

College Bound

ISSUES & TRENDS FOR THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS ADVISOR

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Round-up of Summer News

Higher Ed Act Renewed

CONGRESS passed the Higher Education Act this summer, five years after the old act expired. Both branches of Congress voted on the bill, it went through reconciliation of discrepancies between the House and Senate versions, and in August was signed by President Bush. Congress began working on the 1,158-page HEA five years ago and had extended the old act 14 times. The HEA sets national higher education policy for the next five years.

Some Highlights

Included in the HEA are dozens of new grant programs for colleges and hundreds of new reporting requirements for colleges, according to an analysis of the legislation by *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. HEA also creates a national “watch list” of the most expensive colleges; stops the Department of Education from mandating how colleges measure student learning; punishes states that fail to increase spending on higher education by withholding federal College Access Challenge Grant funds; requires a tougher crackdown by colleges on students who illegally share music and video files; and makes it easier for for-profit colleges to award federal financial aid.

Among other provisions, HEA expands eligibility for Academic Competitiveness and Smart Grants for low-income, high-achieving students who need to supplement their Pell Grants, and makes them available to part-time students.

Critics Focus on Issues Missed

But some critics feel Congress ducked some tough issues such as how to really control spiraling tuition and high levels of student debt, particularly from private loans that carry higher rates and less attractive repayment terms.

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings congratulated Congress, but added that “while the legislation takes some positive steps forward, it fails to create the necessary reforms in accessibility and affordability, and it falls short on strengthening accountability.” Spellings also denounced the “more than 60 new, costly, and duplicative programs.”

NATIONAL TEST RESULTS

ACT Tests Flat. A record 1.42 million students took the ACT this year, a 9 percent increase, including all high school graduates in Colorado, Illinois and Michigan. That represents about 43 percent of all 2008 U.S. high school graduates. But the percent of grads meeting “ACT College Readiness Benchmarks” remained basically the same. Last year, ACT test takers posted an average score of 21.2. This year the average was 21.1.

Only 43 percent of the ACT-tested 2008 high school graduates met or surpassed the “ACT’s College Readiness Benchmarks;” 53 percent did so in reading, just 28 percent did so in science, while 68 percent met or exceeded the benchmarks in English. And only 22 percent met or surpassed the benchmarks in all four subjects, down 1 percent from last year. The benchmarks are meant to predict that a student will be able to do “C” or better in college classes.

The number of African Americans taking the test increased by 17 percent this year, while the number of Hispanic students taking the test rose by 23 percent. The Hispanic average score was 18.7. The average for African American test scores was 16.9.

The ACT said results again proved that more students need to take challenging college-prep classes. It found that 50 percent of test-takers

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COUNSELOR’S CORNER

Counseling in the New Millennium

AS THE LAST CENTURY YIELDED to the new, my son joked that I would need new strategies to address “College Counseling for the New Millennium.” He has proven right. Changing times and record numbers of applications have called for different strategies to help families navigate the college application journey.

1. We Now Plan for High School. A new phase of college counseling has developed. It is no longer just enough for students to do well in high school. Students must now select rigorous courses, Advanced Placement, Honors or advanced courses. To be competitive today, students must do well *and* challenge themselves.

2. Interests Need Cultivating. While doing well academically, students increasingly need to not only choose an interest, but cultivate it. Colleges seek students who have defined their interests and then brought them to high levels of accomplishment. Thus, students need to take an interest of theirs outside of school and bring it into their school community. Last year, for example, a young man did an internship in a third world country studying the economy with a branch of government. He then addressed the school about his experience and wrote a paper which won a school award. This endeavor was impressive because his first interest in this

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INSIDE

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- New Curricula
- and News You Can Use (including Colleges Going Green)

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ROUNDUP OF SUMMER NEWS

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who took the core curriculum met the benchmark in math. And the same proved true for other areas. For results see: www.act.org.

SAT Scores “Stable.” During the last week of August, the College Board announced results for its national tests. Here, too, a record number of students, 1.5 million, took the test, “with a higher percentage of first-generation students than last year and a high rate of minority student participation,” said the College Board. This totaled an 8 percent increase from five years ago and nearly 30 percent increase from 10 years ago.

