

## WSJ – Transcript of the “live” chat – April 10, 2012

### Do College Waitlists Lead to Admission?

- Let us hear your observations, opinions, and questions about college admissions and waitlists by clicking "Comment Now" above. Rachel and Kennon will get to as many as possible when we're live today at noon ET.

by *Allison Lichter* edited by *Demetria Gallegos* 4/9/2012 10:09:20 PM [6:09 PM yesterday](#)

- Welcome to this live chat about college admissions and waitlists. Rachel Ensign and Melissa Korn wrote about this [for today's paper.](#)

by *Demetria Gallegos* 4/10/2012 3:59:28 PM [11:59 AM](#)

- Rachel Ensign and Kennon Dick, a former college admissions officer at Swarthmore and a college admissions consultant, are here to answer as many questions as they can.

by *Demetria Gallegos* 4/10/2012 4:00:48 PM [12:00 PM](#)

- My daughter was pleasantly surprised to be accepted to her two top choices for college next fall. Subsequently we have been mystified by the entire acceptance/wait list process, having received contradictory advice from her college consultant and her school counselor. She initially sent in the (non-refundable) deposits for both schools, with the intent to make her final decision by the May 1st deadline. Both schools seemed to encourage this strategy as they are both hosting Visiting Days for accepted students, presumably to enhance the odds that they attend. However, my daughter was then told by her school counselor that sending deposits to two schools was "forbidden," and might result in a school withdrawing her acceptance. Can it really be true that schools expect kids to make a snap decision after receiving multiple acceptances? Or is it generally recognized they may need time to compare the schools, and possibly visit them, before choosing?

by *clinresga* edited by *Demetria Gallegos* 4/10/2012 4:01:05 PM [12:01 PM](#)

- I think there is a lot going on in this question. NACAC rules dictate that students have until May 1 to decide and you don't have to send in a deposit reserving a space in the class until then.

by *Kennon Dick* 4/10/2012 4:02:10 PM [12:02 PM](#)

- However, there are some schools that try to lock students in by asking for a separate housing deposit earlier than May 1. It's a little slimy, but not against the rules.

by Kennon Dick4/10/2012 4:03:04 PM [12:03 PM](#)

- Sending in two deposits is frowned upon. If a college, finds out you are deposited at two schools after May 1, they could rescind your decision.

by Kennon Dick4/10/2012 4:03:37 PM [12:03 PM](#)

- The accepted students days are designed to help your daughter make up her mind. She isn't expected to have decided prior to attending them.

by Kennon Dick4/10/2012 4:04:09 PM [12:04 PM](#)

- From my reporting, it was clear that your child can be rescinded if they put down deposits at more than one college. While they might get away with it--is it really worth the risk after months of fretting over college applications?

by Rachel Louise Ensign4/10/2012 4:04:35 PM [12:04 PM](#)

- For a student who is eventually accepted from the waitlist, how do financial aid packages compare to those given to non-waitlisted students? Is grant money more scarce?

by Richard4/10/2012 4:04:59 PM [12:04 PM](#)

- Each school is going to be different in how they approach this. In general, if a school is need-sensitive, the financial aid package is likely to be less attractive with minimal grants. Much of that money has already been spent trying to attract the regularly admitted students.

by Kennon Dick4/10/2012 4:05:58 PM [12:05 PM](#)

- As we mention in the article, financial need may even make it less likely to get off the waitlist. A small percentage of schools are need-blind until they turn to their waitlist, when they become need-aware--meaning they take your financial situation into account.

by Rachel Louise Ensign4/10/2012 4:06:19 PM [12:06 PM](#)

- If they are need-blind, you should get a similar package to those of the regularly admitted students.

by Kennon Dick4/10/2012 4:06:39 PM [12:06 PM](#)

- You probably won't get any extra funding, but it should be a solid package.

by Kennon Dick4/10/2012 4:06:52 PM [12:06 PM](#)

- This is a general statement though and there will be differences from institution to institution.

by Kennon Dick4/10/2012 4:07:28 PM [12:07 PM](#)

- Most top schools are need-blind. The admissions director at U. Penn made it clear that students who get in off of the waitlist get the same package they would get if they were accepted initially.

by Rachel Louise Ensign4/10/2012 4:08:06 PM [12:08 PM](#)

- I have been waitlisted to my top two universities so I have followed up by sending each a letter of interest. And one I have met with the director of alumni in my country (I am international). Is that all I should do? Because after all I have heard it's all about demographics, which would just be up to luck.

