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Paying in Full as the Ticket Into Colleges

By **KATE ZERNIKE**
Published: March 30, 2009

In the bid for a fat envelope this year, it may help, more than usual, to have a fat wallet.

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Monica Almeida/The New York Times
Diane Geller, a college counselor in Los Angeles, met with a high school senior and her mother to discuss college options.

Facing fallen endowments and needier students, many colleges are looking more favorably on wealthier applicants as they make their admissions decisions this year.

Institutions that have pledged to admit students regardless of need are finding ways to increase the number of those who pay the full cost in ways that allow the colleges to maintain the claim of being need-blind — taking more students from the transfer or waiting lists, for instance, or admitting more foreign students who pay full tuition.

Private colleges that acknowledge taking financial status into account say they are even more aware of that factor this year.

“If you are a student of means or ability, or both, there has never been a better year,” said Robert A. Sevier, an enrollment consultant to colleges.

The trend does not mean colleges are cutting their financial aid budgets. In fact, most have increased those budgets this year, protecting that money even as they cut administrative salaries or require faculty members to take furloughs. But with more students applying for aid, and with those who need aid often needing more, institutions say they have to be mindful of how many scholarship students they can afford.

Colleges say they are not backing away from their desire to serve less affluent students; if anything, they say, taking more students who can afford to pay full price or close to it allows them to better afford those who cannot. But they say the inevitable result is that needier students will be shifted down to the less expensive and less prestigious institutions.

“There’s going to be a cascading of talented lower-income kids down the social hierarchy of American higher education, and some cascading up of affluent kids,” said Morton Owen Schapiro, the president of Williams College and an economist who studies higher education.

And colleges acknowledge that giving more seats to higher-paying students often means trading off their goals to be more socioeconomically diverse.

Some admissions officers and college advisers say richer parents are taking note of the climate, calculating that if they do not apply for aid, their children stand a better chance

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This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: April 1, 2009

An article on Tuesday about colleges looking more favorably on wealthy applicants referred incorrectly to a pledge by Grinnell College to limit the amount of loans that students must pay back after graduation. The college promises that no student will graduate with more than \$2,000 a year in loans — not a total of \$2,000 in loans.

A version of this article appeared in print on March 31, 2009, on page A1 of the New York edition.

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