

Gaining admission into a prestigious college has been a bit competitive all the time, however, it's not difficult to see just how crazy things have turned out to be these days. Nevertheless, most of the headlines have been made over parents' elaborate arrangements comprising bribes and forged test scores so their children can have an edge in the college admissions process.

Hence, what is really happening and how did things end up really competitive that parents are obliged to breaking the law? Author Frank Bruni mentions a lot of reasons for the record number of college applicants, the record-low acceptance rates, and the reasons why parents are really desperate for their students to get into the "right" school.

Also, you will get to know why a lot of the desperation to get into elite colleges is inappropriate, and the reason why your potential alma mater's reputation has little to do with your success or satisfaction in life. Therefore, before you split out a fortune on your higher education, you need to understand why some experts, as well as graduates, believe that the actual secret to success lies outside the Ivy League.

The Ivy League universities aren't just the only ones creating people that are successful.

Ask several people about the top American colleges – the places believed to set people on a fast-track to success – and the majority of the people will think of the Ivy League schools of Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, Princeton, Yale and the University of Pennsylvania.

This general perception of Ivy League superiority is difficult to disregard, even for people who know very well that you can get a world-class education even if they don't attend any of these schools.

Let us use Chris Christie as an example. When the past New Jersey governor was assisting Andrew his son to decide his options, the question came up if Christie would let his son go to Princeton if he was offered admission. Nevertheless, Christie's old school was the University of Delaware, a school that served him well and also offered him valued experiences.

However, Christie felt that public opinion was probably more significant. He told his son that, despite the fact that he would get a good education even if he chooses his father's paths, he would possibly need to work harder to prove himself. Even though he didn't really see it as just, he told his son to go to Princeton if they offered him admission in order to make use of the benefits of the opportunities that accompany the opinion of Ivy League students being the best of the best.

But, in reality, successful people emerge from a wide range of schools, and definitely not only the Ivy League.

If we consider the people who were running Fortune 500 companies in 2014, just one CEO from the top ten businesses got their undergraduate degree from an Ivy League school. If we increase that number to consider the top 30 businesses, we'll see other Ivy League representatives. However, the list of alma maters remains varied enough to consist of schools such as the University of Minnesota, the University of Central Oklahoma and Penn State.

When we consider the top 100 companies on the Fortune 500 list, just 30% of US-born CEOs went to Ivy League schools.

Definitely, attending an Ivy League school may give a student an edge in life, however, they're far from being the only places creating successful people.

Bias, and not increasing standards makes the acceptance into elite schools difficult.

Thus, how many candidates get offered admission to Ivy League schools? Though, in 2015, just 5.05% of the whole applicants were offered admission into Stanford, which made it their lowest acceptance rate so far in history as at then. However, at Yale, their acceptance rate reduced from 20% in the late-1980s to only 6.5% in 2015.

However, before you think that this is another indication of how elite and esteemed these schools are, let's look at the great extent these schools go to get to those numbers.

According to the previous dean of admissions for the University of Chicago Ted O'Neil, colleges are aware that a low acceptance rate makes a school look prestigious and highly selective about whom they accept. As a matter of fact, a low acceptance rate number is usually used as a promotional device in school brochures and reference materials. However, maybe most significantly, the number gets factored into the highly influential college rankings which are published in the US News & World Report.

Hence, when schools go out of their way to cast a wide net and entice vast numbers of students, it isn't an effort to acquire high-performing students, it's then an attempt to ensure that their acceptance number is as low as possible.

Therefore, if students are finding it difficult to enter into the school they like, this isn't due to universities increasing their standards but it's because they're competing to increase the number of students that are applying, lower their acceptance rate and thus get a better overall ranking.

However, that's not the only reason that can cause students admission to be declined. Also, there is the bias universities have toward the legacies, which is any applicant who has at least one parent that has formerly passed through the school.

In 2011, Michael Hurwitz who was a doctoral candidate at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education published research that revealed how beneficial it is to be a legacy student. His study of the 2006 to 2007 academic year revealed that, when all other factors were the same, a legacy student had 23.3% more opportunity than a non-legacy student of being accepted to the 30 most selective colleges.

