



2023 WHITE PAPER

UNDERSTANDING EARLY COLLEGE APPLICATION DEADLINES

AN EXPERT ANALYSIS OF ADMISSION TRENDS AND THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF EARLY ACTION AND EARLY DECISION

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Who we are

With more than 24 years of college counseling & tutoring experience, Collegewise has been at the forefront of providing families, schools, and non-profits with up-to-date, honest admissions advice. We believe that applying to university should be an exciting time, not a stressful, anxiety-ridden rite of passage. We know that providing expert-written, researched information is one way to do so! Since we opened our doors in 1999, our expert advisors and tutors have guided more than 28,000 students to successful admissions and testing outcomes. We take great care in our work, from our paid counseling programs to our complimentary resources. Our team of 70+ experts pool their 500+ years of admissions expertise to drive student success. Our resources have been downloaded by over 100,000 readers, and we thank you for downloading this one. Happy Reading!

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Christopher authored another [White Paper](#) in June of 2023 that discussed the history behind and practical implications of the US Supreme Court decision regarding race in college admissions. That paper has been featured in graduate-level counselor training courses at universities like UCLA. Christopher works directly with students as a counselor at Collegewise, and they are also one of the co-directors of Collegewise's Inclusion, Equity, and Access Committee, a role they have used to arrange partnerships between Collegewise and non-profit organizations that serve low-income students.



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With more than a decade at Collegewise and over 25 years in the industry, Meredith has deep and broad expertise in all things college counseling. She has particular expertise with STEM admissions and is the author of the Collegewise [Guide to STEM Programs](#), as well as the former Editor-in-Chief of the Collegewise [Guide to the Common App](#). During her time at Collegewise, her students have gained admission to nearly 200 different colleges, including every college listed in this white paper.



Anjali Bhatia

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Anjali is a mission-driven CEO with a lifelong passion for helping students build the right skillsets. She's held a number of executive leadership positions within education over the last 12 years. Anjali holds her MBA from The Wharton School, where she received the Joseph Wharton Fellowship. She completed her undergraduate degree at Duke University, where she was the recipient of the full merit scholarship, the Robertson Scholarship.



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Before joining Collegewise, Fayelah developed and coordinated college-access programs at community-based organizations in Orange County, CA. With six years of student services and college counseling experience, Fayelah has provided individualized guidance on the college exploration, application, and decision-making process to over 200 students.



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A natural teacher, Aaron relishes drawing upon his deep experiences in the college admissions landscape to guide students and parents to make smart, informed decisions at every stage of the journey. In addition to the standard processes of college admissions, Aaron is uniquely positioned to support students chasing the dream of NCAA competition. He has worked with students from 20 different countries who went on to attend schools such as John Hopkins, Brown University, New York University, Middlebury, Northeastern, Boston College, Amherst College, UCLA, and UC Berkeley.

Introduction

The process of researching, selecting, and applying to colleges can be really exciting for teenagers. However, the ever-changing nature of admissions priorities, selection criteria, and eligibility requirements can also be confusing and frightening, both for students and their parents. On top of that, families have to consider various application timeline options when planning their approach, including some of the following:

- ✓ Regular Decision
- ✓ Early Decision
- ✓ Restrictive Early Action
- ✓ Early Action
- ✓ First-Generation Early Action
- ✓ Single-Choice Early Action

The full list of options can feel overwhelming. Families often wonder which pathway is best for their student and ask questions like, "Should we apply early here?" or "Will I have a better chance if I do Early Decision there?" Moreover, families often wonder why there are so many options to begin with.

To help clear up some of this confusion, we've put together another study on admissions practices and trends. We have analyzed the decision options available in college admissions cycles, specifically focusing on Early Decision (ED), Early Action (EA), and Regular Decision (RD) processes. This white paper will explain the differences between each and offer strategic guidance when navigating the unique deadlines. We will also explain the different manifestations of EA, including Single Choice Early Action and ED Prohibitive Early Action.