by Ashley4/10/2012 4:08:11 PM [12:08 PM](#)

- There is certainly an element of luck in this process. Stay in contact with the admissions officer that is in charge of international admissions and try to contact them a few times between now and May 1. Make sure to send updated grades and any changes to activities that you feel will help your case. Make sure they know WHY you think that school is the right school for you. The more concrete you can make your reasoning, the better off you will be.

by Kennon Dick edited by Demetria Gallegos 4/10/2012 4:11:04 PM [12:11 PM](#)

- While it's good to express your interest after you're waitlisted, be careful to not be TOO persistent. Don't call or e-mail every day if you don't have anything new to say. And don't show up on campus for new student orientation.

by Rachel Louise Ensign4/10/2012 4:11:18 PM [12:11 PM](#)

- The student who got in off of the waitlist who we featured in the article only reached out to admissions once

by Rachel Louise Ensign4/10/2012 4:11:40 PM [12:11 PM](#)

- But she was very original--she wrote one letter that was unique and likely made an impression.

by *Rachel Louise Ensign*4/10/2012 4:12:12 PM [12:12 PM](#)

- My son is writing letters (one every few days) to the Dean of Admission and others on the Admission staff reiterating that the school he is waitlisted at is his #1 choice. He applied early decision, was deferred, and is now waitlisted. The letters are respectful. Do Admissions staff see these as annoying, do they consider them at all?

by *Kathy Murphy*4/10/2012 4:12:54 PM [12:12 PM](#)

- The kids that call every day move to the "stalker pile" and that doesn't help.

by *Kennon Dick*4/10/2012 4:13:38 PM [12:13 PM](#)

- Keep the contact reasonable. Once a week is fine.

by *Kennon Dick*4/10/2012 4:14:11 PM [12:14 PM](#)

- My daughter has been waitlisted by Georgetown. I understand the school will consider a whole range of factors when making decisions. I just wonder if my daughter's background of an Asian from NJ will be detrimental to her prospect. Thanks.

by *Bryant Zhao*4/10/2012 4:14:51 PM [12:14 PM](#)

- I don't see how that would be a detriment. I hear this kind of comment a lot, and it's never been my experience that her demographics would work against her.

by *Kennon Dick*4/10/2012 4:16:37 PM [12:16 PM](#)

- From my discussions with other parents and my daughter's discussions with friends, it seems like many students have been placed on waitlists this year. Is this true?

by *Nancy*4/10/2012 4:17:19 PM [12:17 PM](#)

- The numbers show it's a mixed bag. Some colleges upped the size of their waitlists

by *Rachel Louise Ensign*4/10/2012 4:18:09 PM [12:18 PM](#)

- But others, like Stanford and U. Penn, made their lists smaller because so few kids get admitted from them in the end.

by *Rachel Louise Ensign*4/10/2012 4:18:31 PM [12:18 PM](#)

- Overall, more colleges across the board are using waitlists now than in years past.

by *Rachel Louise Ensign* 4/10/2012 4:18:47 PM [12:18 PM](#)

- Enrollment managers at each college are looking at their numbers and trying to determine how many kids they need on the waitlist to cover their bases. the greater the uncertainty the more they waitlist.

by *Kennon Dick* 4/10/2012 4:19:26 PM [12:19 PM](#)

- Could you give us the basics of the process? If being wait listed is equivalent to a rejection letter, as one of your sources mentions in the article, how do colleges decide who gets in and who goes on the list?

by *Demetria Gallegos* 4/10/2012 4:19:52 PM [12:19 PM](#)

- It's a long process. There is a lot of deliberation and some really hard choices. Imagine being in a room with ten people and each has a pile of applications in front of them and there are only five spaces left in the class. You have to try to argue as best you can to hopefully get your kids in. If you aren't successful, your kids are destined for the waitlist.

by *Kennon Dick* 4/10/2012 4:22:55 PM [12:22 PM](#)

- Some students are waitlisted because they almost made the cut and colleges want to keep them around longer. But others are waitlisted just out of courtesy.

by *Rachel Louise Ensign* 4/10/2012 4:23:14 PM [12:23 PM](#)

- My daughter is waitlisted at NYU. It is her #1 choice. I am not sure how I can help as parent.

by *KingK* edited by *Demetria Gallegos* 4/10/2012 4:23:28 PM [12:23 PM](#)

