

THE COLLEGE OF YOUR CHOICE: REJECTED

I recently spoke with a young woman who was coming to grips with a major nightmare in the lives of high school seniors—a rejection letter from her college of choice.

“I only wanted to go to this college,” she said sadly. “It had everything I wanted for my major. The faculty was wonderful and I was excited about taking their courses. The campus had, like, everything—great residence halls and classrooms, even a stream with real fish.” She added, “The students were so friendly and outgoing. And they don’t want me.”

I gave her one of my better “There, there” nods. “What will you do next,” I asked.

“I don’t know. I gave this college my very best when I did all the application materials. I qualified, understand?”

I asked how many other colleges she had applied to.

“None,” she said. “I just wanted to go to this one.”

Oh. This is where the trouble started. One of the painful truths of the college admission process is: “Keep your options open, even if you really want only one institution,” and there is a certain peril in ignoring that truth. At the very least, a letter of rejection leads to disappointment and a sense of confusion about what to do next.

Applying to—and being rejected by—only one school can harm your self-image. In one line of reasoning, the rejection of your application is equated with a rejection of you as a human being. You are not worthy of that college. Perhaps you are not worthy of college at all. Perhaps you are not smart enough or attractive enough or outgoing enough to get in—anywhere.

“There, there,” and I mean it.

There are any number of reasons why your application, not you personally, might have

been rejected. It’s a crowded field of college hopefuls—especially in the more selective colleges—and the criteria for admission can be strictly enforced. For example, your grades may be good enough to gain entrance into college B but not necessarily into college A. The fact is, there is a growing number of high school seniors each year (until the class of 2008 leaves high school), and although you may be well qualified for that school that has your heart, so are four or five others who are competing for that same seat. So even though someone JUST LIKE YOU was admitted just three or four years ago from your high school or family circle, it may be more competitive now for you to be admitted. It’s a matter of numbers. You need to keep your options open, realize there still are a lot of great choices for you, and be ready to move on to your next choice if you have to.

Of course, you should apply to the college that most appeals to you. But don’t stop there. In addition, apply to at least two other colleges in which you feel you would be comfortable. There are more than three thousand colleges and universities in the United States, and you can find both personal satisfaction and preparation for the future in any number of them.

So, don’t limit your choices and, if rejected, don’t beat yourself up. If you’re flexible and open minded, you’ll find the right college that is waiting for you to apply.

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