A man in a dark sweater is holding a white sign. In the background, a woman in a grey blazer and a man in a blue shirt are smiling. The sign contains text about prospective students and credentials.

NO, PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS DON'T LITERALLY LINE UP WITH CREDENTIALS IN HAND IN THE EFFORT TO ATTEND THEIR COLLEGE OF CHOICE. NOR IS THERE AN ORDERLY PROCESSION AFTER - OR IN TOO MANY CASES IF - THOSE STUDENTS HAVE COMPLETED THEIR EDUCATION.

The two main stories to follow address the "ins" (what do colleges look for in the admission process) and "outs" (graduation rates) of Indiana higher education. Both play important roles in creating and maintaining the workforce needed for Indiana employers. They impact the financial status of individual students and their families, as well as the state as a whole.

The "in" story comes from a variety of admission office representatives, with insight from a guidance counselor and several students. The "out" compiles statistical data and utilizes analysis from the office of the state's higher education commissioner and two national experts.

Admissions 101

By Tom Schuman

Here's What Matters in College Preparation

Test scores. High school grade point average (GPA). Class rank. Course choices. Extracurricular activities. Application essays. In-person interviews. Which factors determine whether the first 17 years-plus will have students prepared to gain admission to the higher education institution of their choice?

All of the above, in some shape or form. Some carry much more weight than others. Some will vary by the particular college or university. What holds true today may be different a few years down the line as adjustments take place.

Mary Ellen Anderson, director of admissions at Indiana University (IU) in Bloomington, says, "While there are standard things we look for, the charge we have as an admission office does shift slightly – sometimes more than slightly – from year to year." Currently, standardized tests (always important, according to Anderson, for those seeking scholarships) are being looked at more closely in the admissions process in Bloomington. They complement the ongoing "focus on academic course work in high school, as well as the grades and the trends in grades."

While there can be a number of reasons for such an alteration, Anderson says that for her school it is simply the desire of faculty committees and the board of trustees to do the best job possible in evaluating student applicants.

Numbers game

For the 2006-2007 academic year, IU received nearly 25,000 applications. A freshmen class of 7,257 was enrolled. Both were record numbers. Anderson says the GPA of prospective students granted admission was about 3.7 (on a 4.0 scale); for those eventually enrolling, that number was about 3.5. SAT scores averaged 1,170 and 1,121 in the admitted and enrolled categories, respectively. Approximately one-third of IU-Bloomington's students come from outside the state or one of more than 130 countries.

"We took our charge to heart. We have a very well prepared, high-quality class," Anderson reports. "While SAT scores have gone down across the country and SAT scores are down a little in the state, ours have gone up."

The scrutiny has only intensified for the 2007-2008 class as applications had already increased significantly (exceeding 27,000 by mid-February). Applications received after April typically receive notice that admission will be granted on a "space available basis." Due to the numbers, however, Anderson notes that for the first time in school history a wait list has been established for the 2007 fall semester.