- It's a lot better if your child takes the lead on this

by *Rachel Louise Ensign* 4/10/2012 4:24:14 PM [12:24 PM](#)

- Admissions experts say that that shows their interest is genuine

by *Rachel Louise Ensign* 4/10/2012 4:24:35 PM [12:24 PM](#)

- As an admissions officer, we really want to hear from the student. They are going to be the best advocate. Having mom or dad taking the lead isn't as helpful.

by Kennon Dick4/10/2012 4:25:45 PM [12:25 PM](#)

- As a parent, be a guide and a solid supporter, but let them make the contact and advocate on their behalf.

by Kennon Dick4/10/2012 4:26:26 PM [12:26 PM](#)

- We've had several questions about whether the process is the same for graduate schools. Here's one:

by Demetria Gallegos4/10/2012 4:26:34 PM [12:26 PM](#)

- Is the waitlist process any different when applying to graduate school? Do graduate school admissions use the waitlist process?

by Hector4/10/2012 4:26:37 PM [12:26 PM](#)

- It is a bit different for grad schools. They do use waitlists, but there is less of the logistics happening behind the scenes than on the undergraduate level.

by Kennon Dick4/10/2012 4:27:57 PM [12:27 PM](#)

- In any waitlist situation, you might be able to find out about your chances being accepted from the list. Ask if last year's numbers are available and talk to the admissions officers about whether you have a shot or not.

by Rachel Louise Ensign4/10/2012 4:28:11 PM [12:28 PM](#)

- Wait lists are a scam! The whole application process is a scam, too. Colleges and Universities seem to thrive on encouraging as many applications as possible with the sole purpose of being able to reject as many as possible, therefore appearing to be ultra-selective, ultra-competitive and more desirable. It just creates a vicious circle and perpetuates the process.

by Fed Up With the Whole Process4/10/2012 4:28:44 PM [12:28 PM](#)

- That's a reaction I've seen from a lot of commenters

by Rachel Louise Ensign4/10/2012 4:29:05 PM [12:29 PM](#)

- It's definitely understandable given that in a lot of these situations, more students get waitlist offers than acceptances

by Rachel Louise Ensign4/10/2012 4:29:22 PM [12:29 PM](#)

- This whole process inspires a lot of anger and animosity. I certainly see that with my own students. April can be hell for a lot of students.

by Kennon Dick 4/10/2012 4:29:50 PM [12:29 PM](#)

- But from a school's perspective, it makes sense to have such a large waitlist. For one, many students will opt to not accept a spot on the list.

by Rachel Louise Ensign 4/10/2012 4:30:02 PM [12:30 PM](#)

- And when they do need to draw on the list, they want as broad of a group as possible so that they can fill those little "holes"--i.e. find that oboe player, Physics major from California

by Rachel Louise Ensign 4/10/2012 4:30:32 PM [12:30 PM](#)

- However, on the other side of the desk, the AOs, (Admissions Officers) are trying their best to help their students get into the class. The reality is that most of the process is beyond their control

by Kennon Dick edited by Demetria Gallegos 4/10/2012 4:31:41 PM [12:31 PM](#)

- My child has high grades and applied to several schools for Mechanical Engineering. Despite all input that Engineering is a highly desired field, schools have either rejected him or put him on a waitlist. Where is this supposed demand for the sciences? Has government funding for education so increased applications that a good student no longer has a high probability of getting accepted?

by TLD 4/10/2012 4:32:07 PM [12:32 PM](#)

- I think each college is looking for a different kind of "good student"

by Rachel Louise Ensign 4/10/2012 4:33:32 PM [12:33 PM](#)

- While Engineering is a field that leads a student to great career prospects, it doesn't mean that it's easier for an applicant to get into.

by Rachel Louise Ensign 4/10/2012 4:34:08 PM [12:34 PM](#)

- I think all students need to have a good distribution among their applications. I recommend that all students have a good solid safety school to fall back on. This is especially true as you get into highly selective admissions where the decisions can be very subjective.

by Kennon Dick 4/10/2012 4:36:35 PM [12:36 PM](#)

- You didn't mention one of the reasons students end up on waitlist these days: Ivies receive so many qualified applicants, they don't have room for all the ones who could be accepted, and

they're not expanding enrollment. Why do colleges not feel more pressure, or an obligation, to work together and improve the efficiency of the admissions process? They can't collude of course, but already they have consortiums to share data on admitted candidates to see, for example, which schools received applications from the same student. Why not work together to improve outcomes on the admissions process?

