

COUNTDOWN TO NOVEMBER

Find out if you should apply under an early application plan

By Betsy F. Woolf

The buzzword senior year of high school lately is “early.” Lots of students are jumping on the bandwagon, applying to colleges in the early fall - on or before November 15 - usually receiving admissions decisions from colleges in mid to late December, and even before.

If you aren’t familiar with the “early” college application options, here is a brief glossary of terms:

- **Early Decision:** A student who applies to a school like Haverford College near Philadelphia signs a contract agreeing to attend Haverford if he or she is accepted. Although the student may apply to other colleges, he or she must withdraw these applications if that acceptance comes through. This option is recommended for a student who has done the research and clearly has a first-choice college.
- **Early Action:** Although the student applies early and receives an expedited decision to a school like Northeastern University in Boston, he or she does not have to decide whether to attend Northeastern until spring. The student may also apply to other schools and accept another college’s offer of admission instead.

- ***Single Choice Early Action:*** This option works like Early Action except the student may apply early to only one school. That means if a student applies to Yale Early Action, he or she cannot also apply to another school through Early Decision or Early Action. Some schools vary the theme. For example, students applying under Georgetown University’s Early Action program “may not concurrently apply to a binding Early Decision program although they may make multiple Early Action applications.”
- ***Early Decision II/Early Action II:*** Some schools, like Hofstra University in Hempstead, N.Y., entertain early applications over two time periods. These schools refer to their early applications as Early Decision I and Early Decision II or Early Action I and Early Action II. Early II application deadlines are later than Early I, which gives students more time to decide where to apply. Plus, a student who has applied early to a college and has been rejected can still apply to a second college and receive an expedited, hopefully favorable decision.
- ***The Mix:*** Some schools have a variety of early application plans. Dickinson College in Carlisle, PA., has Early Decision I, Early Decision II, and Early Action.
- ***Rolling Decision:*** The admissions committee at a school like Lynn University in Boca Raton, Fla., reviews an application soon after it is received, makes a decision, and notifies the student. A student who applies early in the fall can actually receive a decision before December.
- ***Priority/Early Response:*** Names often vary, but these deadlines are similar to Early Action deadlines. If a student applies by a certain deadline, he or she will receive an admission decision by a certain date. The University of Michigan has an Early Response application deadline; Penn State has a priority deadline. However, schools with these

deadlines may accept applications prior to these deadlines, often on a rolling basis, and students can receive even earlier admissions decisions.

Does early decision really give a student an admissions advantage?

It depends on the college. To find out, you may need to do some digging on a particular college's web site or you can try calling the college's Admissions Office and asking these questions:

- 1) What percent of the class is admitted early?
- 2) What percent of early applicants are admitted to the school and what percent of regular decision applicants are admitted?

Try to get information on the most recent freshman class if it is available and one or two prior classes.

Are there drawbacks to applying early? Yes. If financial aid is a consideration, a student applying Early Decision (the binding option) foregoes the opportunity to compare financial aid packages among schools. That doesn't mean that a financial aid package awarded to an Early Decision applicant is necessarily *bad*; it just means the family has lost the opportunity to weigh one package against another. Financial aid awards do vary from school to school, because institutional priorities and the amount of available aid vary from school to school. The process is similar to the process of admitting students. There are no guarantees.

Financial issues aside, if a student has a mediocre high school record, it still may be a good idea to apply later rather than earlier. The first half of senior year is the time to show colleges that the student has gotten his or her act together. Colleges are looking for a bellwether of future college success, no matter how late in the high school career it arrives.