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Getting into U.S. Universities: How U.S. Colleges and Universities Manage Selective Admission

MEET THE EXPERTS CONFERENCE 2008
Vienna, Austria
November 20, 2008

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TOPICS

- Overview
- Competition for Admission
- **Managing Selective Admission**
 - Undergraduate level
 - Graduate level
- Resources

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Overview

- No U.S. national system for recruitment or admission of students
- No national entrance exam
- Each institution establishes its own recruitment and admissions process, policies, and standards
- Increased competition at both undergraduate and graduate levels for admission and financial aid

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Competition On The Rise

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Undergraduate

Colleges reported an increase in number of applications for 2007

- Record number of applications reported across the country
- Number of high school graduates will peak at 3.33 million in 2008-09
- Anticipated that total college enrollment will increase at least through 2016

Overall acceptance rate remains unchanged over the past decade—68.3%

- 4-year public institutions—70.4% average acceptance rate
- 4-year private institutions—67.4 average acceptance rate
- will vary depending on institution and number of applications received

Taken from the NACAC State of College Admission 2008 Report (National Association for College Admission Counseling)

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Graduate

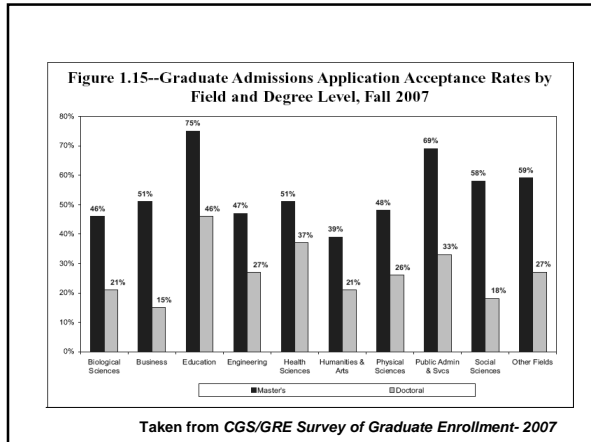
1.4 million graduate applications in 2007

- strong competition for seats, especially at the PhD level
- strong competition for money

45% application acceptance rate

- varies greatly by institution, field of study, and degree
 - Rates ranged from a low of 15% for doctoral programs in business to a high of 75% for master's programs in education
- competition at the doctoral level is much higher
 - 55% acceptance rate at the master's level
 - 25% acceptance rate at the doctoral level

Taken from CGS/GRE Survey of Graduate Enrollment- 2007 (Council of Graduate Schools/Graduate Record Exam)



Managing Selective Admissions

Selectivity

Institutions tend to be categorized as

- Highly selective
- Competitive
- Less selective
- Open admission

Undergraduate

Process is centralized in the admissions office

- **Recruitment**
 - aggressively target desired populations
- **Review of applications**
 - top factors: grades in college prep courses, strength of curriculum, standardized test scores, overall grade point average (GPA)
- **Admission decisions and financial aid offers**
 - generally admitted to the institution and not to a specific department
 - financial aid based on merit and/or need
- **Follow-up to turn 'admit' into 'enrolled'**
 - Leverage admission, generally with aid packages

Highly Selective and Competitive Undergraduate Institutions

- Tend to have earlier application deadlines
- Tend to offer early admission programs such as 'early decision' or 'early action'
- Additional factors weighed heavily in admission consideration
 - personal essay
 - counselor and teacher recommendations
 - extracurricular activities, including community and leadership activities, along with any work experience
 - test scores, especially subject test scores

Less Selective

- May have 'rolling admissions'
 - admission decisions are made as applications come in
 - admissions is kept open until classes begin
- May only require proof of high school graduation
 - often called 'open admissions'
- Frequently have competency exams that students must take prior to registering

Specialized programs at both selective and less selective

- can meet admission requirements to be admitted to the institution but not meet requirements for a specialized program
 - for example, fine arts, nursing, engineering and sciences, honors programs

College Ratings of the Importance of Various Factors In the Admissions Decision: Fall 2007

