



Newsweek
& THE DAILY BEAST

College Coverage

Five Things to Know

1. We Run Consumer-Oriented Stories

Our coverage of college is the most consumer-oriented coverage The Daily Beast does. Nearly every Daily Beast college story has some sort of useable takeaway for parents and students.

2. Admissions is Our Bread and Butter

Approximately 4 out of 5 of our college stories are concerned with admissions: How to choose a school, and once you've chosen it, how to get in.

3. Selective Colleges Come First

As a general rule, The Daily Beast covers more-selective schools more often, even if the article in question isn't specifically about selectivity.

4. Stories Are Targeted Toward Parents

Our readership skews older, so stories generally aren't generally addressed only toward students. Stories that are of concern mainly to parents are fine.

5. We Like Schools Behaving Badly

If you can tell us something other than how great your school is, you're much more get your school into The Daily Beast. This doesn't mean you need to give us scandal – just something more interesting than self-flattering story ideas.



Bogus College Stereotypes

Are Cornell students suicidal? Is Dartmouth all Republicans? Is Vassar really gay? Kathleen Kingsbury investigates which college reputations are bunk—and which are well-deserved.

by [Kathleen Kingsbury](#) | July 19, 2009 6:57 PM EDT

Campus stereotypes have been around as long as college itself. And, usually, these reputations stick no matter what a university—or parent—tries to do about it.

“My favorite was, ‘God, Mom, Hamilton is so Hootie & the Blowfish,’” recalls Meg Gobles, a Brooklyn mother who guided her son through the college admissions process last year. “What does that even mean? And how could I possibly rebut it?”

From Dartmouth’s buttoned-down Republicans to Cornell’s suicidal student body, The Daily Beast investigates the longstanding stereotypes of eight prominent schools to find out just how true they are.

How Gay is Vassar?

Not surprisingly, Vassar College does not track students’ sexual orientation. As a former women’s college located an hour outside New York City, however, it’s no surprise that it tends to attract more open-minded applicants. There are “a good number of gay and lesbian students, particularly gay men,” says Phillippe Kleefield, president of the Queer Coalition of Vassar College. Furthermore, he adds, “A lot of people are more willing to question their sexual orientation on campus and experiment.”

But Kleefield found himself often disappointed by his classmates when it came to supporting gay issues. He estimates his organization had five active members, and when it came to political controversies such as gay marriage, Vassar students rarely got involved. “When you live in a bubble, where you don’t have to interact with people who think differently than you, it’s easy to get a progressive place,” says Kleefield, who graduated in May. “I think Vassar students start to think everywhere is as tolerant, and that just isn’t the case.”

Cornell Makes Students Suicidal

This is one of those urban legends that Cornell administrators would love to make disappear. The school’s isolated location in frigid upstate New York doesn’t help. Nor does the fact that, like most of their Ivy League counterparts, Cornell coeds carry a stressful workload. Not to mention that, over the years, there have indeed been students

who have taken their lives by flinging themselves dramatically into the depths of Ithaca's famous gorges.

But, in reality, Cornell has just one or two suicides each year, consistent with the national average. (Suicide is the second leading cause of death among American college students, after motor-vehicle accidents.) In addition, since 2002, Cornell has put in place several measures to prevent suicides, and only five students have taken their life since then, compared to 11 in the six years prior.

All of Long Island Goes to Wisconsin

This, of course, is not true: Nearly two-thirds of students at Madison are Wisconsin residents. And yet, ask any "Sconnie"—as the natives are known—and you're sure to hear about the town being overrun by "Coasties," the not-so-affectionate moniker for students from the East Coast and California. In campus lore, these out-of-state invaders even have a uniform: oversized sunglasses, a North Face jacket, spandex pants, and furry UGG boots—no matter the weather. Oh, and her perpetual orange suntan.