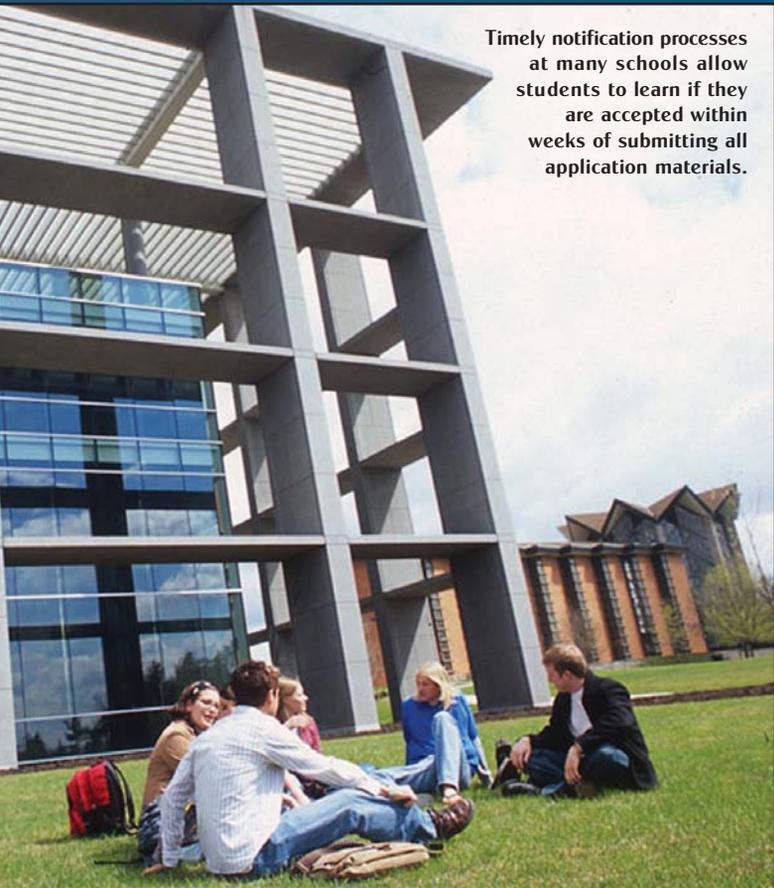
At Ball State University, the applicant pool has ranged from 11,000 to 12,000 in the past few years. For the 2007-2008 school year, there was a 23% increase through mid-January. Chris Munchell, associate director of admissions, estimates that typically about 75% of applicants are admitted, approximately 4,000 confirm their intention to attend the school and between 3,500 and 3,600 actually report to campus for classes.

SAT or ACT scores, however, fall a little farther down the list in Muncie.

"The first thing we look at is a student's curriculum – the four years of English, three years of math, three years of science, three years of social science. We highly encourage foreign languages,

Proper preparation in high school is a significant factor considered by college admissions personnel.





Timely notification processes at many schools allow students to learn if they are accepted within weeks of submitting all application materials.

although it's not required," Munchell explains. "Then we look at the academic GPA, not the overall GPA. We look at the grades and curriculum trends. We want to see some consistency there.

"This year we've started to look more at the extracurricular activities and the community service," he continues. "Our professional staff reviews each application individually. We put more emphasis on that now as we try to take an individualized perspective."

Private approach

Not all colleges and universities, of course, are created equal. Taylor University is a 161-year-old Christian liberal arts college with its main campus in Upland (in Grant County). Its 1,854 students in the fall of 2006 came from 44 states (31% from Indiana) and 23 foreign countries.

According to the university web site, those admitted as freshmen averaged: 3.62 for a high school GPA; 590 and 591 on the critical writing and math portions of the SAT, respectively; 27 as an ACT composite score and 38% were in the top 10% of their high school class.

Amy Burnett, coordinator of communications for the Taylor admissions office, outlines the requirements and procedures beyond the high school transcript and test scores. Included are two letters of recommendation – from a guidance counselor and pastor or someone else involved in the applicant's spiritual life – as well as an essay from the student.



Overview

- Founded in 1846
- More than 40 denominations
- Liberal Arts education

Academics

- 21 departments
- More than 100 majors and 40 minors
- Student-Faculty ratio 13:1
- Internships required in most areas

Student Body

- 1,900 Students
- 45 states and 22 countries represented
- 80% of students live on campus
- Average for incoming freshmen
High School GPA: 3.6
ACT: 26
SAT: 1200

Student Life

- 89% play intramural sports
- 54,294 hours of volunteer service
- 1,100 students in discipleship groups

Study Abroad

- Recognized for having the highest percentage and actual number of students study abroad
- Freshman Irish Studies Program - students can spend first semester of college in Ireland
- Lighthouse trips - 3-week international ministry trips in January



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"We do personal interviews with each student that applies," explains Burnett, with those numbers totaling more than 1,600 for 2006. "Our goal is to not set students up for failure."

The interview – once common at smaller, private schools – is no longer widely utilized. "I understand we're one of the few still requiring an interview for admission. We have no intention of changing any time soon," Burnett states.

The advantages are numerous, for both the student and the school.