With all these challenging factors to face, students are feeling obliged to go to an extra extent to win over the admissions board. But how extreme? Let's find out about this in the next chapter.

Parents and students feel the urge to go through an extreme extent to get into the best college.

Since the pool of applicants for colleges is constantly increasing, the old advantages like good test scores and grades won't matter anymore.

Nevertheless, that's what a lot of applicants are detecting these days. And this is the reason why in order for them to stand out from a progressively competitive multitude, a lot of them are now going through expensive college prep courses.

How expensive are we talking about? The New York-based company Bespoke Education provides tutoring and counseling for college applicants, and their services on just SAT preparation alone, you'll need to pay \$5,000 upwards.

Still parents are not only ready to spend this huge amount of money on their high-school graduate children; however, some are also willing to get advantages as early as possible. In places like New York City, the pressure is on for parents to get their children into the type of primary school, kindergarten, and preschool that might offer those kids an advantage when it comes to college!

These are precisely the type of parents to whom the Aristotle Circle provides. The Aristotle Circle was established in 2009 and it provides assistance and test preparation for children who are applying for a place at one of the city's most competitive schools. The cost of their services is up to \$450 per hour.

To illustrate how desperate some students can be, let's take a look at an application that Michael Motto, who spent years as an admission officer screening applicants at Yale, can't help but remember. This application was sent by a young woman with outstanding grades, test scores, and awards, and at first look, she seemed certain to be included in his submission for consideration by the selection committee.

However, Motto read the essay part of her application. The student started by stating her admiration for her French teacher; however, she then went further to talk about a conversation with the teacher which she found so interesting that she decided to pee in her pants instead of getting excused to go to the restroom.

Although the student may have wanted to show how she really values an intellectually stimulating discussion, Motto was less impressed and he was more concerned about the student. In the end, Motto called the student's guidance counselor to show his worries instead of approving her application. One might see this as an isolated instance of an over-the-top, weird application; unfortunately, it's only one of several extreme applications Motto and other admissions officers have gotten.

School rankings regularly offer more harm than good.

With students feeling really stressed to get into the "best" school, which is the one they assume will offer them the greatest benefit in life, all eyes are on the college rankings to show which school is actually the *crème de la crème*.

However, it turns out that even those working for the best-ranked schools will agree that these rankings aren't useful.

When Jeffrey Brenzel was still the dean of Yale, he wrote and published an essay on the school's website that cast a critical eye upon the progressively influential college rankings. Brenzel was very certain that the rankings weren't only deceptive, they were also downright harmful.

To start with, the rankings are unscientific in their method. It was recommended by Brenzel that Consumer Reports magazine has far more scientific precision in ranking vacuum cleaners than the US News & World Report does in ranking colleges!

However, maybe even more harmful is that it lets students concentrate more on a school's ranking and focus less on if that school is the best academic fit for them. As it was described by Brenzel, it's been a common practice for students to consider lists that reflect the all-important rankings in the news instead of considering lists of schools that were cautiously made with their needs and wants in mind.

Brenzel is right about how unscientific, random and deceptive the rankings can be since they consider particular things like "reputation," and how rich a university is. Eventually, none of

these categories has whatsoever to do with the quality of education a student gets. Meanwhile, important factors such as job placement among graduates and international opportunities are totally overlooked.

What actually add to over a fifth of a school's final ranking, are the superficial ideas of high school guidance counselors, university presidents, and other educational professionals. Every year, they're questioned to define universities as being either "distinguished," "strong," "good," "adequate," "marginal" or "I don't know."

Jennifer Delahunty who was the dean of admissions at Kenyon College used to take part in this yearly survey, and she mentions how absurd it is to question people to give a judgment on schools when the only in-depth knowledge they probably have is about their own school.

The absence of diversity at elite schools can signify that students don't get out of their comfort zones.

When you look very well at the rankings, it brings about a vital question: What do we actually get from our time at a university? Is it mainly about the career benefits or the quality of education we get? Is it about what happens in the classroom or beyond it?

