

You've been wait-listed to college. Now what?



Ivy League schools released their admissions decisions Thursday, and other elite institutions are set to notify students of their decisions on April 1 -- on the heels of a college admissions scandal that has rocked higher education.

With rates of admission to the top crop of colleges and universities at a record low -- many students likely didn't get into their No. 1 pick. Harvard on Thursday admitted a record-low of 4.5 percent of applicants to its class of 2023, while Brown University's rate dropped to 6.6 percent.

But if you are on a waitlist, you still have a shot at earning an acceptance letter to the school of your dreams. Yale graduate Christopher Rim, offers guidance on how to navigate the

admissions process after schools' decisions are released -- and make a last ditch effort to stand out.

Q: I didn't get into my first choice. Now what?

A: Most students are accepted to at least one school. If you were accepted to multiple schools, but not your dream school, don't put all of your eggs in one basket. Really weigh your options. Be sure to secure your spot with a school you were accepted to so the offer doesn't get rescinded. You need to say, "Yes I want to join your class," so that you don't lose your spot.

Also, be sure to accept your spot on the waitlist -- you need to do that, too.

Q: How can I increase my chances of getting off the waitlist?

A: After that, think about how to best approach the school you were wait-listed to. The school most likely gave you directions on what next steps are. A generic letter will say something like, "If we have a space that opens up we will let you know by X date." If a school says not to send them any additional letters of continued interest or recommendations, follow their advice. Most students will say they have something to say and give them an extra letter, but don't do it.

Most schools don't say that, however, and they do allow you to write [a letter of continued interest](#). It's important to address it to the regional admissions officer. Don't direct it to the office of undergraduate admissions in general or to the dean of the college. Write a personal and customized letter for that person identifying the value you would add to the campus community if you were to get off the waitlist. Don't use a generic letter and send it to two or three different schools where you are wait-listed.

Q: What should I say in a letter of continued interest?

A: Don't summarize everything you already told them in your initial application, or list every award or accomplishment. They want to know why this school is going to be the best fit for you. They don't want students who are well-rounded, they want to see a singular focus from a student, or a singular talent that they can bring to the campus community so they can form a well-rounded class.

This is where it can get funny and interesting. If you think about how many letters of continued interest these admissions officers will receive, you want yours to stand out. If a student was recently awarded a scholarship that's not reflected on the application, include that. Talk about how you add value to your current high school and say you can do the same when you arrive on campus. If you are a huge sports fan, and a team at the college just moved onto the next round in a tournament, call that out. Make it fun and enjoyable and let them know that this is the type of energy you would bring to the community. You want to be very specific, and also send these letters within the next few days or weeks. Don't wait too long.

Q: What else can I do?

A: That's pretty much the only thing a student can do to get off the waitlist. A school might ask for your final grades, but that is rare. Take time to reflect on the acceptances that you received. Be grateful for those. Look at the bigger picture -- if you don't like the schools you were accepted to, you do have the option to transfer after your first year, so consider how many credits you might need to transfer and plan your freshman year at the school you were accepted to appropriately and accordingly. USC is known to

accept a far greater number of transfer students than a school like Boston College is, for instance.

If you want to transfer from, say, a school like Duke or Emory to Princeton, talk about a facility or program this school has that no other school does. Don't just say you want to be academically challenged, because Duke and Emory are great schools and every single student will write that. Maybe the campus has a lab on artificial intelligence that your current school doesn't have.

Q: What are my odds of beating the waitlist?

A: It's really difficult to get off the waitlist, and to count on going to a school you're wait-listed at is not the right mindset to have. We help students focus their energy on the positives about other schools that might allow them to explore interests in a different field.

Keep in mind there is no one way to get into any of these top schools. You can have perfect SAT scores, a perfect GPA, belong to three different clubs and have a perfectly packaged application and you still don't get in. If Harvard wants to admit students who are perfect across the board in terms of numbers, they could fill their entire class multiple times over. They want students who are interesting, who can add value, so it's about how you have impacted your own community.

Q: Will the college admission scandal change anything?

A: Yes. Moving forward, admissions offices will be working much more closely with external departments like athletic, music and art departments. Admissions offices will do a much greater overview of students admitted through different recruitment channels, whether they be arts, music, athletics, and re-haul the

process to make sure something like this can't happen again. The checks and balances of the system will be reviewed and new measures will be implemented very quickly.

By Christopher Rim