	Considerable	Moderate	Limited	None
Grades in college prep	79.9%	14.4%	2.9%	2.7%
Strength of curriculum	63.8	23.9	8.0	4.3
Admission test scores	58.5	30.9	8.0	2.7
Grades in all courses	51.6	40.1	6.1	2.1
Essay or writing sample	25.8	37.9	19.9	16.4
Class rank	23.4	43.8	23.4	9.4
Demonstrated interest	22.0	30.3	23.9	23.9
Counselor recommendation	21.1	40.4	28.1	10.4
Teacher recommendation	20.8	40.0	28.6	10.5
Interview	10.8	23.7	35.8	29.8
Subject test scores (AP, IB)	6.8	32.2	34.9	26.2
Extracurricular activities	6.5	45.7	32.8	15.1
SAT II scores	6.2	13.8	28.2	51.8
State graduation exam scores	4.4	13.7	28.7	53.3
Work	1.9	24.2	46.8	27.2

Taken from the NACAC State of College Admission 2008 Report

Undergraduate Exams

Common Entrance Examinations

- **SAT** (Scholastic Assessment Test) measures verbal and mathematical abilities
 - **SAT Subject Exams** (formerly SAT II)
- **ACT** (American College Testing Program) comparable to SAT, more subject oriented

In addition for international students

- **TOEFL** (Test of English as a Foreign Language) usually required at ALL institutions for non-native speakers of English
- **IELTS** (International English Language Testing System) frequently accepted in lieu of TOEFL

Graduate

Processes are collaborative but decentralized

- **Recruitment**
 - generally at department level or international affairs/programs level
- **Review of applications**
 - generally layered levels of review
- **Final admission decisions**
 - admitted to a department and frequently a specialization
 - generally at the graduate school level but can occur at department level, especially professional fields
- **Follow-up to turn 'admit' into 'enrolled'**
 - generally handled at the department level

Graduate

Collaborative levels of admission and financial aid decisions

- **Departments recommended**
 - focus on preparation, talent, expertise
 - focus on academic fit
- **Graduate schools approve and admit**
 - focus on preparation, policy and budget
 - ensure a fair and equitable process
- **Admissions offices conduct technical review**
 - focus on credentials and requirements
 - ascertain if minimum requirements met

Graduate Admission Requirements

Vary greatly

- application deadlines
- proof of finances
- tests & minimum scores—*GRE, TOEFL, and GMAT*
- GPA (grade point average)
- Work and writing samples or portfolio requirements
- interviews or auditions
- work experience

Vary from institution to institution

Vary within different programs in institution

- sometimes by specialization within the same program

Vary by field of study

- business weighs work experience and essays
- law weighs prior institutions attended
- theoretical fields in sciences and humanities weigh prior academic and research experience

Vary from year-to-year

Factors Weighed

Preparation for study in a specific field

- Content of undergraduate curriculum and evidence of degree of mastery
 - *transcripts*
- Evidence of higher order reasoning/ cognitive skills, ability to use content knowledge acquired, potential to conduct research/ advanced study
 - *research projects, standardized test scores, portfolios, letters of recommendation, interviews*

Personality and leadership skills

- Evidence of non-cognitive skills supportive of success in graduate programs (e.g. motivation, persistence, leadership)
 - *letters of recommendation, interviews, community service, work background*

Quality of prior institutions attended

- Evidence of accreditation or other measure of quality assurance
 - *addresses quality of prior education*
 - *prior experience with institution*

Taken from presentations prepared by John Yopp, University of Kentucky

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Graduate Exams

Common Entrance Examinations

- **GRE General** (*Graduate Record Exam*)
 - **GRE Subject Exams**
 - Biochemistry, Cell & Molecular Biology, Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Literature in English, Mathematics, Physics, and Psychology
- **GMAT** (*Graduate Management Admission Test*)

In addition for International Students

- **TOEFL**
- **IELTS**

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Resources

American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) – information on credential evaluation -- www.aacrao.org

American Association of Community Colleges (AACCC) – www.aacc.nche.edu

Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) – www.cgsnet.org

- Information grad enrollments & trends: <http://www.cgsnet.org/VirtualCenterResearch/index.htm>

Education USA – wealth information about studying in the U.S.
<http://educationusa.state.gov>

Institute of International Education (IIE) – www.iie.org

- Open Doors Annual Report on international student mobility trends
<http://opendoors.iienetwork.org>

National Association for College Admission Counselors (NACAC) – undergraduate information -- www.nacacnet.org

NAFSA: Association of International Educators— www.nafsa.org

National Association of Graduate Admissions Professionals (NAGAP)— www.nagap.org

National Center for Education Statistics/Integrated Postsecondary Education Data— <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds>

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Questions or Comments?