"We get to learn where they've traveled, their activities, their personal relationship with Christ," she offers. "We get from them what we can never see on paper. We have a program in which freshmen go to Ireland for their first semester in college. You can just see their eyes light up when we talk about it. I know which kids are better suited for that after talking with them."

Opening the doors

Ivy Tech Community College has a different mission. Michael Fisher, director of admissions for the Wabash Valley region, describes it as "providing education to people within a community who otherwise might not have access." As a result, the statewide Ivy Tech system is an open access institution.

The school requires an assessment of basic reading, math and writing levels – assisting with placement into the most appropriate classes. The assessment, however, can be waived if the applicant received a predetermined level of SAT or ACT

scores, or has prior college experience in the past 10 years with certain grade levels.

The assessment is offered in two forms. COMPASS is an untimed computer test; ASSET is a timed exam utilizing the paper-and-pencil format that many people are more familiar with.

"The only thing we do with the high school transcript," Fisher notes, "is make sure it's official, with a date and seal. We look to see if test scores are posted (in order to potentially waive the assessment). We don't look at grades or the type of diploma."

Fisher, who has been at Ivy Tech for 14 years, is a believer in the open access system. He cautions, however, that "you can come, express an interest and two hours later be registered. The impulse buyer is not always the best. We need to create some autonomy in the student."

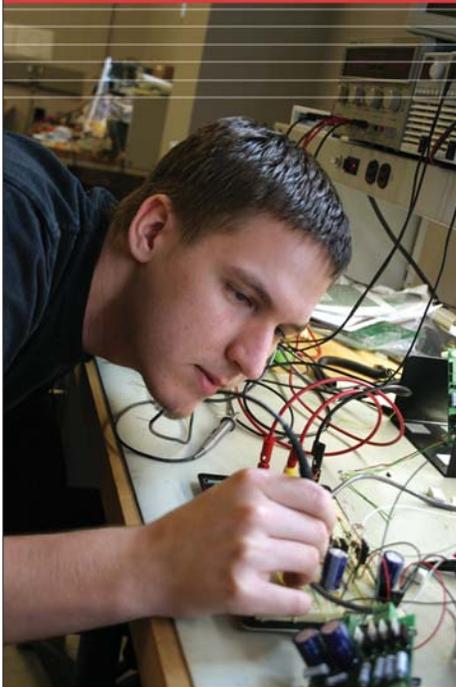
Timely feedback

Most schools appear to emphasize a continual process in which applicants are notified of their status within a short time period.

"The rolling notification is the greatest thing ever," claims IU's Anderson. "The sooner a student applies, the sooner they will get some answer (typically admission, non-admission or a hold to further evaluate). Within a three to five week period from the time we get a complete application, we can get them some response."

At Ball State, the procedure is similar. Most applications,

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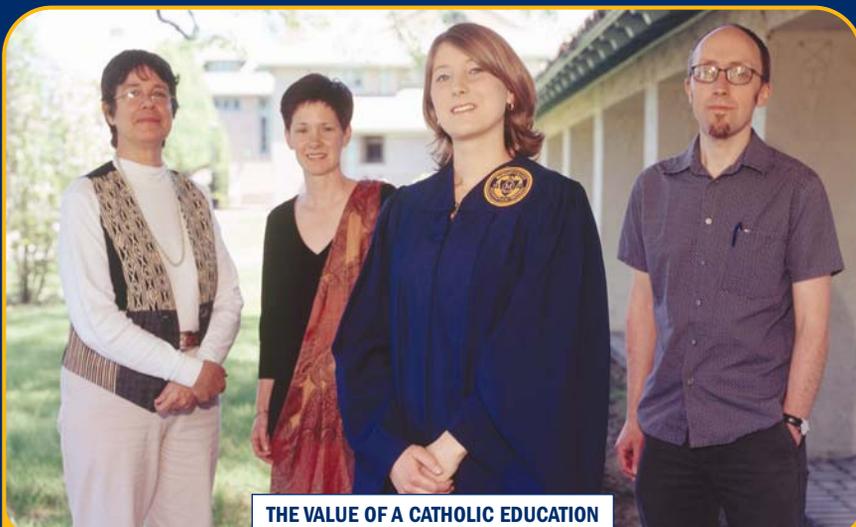
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according to Munchell, are received between August and January. Once all materials are received, a response back to the applicant takes four to six weeks.