How the University of Wisconsin became a Midwest mecca is a mystery. (After neighboring Illinois, New York sends more college students to Wisconsin than any other state, and California is close behind.) But there's little doubt that the influx of East and West Coast applications since the early 1990s has brought prestige and money—out-of-state tuition is nearly three times that of in-state. Perhaps as a result, admissions have become more selective as freshman applications rose more than 40 percent from 1989 to 2005.

That fueled some resentment as it got harder for even Wisconsin students to get in. And the Coasties don't always help their own image, often living in private, off-campus dorms and sticking to their own fraternities and sororities. Tensions have occasionally spilled into the classroom. "A couple of days ago, I was in lecture when a teacher asked if there was anyone from Los Angeles in the class... Upon hearing one student's reply, the professor stated, 'If anyone needs money, go to this guy—or his parents,'" freshman and New Yorker Skye Kalkstein recounted in the campus paper in 2006. "After another student said she came from Beverly Hills, the professor called her a 'rich bitch.'"

Everyone at MIT Is a (Male) Lab Rat

Work, friends, sleep: pick two. It's a student mantra around the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Cambridge campus. As one spring 2010 applicant put it, "I know I'll have to give up girls and fun if I want to go there, but it's worth it."

Of course, by design, freshmen go to MIT to study engineering, science, and technology—all traditionally male-dominated fields. But women have attended MIT since 1871 and currently make up about 45 percent of the student body. In addition, there are actually humanities majors at MIT—a whopping 140 in the 2008-2009 school year out of about 4,000 undergraduates.

But a little-known fact is that all MIT students are required to take eight classes in the arts or humanities to graduate. “While the literature department had very few majors, I was by no means alone in the classes,” says Joe Pokora, a dual literature-engineering major who graduated in May.

Penn Is So Jewish

“At Penn, being Jewish is much more than religion. It's the summer camps, the teen tours, the Long Island name game and what fraternity you join.”

That's how one recent (non-Jewish) grad describes the Jewish culture at the University of Pennsylvania. Penn has long had the rep of being the most Jewish campus in the Ivy League, and its students are the first to confirm it's warranted. But in fact, only about a quarter of Penn's student body is Jewish, according the school's Hillel chapter. Yale rivals (and, some years, exceeds) that proportionally, and most of the country's elite universities aren't far behind. All offer Shabbat services, kosher dining, and a rich Jewish campus life.

So why does Penn have the rep? In part, it's probably due to the school's history. Today, about one-fifth of Ivy League students are Jewish. But, as detailed in sociologist Jerome Karabel's book *The Chosen* in the 1920s, the Big Three—Harvard, Yale, and Princeton—began systematically excluding Jews in their admissions processes, a practice that continued into the 1970s. Penn, on the other hand, never discriminated as such. Add in “legacy” admissions, and the university has educated several generations of many prominent Jewish families. “When I was 10, my mother posted a list in our kitchen of all the Nobel Prize winners who graduated from Penn,” says one Jewish alumna. “But she was much more impressed when one girl on my hall was a Lauder and another was related to the Guggenheims.”

You Can Major in Anything at Bennington

Physics and the Role of Science in Wartime Technology. Democracy in Developing Countries. Bio-Chemistry of Freshwater Newts. These are just a few of the fields of study Bennington College advertises to potential applicants. The small liberal-arts college in bucolic Vermont has long had a reputation for its open academic structure that even includes optional grades.

It is an oversimplification, however, to say Bennington has no requirements. Yes, students design individual learning programs, but faculty must sign off on their plans. That said, students are then largely left to direct their own studies—a tradition Bennington grads are quite proud of. “Your imagination, your intellect, your discoveries are cultivated and increasingly govern your educational life at Bennington in place of the imposition of external templates designed by others,” brags the school's Web site.

Berkeley Is All Asians

By the numbers, the stereotype seems justified: At 46 percent, students who identified as ethnically Asian made up the largest proportion of the freshman class in the fall of 2008. Caucasian students accounted for about one-third and other racial group about 15 percent. And because 85 percent of Berkeley's student body is California residents, this figure can't be chalked up to the state's racial breakdown—only about 13 percent of Californians are Asian or Pacific Islander and three-quarters are white.

