and every candidate is different.

*Hilary Rediker (NJ)*

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**MYTH:** You won’t be accepted if you file for financial aid.

**FACT:** In many schools, the financial aid decision is made separately for admissions, ensuring one’s ability to pay does not influence the admission decision.

*Loredana M. Harrison (MA)*

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**MYTH:** The goal of the college search process is to get into the “best,” most select school. Or, if I don’t go to one of these sexy 20 colleges, my life is over.

**REALITY:** The goal of the college search process is to find the best fit for a student’s style of learning, personality and financial needs.

*Lisa Bleich (NJ) and Sue Bigg (IL)*

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