He adds that May 1 is a generally accepted national deadline by which schools hope to hear from students whether they will be attending in the fall. Only once in the last seven years has Ball State's freshmen class been filled by that May 1 date. When spots remain open, Munchell says students will be admitted up to mid-August.

Taylor utilizes an early application period, interviewing some students in their junior year of high school or in the summer prior to their senior year. Deadline dates are in November, December and January, with students given notice of their status within three weeks.

"Generally, it's in the students' best interests to apply early. If for some reason, we want to see another semester of grades or we've encouraged the applicant to take a test again, then there is time," Burnett details. "We want to help in any way that we can."



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Kendra Thornton

About Kendra:

- Currently working in Indianapolis and preparing for medical school.
- Marian College, B.A. in Art, minor in Chemistry (summa cum laude) '06, Business Creation and Development program, Delta Epsilon Sigma National Scholastic Honors Society, Who's Who at Marian College
- Home schooled in Indianapolis

Kendra and some of her favorite professors. From left to right are Megan Wright, M.F.A., Jamie Higgs, Ph.D., and Rod Macrae, Ph.D.

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Pulling rank

Two trends documented nationally that impact the admission process are fewer high schools making use of class ranks and students applying for admittance to an ever growing number of colleges and universities.

For those interviewed for this story, class rank has never been a major factor in the decision to admit or not admit an applicant.

"It doesn't tell the story, in our opinion, of a student's chances of success at Ball State," says Munchell, adding that it's most difficult to compare the relative strengths of the students within various high schools. He does note that rank can be a factor in some scholarship processes.

Asked about the reduction in class ranks, Anderson contends, "Personally, I think it's made our job easier, and it's to the benefit of the student. We have to examine courses, grades and trends more closely. There's not a standard grading scale out there."

Floyd Central High School in Floyd Knobs, annually on the Indiana Chamber's "Best Buys" list for high schools that achieve high levels while utilizing tax dollars efficiently, still ranks students. Mark Clark, one of the school's guidance counselors, says, "There have been discussions about whether we continue. We have 400 people in our senior class and right now nine of them are tied for first. Rank, in my opinion, just does not play as big a factor as it used to."

Taylor's Burnett has not seen the multiple applications at play, but Munchell has. "There are so many options available to students today, and it's obviously a very important decision they're making. Not only are

students applying to multiple schools, but they're going to two or three different orientations and then making decisions."

Anderson, a 28-year veteran of the process, doesn't understand the logic. There may be a good compelling reason, she concedes, to go beyond the traditional three to five applications, "but to apply to 20 or 25 schools is crazy. If you apply to 20 or 25, you're probably going to be admitted to at least 10 or 15. If you're not able to narrow it down in the application stage, it's going to be very hard to make that one right choice."

Some view the selection process as becoming more sophisticated. Burnett sees extensive research and visitations before students are making the applications.

Student viewpoint

Three students serving internships at the Indiana Chamber agree with that assessment.

Andrew Terp, a high school senior, started talking with his counselor and scheduling testing dates during the second semester of his junior year. In the ensuing summer, he looked at between eight to 10 schools – researching online and making some campus visits. His lone application was for direct admission to the Indiana University Kelley School of Business, where he intends to major in finance or marketing. He applied in early September and received confirmation of his admission in about a month.

