Deferred Early? Don't Fret!
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The seasons of college admission are fairly predictable. College Counselors work closely with students through the college exploration and application process in the fall as applications are completed and essays are drafted, edited, and finally submitted with great hopes of inviting admission offers. When these applications are submitted under Early Decision (binding) or Early Action (early notification) plans, admission decisions are typically expected in December or January.

Admission committees often elect to defer an early application when a student’s application would benefit from additional standardized college testing and/or inclusion of the 7th semester grades reflecting work in the senior year, or if they want to consider the application in the context of other applications.

Even though college counselors know that defer notifications are part of the process, receiving this news can be demoralizing for students. Here are some strategies and approaches I share with students and parents to help manage this part of the process:

Understand that colleges receive many more qualified applications than they have space for in their next freshman class. Deferred applications are part of the process. Remember that you were not denied – your admission decision is still pending, and you will receive this decision later in the admission cycle.

It is human and natural to want to solve this and figure out what you did “wrong.” Chances are you did nothing wrong – the good news is that they often share exactly what they need to complete your review in the letter telling you that your application has been deferred! Read the information carefully to see if they are asking you to take additional SAT, ACT, or TOEFL tests. If they mention new testing and you are seriously interested in this college, you should seriously consider registering and preparing to take an additional test. They may mention that they want the opportunity to review your grades from the first semester/trimester of your senior year. This is no time to slack off on your academic effort! Sometimes the defer letter does not mention any specific details – they may say they want to review your application with the Regular Decision applications later in the process. Avoid the overwhelming urge to contact the college to find out why they deferred your application particularly if the defer notice asks you not to contact them or submit any additional materials.
If the deferral does not specifically ask you not to submit anything new, it is perfectly appropriate to begin compiling an update email. While you do not want to barrage the inbox of the admission representative, it is appropriate to send one update with significant and new information which can be added to your file. In order to make the most of your update email, consider your academic and extracurricular work as well as significant honors or awards you received since you submitted the application. Are you pursuing any independent research which you did not mention in your application? If this school is your first choice, it is appropriate to include that in the update. Consider the timing of your update email. You want to allow enough time so that you have meaningful, interesting, and new information to add for their consideration. You don’t want to wait so long that they have already reviewed your file.

Shift your energy to your remaining applications and essays. Review each one carefully to be sure that you are submitting accurate applications along with well-written, compelling essays.

Be patient. When you submitted your early application, you were hoping to receive a decision in the winter. You may now be waiting until spring. Adjust your expectations. If you originally applied under the binding, Early Decision application plan and you were deferred, you are no longer bound by the agreement to attend if admitted. If they offer admission, you will have until May 1st to deposit if you choose to attend.

Talk with your parents or your College Counselor if you still have questions or concerns. They are here to support and encourage you throughout your college process!