Howard Schultz who was the former CEO of Starbucks Coffee states that the actual opportunity offered by college was the opportunity for him to increase his horizons and leave his comfort zone. A lot of people would agree to that.

Schultz was born into a Jewish family in Brooklyn, and when the time came for him to go to college, he could have remained close to his origins. However, he decided to go to Northern Michigan University. By doing that, he could experience new things, get to meet new people and also leave his comfort zone.

Also, Schultz had to look for paid work in order to remain afloat and keep up with his education. However, this was also an essential part of his education. By doing part-time jobs such as bartending, he learned valuable life lessons you wouldn't learn in class. Doing these jobs

permitted him to carry responsibilities and come of age in a manner that wealthy students at elite schools don't regularly do.

And he also met new people there. Northern Michigan University exposed Schultz to the values of Midwesterners, who grew up somewhat differently than the New Yorkers he'd known. And in return, for a lot of his fellow students, Schultz was the first Jewish person they'd ever come across. This was the tangible value of college: giving an opportunity for people to learn about different ways of life beyond the classroom.

However, in a lot of elite schools, you won't see much socioeconomic diversity.

A Yale graduate named Rebecca Fabbro who lived in the wealthy New York suburb of Edgemont. It wasn't difficult for her to realize that the majority of her classmates at Yale were similar to her, children from wealthy families whose advantages made it very easy for them to enter an Ivy League school.

Therefore, when Fabbro detected that the school literature declared that the student from Yale came from diverse backgrounds, she was determined to do some research of her own. After checking the school's financial aid data, she discovered that almost half of the students at Yale come from families that earn above \$200,000 per year! Meaning, about 50% of students from Yale are students from the wealthiest 5% of the United States.

Intelligence and a prestigious education don't give you an assurance that you'll succeed in life.

Have you ever been stuck in a conversation with a person that keeps talking about his prestigious education, describing all academic achievement determined on impressing you with his intelligence?

While they may think that an extravagant alma mater and intelligence may contribute to being an impressive success, this isn't usually the case.

As Bradley Tusk a businessman indicates, real success requires more than smarts and good schooling. Also, Tusk is the former deputy governor of Illinois besides being a venture capitalist. Naturally, Tusk has dealt with various job applicants, and his experience has shown that the actual qualities of success comprise skills like good work ethic, good instincts, a determination to hustle, great communication skills and creative ability. All of which has only a little to do with which university someone attended and the number of academic awards they got.

According to Tusk's estimation, going to a school that isn't even part of the most elite could increase your likelihood of developing these skills. This is because they regularly come as an outcome of continuous hard work in producing and chasing down opportunities instead of having them given to you as an outcome of your school's reputation.

Although your school's reputation may not be important, what you do with your time while in college is important.

According to a poll that was done in 2013 among college graduates, the leading factor in identifying future happiness was a specific type of behavior that people engaged in during their period in college. One of those behaviors stood out as being the most important of all in improving one's satisfaction later in life and that is being extremely and actively involved in a campus group or activity. It's worth stating that this is the opposite of the type of dabbling in numerous activities that students do when they're writing their resumés.

Also, what is important is that the results of the poll revealed that going to a highly ranked school only offered people a little uptick in life or career satisfaction. When considering the graduates from schools that are ranked among the top 50, just 11% of them felt that they were flourishing across all categories of well-being. When considering all the graduates, irrespective of their school's ranking, 10% said they felt the same sense of flourishing.

Basically, this shows that your school's reputation has little or no importance in relation to your satisfaction in life.

Elite schools have the ability to narrow students' perspectives.

For the majority of college students, their time of higher education is also a transitional one, as it provides in a lot of ways as a connection between childhood and adulthood. Usually, someone's college years are a period for finding their interests and discovering a career path to follow.

But, nowadays, there's a rise in the number of people who view college as being of value for one certain thing which is money.

According to a study that was conducted by UCLA's Higher Education Research Institution, during the mid-1960s, about 42% of new freshmen students across the United States mentioned money as being the main purpose why they are going to college. But in 2014, that number increased to 73%.

Also, during that exact time period, there was an obvious decline in the number of students who cherished college as a place of self-discovery where they'd create a meaningful life philosophy.