Among the highlights: Females narrowed the performance gap with males in critical reading, and outperformed males on the writing section. Females “continue to form a majority of test-takers among all ethnic groups,” said the College Board, by 13 points. And, according to the College Board, “The SAT’s writing section has proven to be the most predictive section of the test for determining first-year college” success.

For more info and a list of scores by states see www.collegeboard.com.

OTHER RECENT RESEARCH

Better SAT? A study of the first cohort to take the “new” SAT in 2005 and to finish its first year in college indicates that the “improved” test yielded about the same predictive results as the “old” SAT. The new third writing section, however, was slightly better at predicting college grades. The College Board, which administers the test, said the study proved that the SAT remains an “excellent predictor” of success in college. The test also is a slightly better predictor than high school grade-point average of college grades.

But the new writing section has prompted various responses. A study by *The Chronicle of Higher Education* found that 32 percent of the schools that use the new SAT writing section said it had “no influence” on whether they admitted a student, while 17 percent said it had “great influence.” Critics point out that the entire test may be a good predictor for white males, but it still under predicts the college performance of women and minority students. And they point out the new test is 45 minutes longer and about \$15 more expensive than the old test.

ACT Test Prep Too Late. It’s a common student and parent complaint; too much time devoted to test prep. Now a new study from the U. of Chicago’s Consortium on Chicago School Research has reached a similar conclusion.

“Students are training for the ACT in a last-minute sprint focused on test practice, when the ACT requires years of hard work develop-

Scholarship Scoops

Help for Hearing Impaired. Rochester Institute of Technology in New York has announced the Warren R. Goldmann Endowed Scholarship to help students with hearing loss to succeed in college. To be eligible, a student must be a deaf or hard-of-hearing National Technical Institute for the Deaf student who has financial need, is majoring in an undergraduate science, technology or mathematics program at RIT and is expected to earn at least a 2.9 grade-point-average.

AXA Achievers. For the seventh year, *U.S. News & World Report* and AXA Foundation will award scholarships to students throughout the nation. Fifty-two students, one from each state plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, will be selected to receive one-time scholarship awards of \$10,000 each; 10 students will be selected as national winners from the pool of 52, earning an additional scholarship of \$15,000 and the offer of an AXA internship. Qualified candidates will have demonstrated drive and determination to succeed, the ability to thrive in a college environment, and respect for self, family and community. Applications are available at <http://www.axa-achievement.com/>. *Deadline:* December 15.

Cash for College. A \$2 million college scholarship for students at two Chicago high schools has been launched with a partnership between JPMorgan Chase and the Chicago Public Schools. Students can earn up to \$2,500 a year based on attendance, grade-point average and test scores. The two target schools have suffered from declining attendance, test scores and graduation rates.

Second Annual Teen Scholarship. The Alzheimer Foundation said it was “inundated” with scholarship applications last year from college-bound students who had the Alzheimer disease in their families or communities. So it is offering another \$5,000 scholarship this year. Students write a 1,200-word essay about the impact of the disease on their own lives. *Deadline:* February 15, 2009. See www.afa-teens.org. ■

ing college-level skills,” the lead author of the report told *The University of Chicago Chronicle*. “Students are very motivated to do well on the ACT, so they put a lot of effort into test prep, thinking it will raise their scores,” she said. But, “teachers need to channel this energy into what really matters for the ACT, students doing high-quality work in their courses.”

In fact, the study, “From High School to the Future: ACT Preparation—Too Much, Too Late,” found that ACT scores were actually a little lower in schools where 11th-grade teachers spent at least 40 percent of their time on

test prep, compared to schools where teachers devoted less than 20 percent of the class time on test prep.

New 8th Grade PSAT Exam. According to a report in *The Los Angeles Times* in August, the College Board “plans to introduce an eighth-grade college assessment exam in 2010.” The test would be voluntary, according to the report, “tailored” to eighth-graders and reinforce the need for students to take rigorous courses in high school. The *LA Times* noted that critics worry it pushes the pressure of applying to college into the middle grades.

