

## THE WAITING GAME

*What to do when you're placed on a wait list*

By Betsy F. Woolf

Congratulations on your college acceptances! April will be a whirlwind month. If you haven't as yet decided which college offer of admission to accept, chances are you'll be on the road again looking at schools.

The date you now have to keep in mind is May 1, the applicants' universal reply date. By that date you should confirm your intention to enroll in a particular college or university and submit a deposit to that *one* institution only. You should also send a "thank-you-but-I-have selected-another-institution" letter to the other colleges and universities that have offered you places in their freshman classes.

If you've received a wait list letter, read it carefully. The letter should provide a history that describes the number of students on the wait list for the school, the number of students offered admission in the past, and the availability of financial aid and housing. Colleges are expected to let you know about the resolution of your wait list status by August 1 at the latest, but many wait list decisions are made during May.

Students often ask me what to do when they're put on a wait list. A wait list is a college's safety net. Although the school has already selected the applicants to whom it wants to enroll, it hedges its bets in case there are still spaces available for incoming students come May 1.

A survey a few years ago found that the average student's chance of acceptance off the wait list for colleges overall is only one in five, but it can be even lower at a particular school. Last year, Dartmouth College offered a place to 1166 students and enrolled 36. The year before, it enrolled only 16. Bentley College offered a place on its list to 895 students last year and enrolled four. Hamilton College, which offered places to 705 students, did not enroll anyone from its list.

But if a school that wait listed you is really your first choice, you have to do something about it. If the college sent you a postcard to return, fill it out and send it back now. If the college asks you to respond via email, do it right away.

The next thing you should do is think about how you can convince the college that you are *really* interested in attending. Write a letter explaining your passion for the school and why you are the best match. Send an updated transcript and tell the college about any relevant accomplishments or honors you have received since you applied. Send an additional recommendation. Visit again.

But keep in mind that despite your best efforts, there simply may not be a space for you. Admissions staffs use all sorts of data and statistics to predict the number of students they should accept in order to reach the optimum freshman class size. Sometimes they're right on the mark; sometimes not. One year they may take 40 students off the wait list; the next year none. When you get a call from an admissions counselor telling you that you have been offered admission from a wait list, you should be prepared to accept quickly (although it's okay to ask for time to check with your parents first).

Be patient. Colleges won't know if they will have to go to their wait lists until after May 1. So the best thing you can do right now is to consider your offers of acceptance and commit to one school on or before the end of this month. Chances are there's more than one great place for you, and an acceptance letter from one of those great places just came in the mail.