

## College Early Decision: The Devil's Trap

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As the first child going off to college, my tiger parents have hired a college counselor, listened to all the college podcasts, and visited all of the prestigious colleges. Imagine their delight when they realized my chances of admission could double if I early decisioned into UPenn. Even though the increased odds of being admitted to college are appealing, the early decision (ED) process seems comparable to a devil's story: unassuming high school students blindly selling their souls and maybe even their sanity to get into college.

Both a deal with the devil and the college early decision process hold a common thread: you cannot back out. While you may only be challenged to a fiddle contest in a Faust tale, in real life, ED colleges have the power to blacklist the locked-in student from attending other colleges or to later rescind their acceptance offer.

Can you avoid this deal with the devil?

I attend a cutthroat high school in New Jersey where many students enter freshman year with one goal: gaining admission to Princeton University. They say Princeton has a fantastic engineering program; 82% of students graduate debt-free; and it provides a world class education right at home. Most of them do not know that Princeton is located in the suburbs, many students bike to class, and that a lengthy senior thesis is required to graduate. (In sharp contrast, the students at my school are frequent city-goers, adverse to exercising, and shame those who excel in the liberal arts.) Unfortunately, many students are placing selective colleges on a pedestal based on what they hear and then are being forced to face the truth when they enter a binding contract with the college of their choice.

The glossy brochures that colleges mail to your house and the carefully curated posts on social media are not an accurate representation of what your college experience will be like. A classmate in my Physics class lamented how the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign portrayed itself as an idyllic campus with green grass. However, when he finally visited the college, he was astounded that the entire city was surrounded by cornfields.

Students who are able to tour colleges before they submit their ED applications often receive a "PG-13" tour, where colleges will forget to mention the rigorous workload and the lack of air conditioning and instead highlight the stellar food and their study abroad programs. When I visited the UPenn campus, I was enamoured by the architecture and the bustling city. But, after pressing my tour guide, he admitted he would often study until 3 am and took 7-8 classes a

semester. Although the academic focus at UPenn did not deter me, this is information that many early decision applicants are unaware of.

Even if students are unsure about whether their ED school is their dream school, a higher acceptance rate is enough to make students apply even if the college is not a perfect fit for them. At the beginning of my junior year, eager to end the dread and apprehension surrounding the college process, I set my mind on Cornell. I knew Cornell was not where I would be happy. A city girl at heart, I would not be content in an isolated college town with rolling fields and cows. But Cornell's 12.3 regular decision (RD) acceptance rate versus its 27.7% ED rate was like a tempting deal from the devil himself.

But the biggest problem about the entire early decision process is that students are being treated like pawns. The early decision process is not about the student; it is about the college. In order to make themselves more appealing for future applicants, colleges prefer to have low acceptance rates and high yield rates (the number of admitted students who actually attend). By ensuring early decision applicants will enroll, colleges increase their yield rate while filling their incoming class. They prioritize legacies and athletes even though many low-income applicants do not have the resources or information to apply early. This also leaves middle-class students competing against one another in the hopes that they will be one of the lucky ones to make it into the elite pool. Applying to institutions that are supposed to promote learning can turn into a battle of survival of the fittest, even within the same senior class.

They say the devil is alluring. For the mere price of your soul, you can have power and knowledge. You can have the college of your supposed dreams. But no senior should have to make a decision of this magnitude under such pressure.

As much as I'd like to think I am strong enough to resist the sway of the devil, I am not strong enough. Yes, I will be one of the millions of students applying Early Decision in Fall 2018.