by *Holly G*4/10/2012 4:37:02 PM [12:37 PM](#)

- This is a great question

by *Rachel Louise Ensign*4/10/2012 4:37:35 PM [12:37 PM](#)

- But a complicated one to answer

by *Rachel Louise Ensign*4/10/2012 4:37:40 PM [12:37 PM](#)

- A top college can't just accept a bunch more students because they received more applications-- they'd need somewhere on campus to house those students and a way to keep student: faculty ratios low.

by *Rachel Louise Ensign*4/10/2012 4:39:37 PM [12:39 PM](#)

- Plus, certain colleges pride themselves on being small, intimate places, so changing that could take away from their appeal.

by *Rachel Louise Ensign*4/10/2012 4:39:59 PM [12:39 PM](#)

- In one regard, it doesn't benefit them to expand. As soon as the demographics start to fall, they will be left with a lot of unused resources just like in the early 1990s. At that time you saw schools closing for lack of enrollment.

by *Kennon Dick*4/10/2012 4:40:53 PM [12:40 PM](#)

- Another thing to consider: college applications are at a high right now

by *Rachel Louise Ensign*4/10/2012 4:41:57 PM [12:41 PM](#)

- Boomers' children are going to college

by *Rachel Louise Ensign*4/10/2012 4:42:12 PM [12:42 PM](#)

- ...and applications will likely taper off in a few years

by *Rachel Louise Ensign*4/10/2012 4:42:24 PM [12:42 PM](#)

- Demographics are at their highest now. Colleges are looking at their long range plans and concerned about what they will do in ten years when there are less students applying. It's a great time to be a director of admissions.

by Kennon Dick4/10/2012 4:43:22 PM [12:43 PM](#)

- We have time for one more question:

by Demetria Gallegos4/10/2012 4:43:52 PM [12:43 PM](#)

- What about "second semester acceptances"? I know that USC does this to keep their accepted GPA/score numbers high, and I'm sure other schools do as well. How does it work - can they go to a community college in the fall to keep up, or are they always a semester behind? Also, do kids ever move from a second semester acceptance to a fall one (is it like a waiting list)?

by ssk4/10/2012 4:43:56 PM [12:43 PM](#)

- I can't really answer this based on my own experience. None of the schools that I worked for had this practice. However, as I understand them, it is not like a waitlist. They don't shift students from spring admit to fall admit.

by Kennon Dick4/10/2012 4:44:33 PM [12:44 PM](#)

- I think you need to flip around your reasoning...

by Rachel Louise Ensign4/10/2012 4:44:33 PM [12:44 PM](#)

- Being accepted for the second semester is MUCH better than getting offered a spot on a waitlist

by Rachel Louise Ensign4/10/2012 4:45:04 PM [12:45 PM](#)

- Consult the specific colleges for recommendations for how to use the fall semester. I'm should the advisors there can provide you with constructive ways to use that time.

by Kennon Dick4/10/2012 4:45:24 PM [12:45 PM](#)

- how much time do they give the people on the wait list to accept or reject the offer to enroll in the fall?

by genevieve4/10/2012 4:46:20 PM [12:46 PM](#)

- A college has until August 1 to wrap up their waitlist activity

by Rachel Louise Ensign4/10/2012 4:46:47 PM [12:46 PM](#)

- For a student, they typically call you and ask if you're still interested.

by *Rachel Louise Ensign* 4/10/2012 4:47:14 PM [12:47 PM](#)

- Then they'll send you a formal letter of acceptance.

by *Rachel Louise Ensign* 4/10/2012 4:47:23 PM [12:47 PM](#)

- You'll have to turn that around pretty quickly

by *Rachel Louise Ensign* 4/10/2012 4:47:32 PM [12:47 PM](#)

- Two weeks is a pretty normal time to ask for the commitment.

by *Rachel Louise Ensign* edited by *Demetria Gallegos* 4/10/2012 4:47:51 PM [12:47 PM](#)

- Thanks to everyone for great questions. [Here's](#) a link to the article that ran today. You can continue the conversation there.

by *Demetria Gallegos* 4/10/2012 4:48:09 PM [12:48 PM](#)

- Thanks everyone!

by *Rachel Louise Ensign* 4/10/2012 4:48:23 PM [12:48 PM](#)

- Thanks everyone! Best of luck to all of you.

by *Kennon Dick* 4/10/2012 4:48:49 PM [12:48 PM](#)