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E.D. II: The Not-So-Early Decision

By **ERIC HOOVER** OCT. 26, 2015

This week, thousands of students will click “submit” on their early-decision applications, hoping for a thumbs-up from their first-choice college. With competition for slots ever increasing, let’s assume the worst: You don’t get in. What then? For those eager to get off the college admissions carousel, there’s a second chance at an acceptance before spring: early decision II.

Timing

What’s the difference between E.D. I and its lesser-known counterpart? Deadlines, for one. E.D. I applications are due in November for a December decision. E.D. II is due in January for an answer in February, nearly two months before regular-decision acceptances arrive. Both are binding: You apply to just one college early, agreeing to attend if accepted.

Prevalence

Of the more than 625 colleges that use the Common Application, about 30 percent offer E.D. I; 13 percent offer both E.D. I and II. Among the latter are selective liberal arts colleges (Colby, Pomona, Swarthmore) and small private universities (Brandeis, Emory, Vanderbilt). But hardly any publics offer E.D. II., and no Ivys.

E.D. II is “definitely on more people’s radar,” said Steven Roy Goodman, an independent educational consultant in Washington. More than half the students he

advises plan on applying E.D. II, if necessary. “As early decision becomes a little more competitive,” he said, “it’s not illogical for people to focus on both E.D. I and E.D. II.”

Appeal

“Some kids are late bloomers,” said Matthew J. DeGreeff, director of college counseling at Middlesex School in Concord, Mass. “What I like about E.D. II is it gives them more time to get their application together, more time to visit campuses and do their research.”

E.D. II benefits colleges, too. The more slots filled through binding early decision, the higher the yield (the percentage of accepted students who go on to enroll), a conventional measure of desirability. E.D. II also lets colleges evaluate early birds rejected by their first choice. That future valedictorian denied by Amherst might look irresistible to other colleges.

Downside

Typically, students aim high the first time and, if snubbed, opt for another college, often a less selective one. But think carefully before applying E.D. II: If your top choice deferred you to the regular decision pool, you’re sacrificing another chance at being admitted there. And you still have to apply regular decision somewhere, as a backup.

For students without a “hook” that helps them stand out, E.D. II may not be as good a bet as E.D. I. Generally, applying early improves your chances. But E.D. I pools tend to be bigger and have stronger applicants, so schools take fewer students in the second round. For this year’s freshman class, for instance, Hamilton College accepted 42 percent of E.D. I applicants, and 32 percent of E.D. II applicants. The regular-decision pool was even more competitive, with 23 percent receiving offers. Pomona’s figures support the trend: It accepted 21 percent of applicants E.D. I, and 17 percent E.D. II. Regular-decision acceptance rate: 9 percent.

Bottom Line

Even if the admissions grind has worn you down, don't rush to apply E.D. I or II, especially if money's a concern. Families benefit from comparing financial aid offers; E.D. leaves you with only one.

Although nobody recommends taking the commitment lightly, students can withdraw if the offer falls short of their needs. Figure out what you can pay before an acceptance materializes, says Robert J. Massa, senior vice president for enrollment and institutional planning at Drew University, which offers both E.D. I and II.

"If the college makes it affordable, the search is over," he said, "but if it does not, the search continues."

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