

Don't end up like me

It's March. By now, high school seniors have received all their early action and early decision results. In fact, many are now awaiting results from regular decision applications. A major portion of the class of 2019 is already in college; another major portion is not. Some students are elated by the outcomes of the college application season; others are disappointed.

The overwhelming majority of seniors at the high school—for good or bad—graduate and proceed to enroll in a four-year college or university. A relatively small number pursue an associate's degree, take a gap year, or enter the workforce full time, and very few, if any, join the American military. And it's unlikely that this trend will change over the coming years, even as the price of college continues to rise.

When thinking about college, I am reminded that every single exhausting assignment you ever completed counted for one portion for one term grade for one final grade for one class. All that work you put in—all that sleep you sacrificed—is represented by the single mark. After nearly ten months of slogging away at something you'll never need to know, the only thing that matters is that final grade.

Then, all those final grades, each of which signifies a painstaking amount of effort (or lack thereof), are compiled together into a document known as a "transcript," which the guidance office sends to your prospective colleges as the single most important component of the application process—more so than test scores, and far more (usually) than everything you've done *outside* of school for the last four years.

What was all this for? Why did you spend precious hours memorizing kinematic formulas—or practice ICE charts for different chemical reactions over and over again? Why were you up at midnight memorizing the function of the ascending loop of henle—or proving geometric theorems as a freshman that grown men smarter than you had already figured out thousands of years ago?

Why, when you wished to become a novelist—or become a history professor—did you spend so much time on subjects about which you don't give a good damn—topics that will never again appear in your life? Because of college. It was only ever about college. That's the sole end result. And, in order to get into Williams, you couldn't just submit A's in the humanities or a 780 on the literature subject test.

All this work was to make you seem more appealing—to prove your worth—when the somnolent admissions officer takes a cursory glance at your application—after the twenty she just evaluated—and asks to herself: "What should I let this one in?" If, however, you manage to be accepted anyway: congratulations, you've gamed the system; you've won. Because only your admission matters.

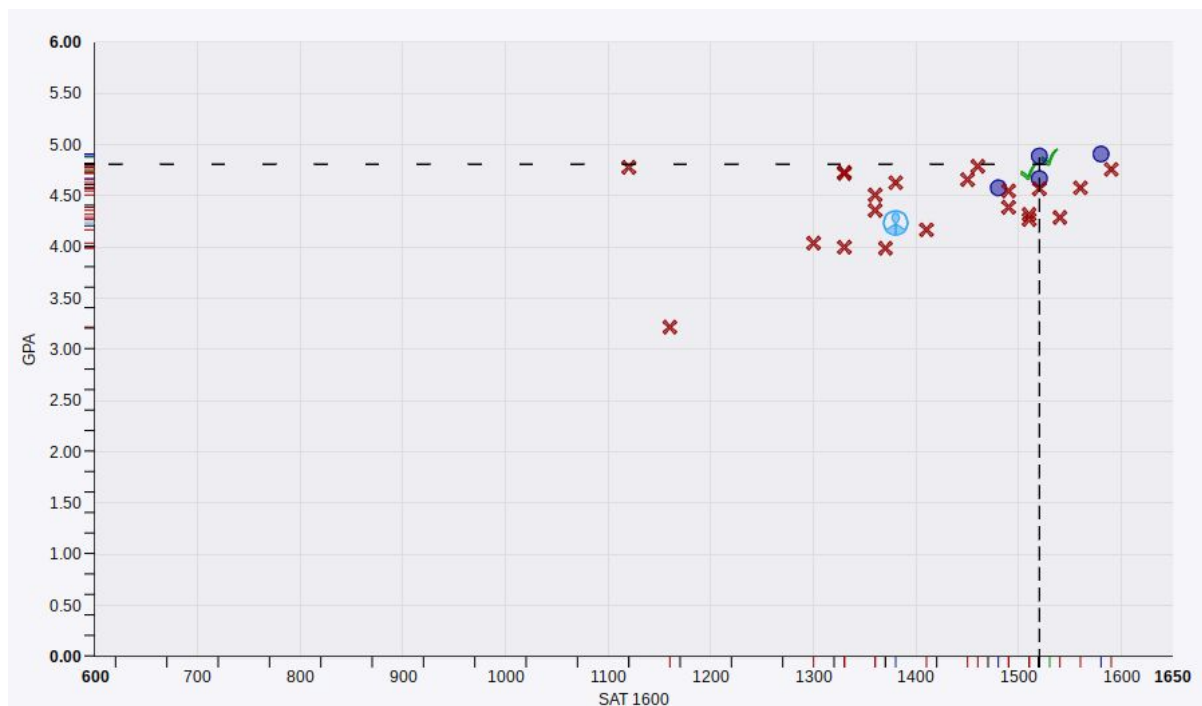
Personally, I applied to fourteen colleges and universities, eight of which have offered me a verdict as of this date. I've received six rejections (formerly with two deferrals), one deferral, and only one

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acceptance: UMass Amherst. As of now, I am awaiting seven RD verdicts from schools ranging in acceptance rate from Brandeis University to Harvard, though I'll likely be accepted by only two more.

So, who am I to offer advice?—he who made no college visits whatsoever and will, perhaps in part consequently, presumably be accepted by just 21 percent of the schools to which he submitted a seventy-dollar application? Because you should learn from my experience how *not* to apply to college. Here are ten points of advice on how *not* to end up like Christopher Bonis:

1. *Don't* blow off honors chemistry sophomore year. If it's too difficult, just drop down to ACP.
2. *Don't* visit all your prospective colleges virtually. Make an effort to see the school in person.
3. *Don't* enroll in as many classes as possible. Enroll in those where you can actually perform well.
4. *Don't* apply to fourteen colleges about which you know basically nothing. Apply methodically.
5. *Don't* waste your ED selection on a college to which you have no chance of being accepted.
6. *Don't* apply to Boston College early. It makes your low likelihood for admission even lower.
7. *Don't* waste your time and money applying to Brown University. You're not getting in.
8. *Don't* take the SAT and ACT seven times. Choose one and prepare thoroughly.
9. *Don't* take seven SAT Subject Tests. Choose one or two and prepare thoroughly.
10. *Don't* pass up opportunities to interview with a college representative. If one's available; take it.



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Naviance scattergram for University of California, Berkeley. Why did I even bother? (*Screenshot courtesy of Christopher Bonis.*)