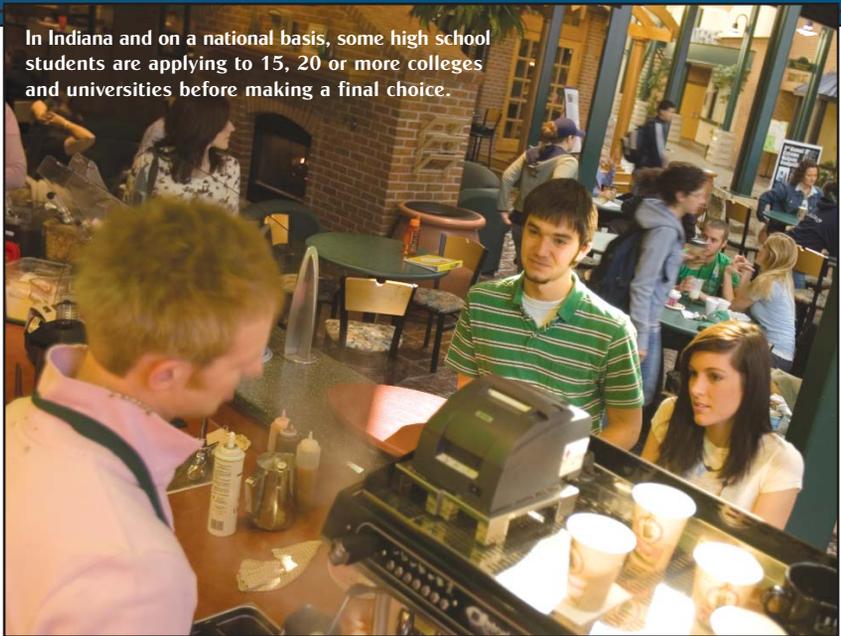
Marina Nicholson, a freshman at DePauw University, knew she wanted a liberal arts education and did not want to be too far from her Indianapolis home. Although many colleges and universities came to her high school to recruit students, she focused on DePauw after reviewing several other schools. She terms the interview at DePauw as "more about what to expect from college," and, like Terp, found the primarily online application process to be fairly straightforward.

Caitlin Wood, a senior at Butler University, recalls only casually looking at the many college and university mailings she received while in high school to see if they matched her interest at the time in pharmacy studies. She since switched majors and is now considering going to graduate school.

"The message in high school is GPA and SAT scores," she says. "I found the extracurricular activities and overall quality of the application (including an essay) also have a lot to do with acceptance and scholarships. Colleges actively seek high school graduates," she continues, "but for graduate programs you have to actively seek them. You have to be much more proactive."

Clark, the Floyd Central guidance counselor, points out that his office starts to work with juniors in mid-January on "what they need to be thinking about." He cautions students that despite applications being made in the fall, colleges and universities "want to see a really strong senior year (schedule) or if you're borderline, they'll want to see first semester grades. They want to see the science and math classes – that students

In Indiana and on a national basis, some high school students are applying to 15, 20 or more colleges and universities before making a final choice.



have challenged themselves."

His overall message: "Research, research, research. Then apply early. It makes the whole process easier."

Changing course

Anderson, Burnett and Munchell were asked what one thing they would change about the admission process.

Anderson touches on the difficulties of a large state university communicating with its constituencies, particularly challenging given the increased number of applications and the adjustment in giving higher consideration to test scores.

"We would love to manage our communication with alumni, counselors, parents and students to help them understand these changes better," she maintains. Despite various counselor programs, newsletters and other outreach, "I still don't think a lot of people got it. We've received an enormous number of calls. I don't know if there was a way to manage this."

Munchell encourages all applicants to take advantage of college visits. When failing to do so, "sometimes your perception may not be accurate. In a perfect world, all would have the opportunity to do that. If you don't have the means, the Internet can help you do that."

Burnett wishes there was less red tape for students, but says the results help prove that the process works. "There is a lot of work for students, a lot they have to go through to apply," she discloses. "But from this end it's necessary, and I can defend that. It serves you, the student, in the end."

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Mary Ellen Anderson, Indiana University-Bloomington, at (812) 855-0661 or www.indiana.edu/admissions

Amy Burnett, Taylor University, at (765) 998-5565 or www.taylor.edu/admissions

Chris Munchell, Ball State University, at (765) 285-8300 or www.bsu.edu/admissions

Ivy Tech Community College at www.ivytech.edu