

`Senior slump' could have severe consequences



Many seniors feel as if the entire college admissions process is behind them; they've been accepted and made their final decision. Some have "checked out" of high school early. They may be attending class, most of the time, but rarely doing any homework and just idling until graduation. Here is a letter from a mom of a senior.

1. *I've threatened punishment and offered rewards, and still, I can't get my son to stay focused on school. He tells me I don't know what I'm talking about when I say that colleges can change their minds. He also says that the teachers have relaxed. They're watching movies in class and kids are heading out to lunch for a few hours. It's just a different school environment once the first semester ends. How realistic is it that an offer of admission will be rescinded?*

Don't let your kids catch "Senioritis" –

Colleges vary tremendously in how they handle a "senior slump." Some give warnings, some place students on academic probation and some actually reverse their decisions. Every summer there's a number of surprised students forced to scramble and make alternative plans for next fall.

Acceptance letters usually state that the acceptance is contingent on consistent performance. "Contingent with consistent performance" is purposefully open-ended.

Most colleges aren't likely to revoke acceptance unless there is a dramatic decline; floating from a B to a C in a single course will not turn heads. But a former A honor roll student getting C's and D's is a major red flag.

Something else that is considered is the college's relationship with the high school. What, if any, backlash might accompany their decision? Some high schools don't actively discourage these reversal decisions because they feel it will teach the next class a good lesson.

The most important, but least predictable, indicator is whether the college is over or under-subscribed. While we may know the total number on the wait list, we don't know the true strength and depth of their wait list or their past yield history.

These decisions can sometimes be softened to an academic probation or summer school, but the truth is nobody knows, and this could be the year that more schools stick to their guns and send a message loud and clear.

Tis the season, no, not Christmas, but it's senior slump time.

Like seasonal allergies, “senioritis” goes into attack mode around this time each year. Merriam-Webster <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/senioritis> defines senioritis as, “an ebbing of motivation and effort by high school seniors as evidenced by tardiness, absences, and lower grades.”

While the first known use of “senioritis” was in 1957, it hasn’t changed much since then. Here’s how BuzzFeed <http://www.buzzfeed.com/daves4/signs-that-you-might-have-senioritis#.bv9NWq2GO1> describes the condition, “A crippling disease that strikes high school seniors. Symptoms: laziness, an over-excessive wearing of track pants, and sweatshirts. Lack of studying, repeated absences, and a dismissive attitude. The only known cure is a phenomenon known as graduation.”

Every year there are hundreds of cocky kids who mistakenly believe their college acceptances are ironclad. Colleges vary tremendously in how they handle a “senior slump.” Some give warnings, some place students on academic probation and some actually reverse their decisions. Far more common than revocation is a warning letter, expressing disappointment, and asking for some explanation. Acceptance letters will usually state that the final acceptance is contingent on consistent performance.

Some students have adopted a very dangerous sense of teenage invulnerability. It usually starts out innocently enough with a missed assignment and then can devilishly detour into a full-blown case of senioritis. Many senior slackers are walking around with a sense of entitlement, “I worked really hard, I did my job, I got accepted to college, now it’s my time to take it easy.” Not so fast.

Roughly one-third of colleges revoke admissions each year, but most colleges are not likely to do so unless there is a dramatic decline. Senioritis can be expensive, too. Under-performers can lose scholarships and financial aid packages.

It’s a cautionary tale and parents, high school administrators and even college admissions officers wish students would take it more seriously. With so many applicants and long waiting lists, colleges may be less willing to gamble on a student who has faltered.

WHAT SHOULD SENIORS BE DOING?

- ❖ Notify colleges of any schedule changes. If you've dropped or added a class, colleges need to know.
- ❖ Let colleges know if there are any disciplinary issues. You are better off being transparent than assuming they won't find out. Your high school guidance counselor may be required to inform all your colleges.
- ❖ If you've been accepted, review your admissions materials to see what you need to do as far as deposits, deadlines and future timelines.
- ❖ Check your email, and especially your junk email, because that is how colleges will be communicating with you.
- ❖ Reconfirm you have all the required courses to graduate.
- ❖ Complete the FAFSA if you haven't already done so and submit to colleges to see about need-based aid.

Parents shouldn't ignore any slide in grades or a lack of motivation. Start out by explaining the serious consequences that could occur, and encourage them to follow-through with the same dedication they had when they started their senior year.

Thankfully this condition doesn't affect most students. Seth Allen, Vice President & Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid at Pomona College in Claremont, California said, "It seems to me that the students who worry most about senioritis are, ironically, the students who can afford to let up a little to enjoy their many accomplishments and hard work."

By Lee Shulman Bierer

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