Also, research has shown that there is a greater worldly focus, along with a narrowing of perspectives among students at elite schools. All of which does a bit to get them ready for adulthood.

This narrowing of interests and career choices is also known as the funnel effect. According to a paper that was published in 2014 by researchers at Harvard's Graduate School of Education, it's a common incidence among Harvard undergraduates.

After the researchers interviewed 40 Harvard undergraduates, the researchers saw that the student got into college with a different range of interests and career choices; however, during senior year, just a select few jobs were being taken into consideration. It was established that the values at Harvard had encouraged them to follow high-paying consulting jobs while implying that some jobs were not worthy of a Harvard degree.

For Junot Díaz who is the Pulitzer-prize winning author, this is a disturbing development. Díaz has also been a creative writing teacher at MIT for about 12 years and has realized directly how students can grow gradually ill-equipped to do anything beyond their narrow career paths.

Instead of generating well-rounded adults, Díaz has noticed elite schools like MIT generate more “fragile thoroughbreds.” This is his name for students who have learned how to outshine in the classroom however are miserably unprepared for adulthood.

Smaller schools can have an individual contact and let curiosity to succeed.

John Green who is the bestselling novelist that wrote *The Fault in Our Stars* has loving memories of his time at Kenyon College, a very small school in Ohio he went to during the late 1990s. Green was particularly grateful for the way he was able to associate with his professors – something that would have been very hard with a larger student group.

In particular, Green cherished the experience he had with the professor for his Intro to Fiction Writing class Fred Kluge in particular. At a point, Green was discouraged after he was rejected by one of the more advanced writing classes. Therefore, Kluge took the time to call Green to his house, sit him down, and give him a detailed and personal assessment of his potential as a writer.

Kluge had seen how traumatized Green’s confidence had been by being rejected into the class, thus this one-on-one meeting was precisely what Green required, and it probably wouldn’t have occurred at a bigger and more prestigious school.

As a matter of face, elite schools can even deject creativity, due to how much they encourage careerism.

Before Hiram Chodosh became the president of Claremont McKenna College, he went to Yale Law School and during his time there, he saw how a lot of students had already imagined their extravagant plans for their careers. These students concentrated a lot on these plans and they paid little attention to actual learning.

Due to this, only a little creative thinking was going on. As Chodosh indicates, groundbreaking ideas aren’t going to originate from the student who has blinders on from having planned all the

detail of their future. Innovation is the outcome of people with open minds reacting to the world surrounding them.

In contrast, Scott Pask found that creativity and curiosity were stimulated at the University of Arizona's School of Architecture. Pask is presently a set designer on Broadway, and he saw that the small school had a good balance of severe coursework and liberty to choose a wide range of interests. While studying architecture, an interest in set design directed him to the school's theater department, which ultimately steered him to New York City after graduating with his degree in architecture. Currently, Scott has several Tony Awards to his name.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach for discovering a good school or a sustaining career. Eventually, success needs hard work and curiosity, and with the evidence we have, the best places to cultivate these qualities may not be the alleged elite schools.

Where You Go Is Not Who You'll Be: An Antidote to the College Admissions Mania by Frank Bruni Book Review

While schools are enticing more and more applicants than ever in the competition for college rankings, parents, as well as students, are doing whatever they can to get an advantage in the application process. This entire competition has put the usual advantages of college into question. A lot of people think that admission into an elite, top-ranking university is access to success and money. However, there are a lot of studies that illustrate how success has little to do with a school's reputation. Smaller schools may be suitable for a well-rounded adult and developing the creative mind and strong work ethic that is required for success.

Don't be influenced by rankings – do your own research.

If you're finding the best school for you or your child, the first thing you have to do is to disregard the arbitrary rankings published in the US News & World Report. The second step may seem a little bit trickier; however, it is significant: put aside any biases and biased ideas. For instance, Arizona State University (ASU) has had to fight very hard against the wrong criticisms that it's only a party school. If you're finding a place where there is no a lot of students, a closer look

displays that 40% of ASU's classes have less than 20 students. Hence, do your homework by focusing on the important information and not allowing things such as reputation hinder the facts.

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