Instead, what Berkeley's demographics show is the effect affirmative action can have on college admissions. In 1996, California voters passed Proposition 209, which amended the state constitution to bar public colleges from considering race in admissions. Since the new law, Asian enrollment at Berkeley and other UC campuses has skyrocketed.

That could soon change. This past spring, the UC Board of Regents approved a new admissions process that, it hopes, will give schools more leeway in whom they admit. While the new policy doesn't explicitly mention race or ethnicity, at least one university-sponsored analysis suggests that the number of Asians accepted will slightly decrease. The same study found that black and Hispanic applicants will remain even and white enrollment would see a boost.

First, however, the policy will have to get past both California's active Asian community, which has protested the new regime, as well as proponents of Proposition 209. One such watchdog, Ward Connerly, a black conservative businessman, wrote in a June op-ed, "The net effect of these changes is that academic achievement will be less significant and UC admissions administrators will have the 'flexibility' to discriminate against those allegedly 'dull' Asians."

Everyone at Dartmouth is a Republican

Dartmouth College has long been known as the most conservative Ivy. Some students think the label stems from the fact that Dartmouth was the second-to-last Ivy to admit women in 1972. Others point to the Dartmouth Review, the school's prominent conservative newspaper, which spawned right-wing commentators Laura Ingraham and Dinesh D'Souza.

In reality, says Harrison Davies, spokesman for Dartmouth's College Republicans, "I'm still surprised that Dartmouth continues to be labeled as a 'conservative' school. On campus, you'd be hard pressed to find a student who shares that belief—I certainly do not." Davies estimates that his organization has about 300 students on its member list, while the College Democrats have about 1,000. He adds, "In my experience, when the College Republicans host high-profile speakers, a large percentage of the crowd are there to challenge the speaker's points."

But that's not the end of the story. While Dartmouth students may not dabble in partisan politics, the board of trustees might. In an unusual setup, alumni elect half of the 18-

member board while the board itself appoints the other half. Historically, such elections were uneventful. But starting in 2004, several more conservative alumni have beaten out establishment candidates. New trustees include Peter Robinson, a former Ronald Reagan speechwriter and Hoover Institution fellow; Stephen Smith, a University of Virginia law professor who clerked for Clarence Thomas; and Todd Zywicki, a George Mason law professor.

Of Robinson and Zywicki, 1980 grad Susan Ackerman wrote in 2005, “Both petition candidates, in short, seem to me to long nostalgically for some ‘Dear Old Dartmouth’ of the past, without admitting the idealized past they crave represents a Dartmouth that was often hard on women, gays and lesbians, and minorities; monolithic in terms of its social life; and fostered an anti-intellectual environment.”

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College Admissions' Secret Strategy

Grades and SATs are set in stone, but a last-minute admissions trick is more important than ever. Marc Zawel on how "demonstrating interest" can get you into your first-choice school.

by [Marc Zawel](#) | September 26, 2010 6:57 PM EDT

For high-school seniors now applying to college, most of the important pieces of the admissions process—grades, extracurriculars, standardized tests—are in the past. They can't be changed.

But as fall application deadlines loom, one relatively simple strategy remains on the table. It's called "demonstrated interest" and, utilized correctly, it can give applicants a last-minute leg up on the competition.

Demonstrated interest is exactly what it sounds like. It can range from attending an information session on a college campus to sending a thank-you note after your admissions interview. And although schools vary when it comes to how much weight they give it, data show that admissions officers are increasingly relying on this factor in making decisions.

A report put out by the National Association for College Admission Counseling found that the percentage of colleges rating demonstrated interest as a "considerably important factor" increased from 7 percent to 21 percent from 2003 to 2006. It's held steady at about 20 percent since that time. In 2008, the last year data were available, that 20 percent made demonstrated interest more important than class rank and the interview.