NEW TEST AIDS

Speaking of tests...Barron’s released a bevy of new test aids:

Flashcards: *AP Calculus*, David Bock; 300-plus flashcards covering equations, formulas, functions, derivatives, and more; definitions on reverse side of each card; ISBN-13 978-0-7641-9421-4; \$18.99.

• *AP Chemistry*, Neil D. Jespersen, 500 flashcards to cover AP Chemistry test topics; explanations and chemical equations on reverse side; ISBN-13 978-0-7641-6116-2; \$18.99.

• *AP Statistics*, Martin Sternstein; 400 flashcards covering exploratory analysis, planning a study, probability, statistical inference; explanations on reverse side; ISBN-13 978-0-7641-9410-8; \$18.99.

Study Guides. *AP Art History*, Jon Nici; two full-length model tests with answer keys, diagnostic charts, answer explanations and model essay responses; 500 works of art described with side-by-side images; ISBN-13 978-0-7641-9463-4; \$29.99.

• *AP Human Geography*, 2nd edition, Meredith Marsh and Peter S. Alagona; two full-length exams with answers explained; a detailed eight-chapter subject review covering all AP Human Geography topics; ISBN-13 978-0-7641-3817-1; \$16.99.

• *AP Italian Language and Culture*, Samuel Ghelli; two full-length practice exams with answer keys; grammar review and a list of Italian idioms; focus on all five parts of the AP exam: listening, reading, writing, culture and speaking; ISBN-13 978-0-7641-9368-2; \$26.99.

• *AP Spanish*, 6th edition, Alice G. Springer; two full-length practice exams on CD-ROM and two more in the manual; automatic scoring on CD-ROM exams; listening comprehension and added review on audio CDs; ISBN-13 978-0-7641-9405-4; \$34.99.

• *AP U.S. Government and Politics*, 5th edition, Curt Lader; two full-length practice exams with answers fully explained; a general overview of the test; study advice and test-taking tips; ISBN-13 978-0-7641-9404-7; \$29.99.

To order see www.barronseduc.com. ■

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country had been generated inside the classroom. His internship also linked to his interest in politics outside of class. His personal experience turned into a shared educational experience. One can cynically view this kind of "cultivation" as resume padding, and, of course, not every student needs to go abroad to demonstrate a genuine interest in a subject. But an outside experience expands a student's understanding of a world larger than self or school.

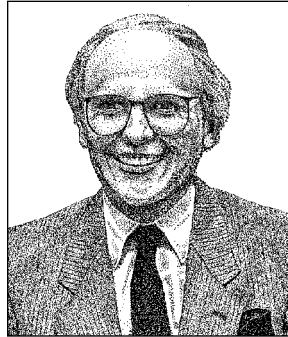
3. The New Focus on "Student Fit". A third aspect of New Millennium counseling is that students are expected to have "focus." Many students balk at having to note a tentative major on their application or to write a paragraph about how a particular college program can help them develop their interests. The colleges, however, are struggling to comprehend how students might use their resources. So students should respond to this question with specific points related to a college's offerings. And students now need to demonstrate an interest in certain academic fields. For example, if interested in government, be a part of student council. If interested in communications, join the debate team or radio station.

4. Making Hay While the Sun Shines. Students in the New Millennium should use the summers after grades 10 and 11 resourcefully. This does not mean expensive jaunts to foreign lands to do community service. There are plenty of local alternatives, such as Habitat for Humanity, community centers or homes for the elderly. Internships and employment also demonstrate that an interest has been put to a test.

5. Earlier Test Prep. Standardized testing has become a first-level screen at most selective colleges. GPA, rigor of courses and SAT I or ACT scores frequently determine whether or not an application is taken further. This has, in turn, led to earlier test preparation prior to the PSAT in the fall of junior year. And more attention has been given to both extended time and un-timed testing for students with learning differences. Families have learned to obtain and send educational evaluations to the College Board or ACT in order to get permission for extended time. There is much controversy over the fairness of these compensations, but this is now part of the process.

