



Fairness of Ea Still Debatable

University officials say that non-binding program has no bias against low-income students

The ongoing debate over early admissions programs at elite schools has largely focused on low-income students, but the impact of recent decisions about early admissions on this group is still uncertain.



By Kimberly Chow

When University officials announced earlier this month that Yale will keep its early action program, they said early admission does not give unfair benefits to privileged

applicants. But when Harvard and Princeton universities eliminated their early admissions programs in September, they claimed the decision would benefit low-income students, who are less likely to apply early and receive the corresponding advantages. Many college counselors and admissions experts said low-income students often are not able to apply early — an option they said provides students with an upper hand in the process — and that the disadvantage may not be overcome in the regular decision cycle.

Dean of Admissions Jeff Brenzel said the early action option allows financial aid applicants the opportunity to be accepted early, but still apply elsewhere regular decision and compare financial aid packages. Brenzel said all applicants are evaluated by their individual opportunities and achievements, not according to socioeconomic quotas. “Many of our best low-income applicants apply early; even if they represent a smaller proportion of the pool, it’s not whether they apply early or regular that counts,” he said. “It’s whether they present the right academic promise, and we certainly have our radar out for students like that.”

For students, one key advantage of early admissions for all students is the higher acceptance rate, college counselors and high school students said. Yale accepted 17.7 percent of early applicants and 7.5 percent of regular applicants for the Class of 2010. The tendency for students to stop applying to other schools after being accepted early can be particularly harmful for low-income students, who then miss the chance to compare different schools’ financial aid packages, said Megan Harlan, director of college guidance at the private Princeton Day School in Princeton, N.J.

Jeannie Borin, president of the admissions consulting firm College Connections, said she has seen many students hesitate before applying early because of concerns that they will not get the best financial aid package. But due to the belief that there is a better chance of acceptance in the early cycle, many students still choose to apply in November, she said.

“I think as college expenses continue to rise, you’re going to have more kids applying regular,” Borin said. “But as long as there’s an advantage in terms of the percentage — more students accepted early — you will still have that group applying early because they want to increase their odds.”

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