Why would colleges value something as simple as a thank-you note so strongly? Kent Barnds is the VP of enrollment, communication and planning at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. He considers demonstrated interest important for two key reasons: yield and retention. "It's clearly an efficiency if we can focus our attention on students that want to come here and are most likely to persist."

Barnds and his committee rate all applicants on a demonstrated interest index. Admitted students that score the highest ("strong and sincere interest") enroll at a rate of more than 60 percent. Meanwhile, admitted students rated on the low end of the index ("wondering why this student applied") enroll at a rate of only 13 percent. Using the index helps Augustana more accurately forecast its enrollment numbers—balancing the number of offers it makes with its target class size.

“Demonstrated interest separates the contenders from the pretenders,” said one college counselor at a prep school in New York.

But the importance of demonstrated interest in admissions decisions does vary by college. “Demonstrated interest is not important to us, our yield just doesn’t make it necessary for us to take it into account,” said Tom Parker, the dean of admission and financial aid at Amherst. This is probably, he said, because highly competitive colleges have higher yields simply by nature of their competitiveness.

- Our Complete College Safety Rankings Even at a school that doesn't track interest like Amherst, however, Parker still recommended that applicants take the steps to do so. “You would be foolish not to,” he said.

“Demonstrated interest separates the contenders from the pretenders,” said Michael Acquilano, the assistant head of upper school and college counselor at Staten Island Academy, a prep school in New York. “Interviews, campus visits, attending regional receptions, meeting with college reps at fairs or high school counseling offices, electronic correspondence—all of these demonstrate interest.”

But students must strike a delicate balance. “Too much contact screams desperate; too little contact can sometimes be interpreted as though the student views the institution as a backup,” said Sara Shapiro Harberson, vice president for enrollment management and dean of admission at Franklin & Marshall.

Harberson cautioned that the interest must be genuine. “Reach out with a purpose of learning something meaningful about the academic program, student experience, or application process,” she said. “If you’re just showing interest for the sake of it, admission professionals see right through it.”

And admissions officers also warned that going overboard with interest could do more harm than good. “Do not camp out on the admissions office lawn or corner the admissions dean in the men’s or women’s room,” said Dan Lundquist, an educational consultant and former director of admissions at the University of Pennsylvania and Union College. “It happened to me!”

Five Tips for Demonstrating Interest

1. Take all opportunities to demonstrate interest

Visit the college, attend an information session, take a tour, conduct an interview, meet an admissions officer at a college fair or local presentation or participate in an online chat. You want to make every effort to show a sincere and serious interest in the school. Importantly, don’t forget to sign in whenever you can—even if you’re already on a mailing list—as colleges track attendance and interest at specific events.

2. Focus on demonstrating interest at the schools where it counts most

Recognize that some colleges consider demonstrated interest more important than others. Generally, Augustana College's Barnds said that it is schools in the "magic middle"—those under pressure to nail down the right enrollment but also just selective enough that they don't want to make unnecessary offers of admissions—that are the most likely to consider it.

3. Students should demonstrate interest—not parents

In many cases, parents today are just as involved (if not more involved) in the admissions process. But admissions deans are clear that only interest directly from a student is considered, which means that emails, calls, or letters from parents to the admissions office play no role in ultimate decisions.

4. Make interest undeniable and clear in your application

The most effective way to demonstrate interest, according to Franklin & Marshall's Harberson, is by "putting in the very best effort in your application." She encouraged applicants to add a statement in the essay or attach a separate note, indicating the school as a top choice. "State your interest and show it in the most important piece of your candidacy—the actual application."

5. Don't become a pest

"You want to express interest in a school, but you don't want to go overboard," said Risa Lewak, author of *Don't Stalk the Admissions Officer*. "Even if you are the perfect candidate, you undermine your case by doing something that is construed as inappropriate or annoying."

Marc Zawel is the co-founder and CEO of [EqualApp](#), an affordable online college admissions counseling program that provides lessons, application tools, community features and support services.

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