6. The Marketing of Counseling. I believe in the efficacy of and need for private college counseling. However, a heavily commercialized industry has mushroomed, spawning "packaging" marketers who profess to "spin" an applicant into the Ivy League. There are also services that ghost write student college essays, both in one-on-one and Internet tutorial sessions. All this marketing is tough for families to sort through.

7. Earlier Apps. We have seen that applying Early Decision at many colleges increases a student's chances of being admitted. Often this is well and good. However, many students now feel an inordinate pressure to apply ED somewhere when they really haven't done due



Frank Leana

diligence. This, in turn, accelerates the need for earlier college visits.

8. Personal Interviews? Going, Going... At the same time, the personal interview is being phased out as many colleges simply do not have sufficient staff to accommodate the pressing requests. This then takes away the personalized effect that used to complement the statistical information on an application. The result: Increasing anonymity in the application process that puts even more importance on grades and test scores.

9. Confusing Deadlines. There is less consistency in the mechanics of the college applications. Families now have to sort through various deadlines and rules for admission. Some colleges forbid concurrent Early Action applications if applying to their school's Early Decision; others do not. And college web sites can be confusing. Also, colleges subscribing to the Common Application may require their own supplemental essays. This all just increases a family's stress.

10. The Increased Focus on the Personal Essay. The importance of the personal essay has increased, particularly at private colleges. In reality, most essays probably neither improve a student's chances for admission nor hurt it. But a poor essay can definitely have a negative effect. Yet students are often stymied by the requirements of the personal essay. They don't feel they have had an experience that qualifies for the topic. They wrongly believe that they need to have invented a cure for a rare allergy or had their poem in *The New Yorker*. In fact, the best essays are about the most basic of human encounters with another person or culture. (A touch of appropriate humor doesn't hurt, either.)

11. More Team Member than Counselor. Today's students lead full lives. If they set goals early on (or if their parents do it for them), to attend a highly selective college, they carry a heavy course load with hours of homework. Many have subject tutors to bolster their work in a particular area. This is coupled with test prep, community service, music lessons, art instruction outside of school, sports, and time with consultants, doctors, and evaluators that cut deeply into time to hang out with friends, see films or just play. One gets accustomed to being part of a "team" constructed to brace their investments of time and advance their chances for success. Thus, today's college counselor has to strike a balance between being helpful and not contributing to the demands of a student's schedule.

12. The Reward is the Same. In the end, I tell students that things usually work out for the best in this application process, although along the way the panic and self-doubt can be paralyzing. Students who are appropriate applicants continue to get into the colleges of their choice. And the reward of a thoughtful application appropriately targeted to the right college that yields an admission remains one reason, whatever the century, we are all in this field in the first place. ■

Frank Leana has been in independent practice since 1985 in New York City and Cambridge, Massachusetts.

CURRICULUM CAPSULES

A “Sustainable” Degree. Arizona State U. has created a “brand new” BA in its business program with specialization options in sustainability, urban policy, tourism management or communication. ASU’s School of Sustainability—which it says is the only school of its kind—will provide many of the classes required for the new degree.

Three New Degrees in NY. Brooklyn C. in New York is offering three new degrees: A BS degree program in exercise science, a bachelor’s degree in multimedia computing and a bachelor’s degree in information systems.

New Arts. Southern Utah U. has added two new arts degrees. Starting this fall, SUU students can earn a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) in Theatre and Bachelor of Music (BM). According to the dean of the College

of Performing and Visual Arts, “these new degrees will allow two-thirds of a student’s classes to be discipline-specific.” SUU’s Theatre program has a partnership with the Tony-winning Utah Shakespearean Festival.

From Geoscience to Gerontology. Reflecting the changing demographics and need for more science degrees, Utica C. in New York has introduced seven new programs this fall—majors in construction management; risk management and insurance; geoscience; gerontology; and biochemistry; a master’s in health care administration and a certificate in gerontology.

Two-Year Law Degrees. Northwestern U. in Illinois has joined Southwestern Law School in California and Dayton School of Law in Ohio to become the first schools in the nation to

offer an accelerated, two-year law degrees. Southwestern started its program in 1974. Dayton just graduated its first two-year class this year. Northwestern will make the transition in the fall of 2009. NU will still offer a three-year track as well. Two-year students will have had to work for two years before entering the program.

It’s a Gas. Students at Western Wyoming Community C. can now work on a new \$2.3 million state-of-the-art oil and gas production technology facility. “The oil and gas production technology program provides an exciting opportunity for young people to enhance their education and secure high-paying energy jobs in Wyoming,” a WWCC official told *The Community College Times*.

Respiratory Therapy. Towson U. and the Community C. of Baltimore County are collaborating to offer students an opportunity to earn dual degrees; a Bachelor of Technical and Professional Studies in allied health with a respiratory therapy track and an Associate of Applied Science in respiratory care therapy. ■

NEWS YOU CAN USE

Ivy Pay Off. Students who attend an Ivy League college earn 34 percent more than their liberal arts peers, according to a survey of 1.2 million students with a minimum of 10 years of work experience conducted by PayScale, an online provider of compensation data. The study also showed that a student’s academic major has little influence on earning power.

“Ivy Leaguers probably position themselves better for job opportunities that provide them with significant upside,” David Wise, a management consultant told a recent *Wall Street Journal*. More Ivy League graduates also go into finance roles than grads of other schools, said the director of the Center for Human Resources at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

Graduates of Dartmouth College earn the highest medium salary, \$134,000. At the bottom of the Ivy League earning ladder is Columbia U., whose graduates earn \$107,000. Graduates of Bucknell U. earn the most among liberal arts college graduates, more than \$110,000.

Going Green. This fall, the U. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign opened a \$60 million College of Business facility with solar panels, a green roof, natural ventilation, and other features to save on energy costs. Worcester Polytechnic Institute opened a “green” residence hall featuring a green roof.

It’s developments such as these that have led new publications this month to award distinc-

tion to colleges for their “green efforts.”

- *Sierra*, the magazine of the Sierra Club, has a feature on “Cool Schools” in its September/October issue. The article includes “10 That Get It,” a list of colleges that includes: U. of Colorado at Boulder, Warren Wilson C., U. of Florida at Gainesville, Oberlin and Tufts, among others. For a complete list see www.sierraclub.org/Sierra.

- *The Kaplan College Guide 2009* listed 25 “green” schools for “environmentally responsible campus projects, courses offered, student groups on campus” and so on. The list included Bates C., Berea, Carleton, Dartmouth, Duke and Penn State among others. See www.kaplanpublishing.com

- The National Wildlife Federation released its Campus Environment 2008 Report Card, “a comprehensive look at nationwide trends in sustainability among America’s institutions of higher learning. The study reviews programs at 1,068 institutions and awards academic letter grades on a variety of issues. For info see www.nwf.org.

And finally, Bowdoin C., Colby C. and the U. of New England suggested students leave their cars at home. These colleges have partnered with Zipcar, a car sharing service.

In Brief... Villa Julie C. in Maryland, is now Stevenson U., an independent college with a career-focused liberal arts curriculum. Albright C. in Pennsylvania will no longer require SAT or ACT test scores from applicants. ■

Enrollment Trends

Yale expands. Yale C., which currently admits less than 10 percent of its applicants, has decided to expand its enrollment by 15 percent by establishing two new residential colleges, which will open in 2013. This will be the first significant expansion since Yale began admitting women in 1969, when applications soared from 6,781 to 10,039. This year, Yale attracted 22,500 applications. That means, Yale President Richard C. Levin said in a letter made public in June, that in recent years, Yale has “denied admission to hundreds of applicants who would have been admitted 10 years ago.” Yale will add faculty and facilities to support the two residential colleges.

Community College Growth. Two-year college enrollment is growing faster than that for four-year schools in 35 states, according to a new report from the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute for Government. The study ranks states in five areas of community college involvement. Iowa, Mississippi, New Mexico and North Carolina led the way in all five areas. Arizona, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Nebraska, Texas and Wyoming led the way on four of five measurements. See the entire report, “States and Their Community Colleges” at www.rockinst.org. ■

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