This study will delve into the data regarding college admissions trends, with a particular focus on highly selective private schools such as Ivy League institutions and other prestigious colleges. Our study will provide a deeper look at the following components:

- ✓ Yearly admission rates and acceptance trends
- ✓ Weighing in on ED controversies and what they mean for families
- ✓ School analyses and early application submissions
- ✓ Enrollment numbers post-pandemic and the reliance on early application pools
- ✓ The importance of strategizing college lists and concrete decision plans
- ✓ How families can use the data we've analyzed in their strategy

Overall, our study aims to offer valuable insight into the decision options in college admissions and provide guidance for students and families navigating the increasingly competitive process. We stress the importance of comprehensive planning, taking into account financial considerations, academic preparedness, and the overall college list when determining the optimal application strategy.

At Collegewise, we encourage all students and families to look beyond the most selective colleges when building their lists. For this study, however, we chose to focus on two groups of schools that share similar positions in the college admissions marketplace and have similar applicant pools.

Types of Decision Options

Before we launch into an academic analysis of the trends in the various admissions cycles, we should first explain the three major options: Early Decision, Early Action, and Regular Decision:

	Early Action	Early Decision	Regular Decision
Typical Deadline	November 1	November 1	January 1-15
Commitment	Not-binding	Binding	Not-binding
Offering	Some schools offer both, only one, or neither options		All schools offer a RD option
Results	December-January	December-January	~April 1

An explanation of Early Action (in its various manifestations)

Early Action is almost exactly what it sounds like: action happens early. Students submit their applications earlier than the standard timeline, and their responses come back earlier as well. Many students can expect to hear back from colleges between December and January.

There are a few more complicated versions of Early Action to consider:

Single Choice Early Action (SCEA): a Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Stanford policy

It's not a binding admissions decision (EA is never binding), but the agreement prevents students from applying to other private schools during any early rounds.

- Students may not apply ED to any other school if they submit an SCEA application.
- Students may still use non-binding early application options to apply to public schools or to private schools with scholarship deadlines connected to those earlier dates. Private schools without specific scholarship deadlines are off-limits.

Example: A student could apply to any one of those 4 schools using SCEA, and still apply to UVA and U-M for EA, but could not apply to UVA's ED option.

ED Prohibitive Early Action: a Georgetown and Notre Dame policy

- The agreement prevents students from applying ED to any other schools.
- Students can apply EA to Georgetown and/or Notre Dame and still apply to as many other EA schools as they want (as long as those schools are not Single Choice EA, of course).

Outside of these policies, there are no limits on how many Early Action applications a student can submit. Most EA schools do not stop students from applying Early Decision to other places.

- Example: A student could apply ED to one school and EA to 10 other schools (as long as those schools do not have the policies mentioned above).

More information about Early Decision

The ED agreement is essentially "if I get in, I will attend." There are rare exceptions to this rule, typically related to unique financial or medical circumstances, but that should be the functioning understanding of the ED process. One common exception is that most universities release students from the binding component of ED if they are admitted to "alternate" programs/campuses.

NYU, for example, releases students from the binding component of ED if they are admitted to a campus other than their first-choice campus or aren't admitted directly to the specific school at NYU that was listed as first-choice.

Some schools accept the majority of their students from the ED applicant pool. Some schools also have much higher ED acceptance rates.

- ED applications typically do not come with restrictions on EA applications, though (as noted above) some EA applications have their own restrictions about ED applications.

Please note, that a student may only submit one ED application as it is a binding commitment. If a student is admitted, they must withdraw all other applications and attend that school.

Early Decision I versus Early Decision II

Some families may not be aware that there are two ED deadlines for students. All of the same policies and logic apply, but this round of applications is due after decisions have been released by most ED1 or EA schools. A student can update an application from RD (or EA) to ED2 at most schools that offer the option.

- Example: A student who is not admitted to Brown when ED notifications are released in December may submit (or update) a Tufts application to the ED2 round before January 1st.

Early Action and Early Decision Response Times

Generally speaking, ED decisions come out in early-mid December, but (and this is uncommon) some won't arrive until early January. EA decisions are on a similar timeline, though the wait into January is much more common (guaranteed, in fact, at some schools) and often extends into late January.

Some EA/ED decisions come out after the typical early January RD deadlines (again, uncommon for ED), but some RD applications will be due in November/December anyway.

University of Washington's application, for example, is due on November 15th, and the UC system deadline is November 30th.

In almost all cases, students will receive their EA/ED decisions in advance of ED2 decision announcements. A student who is accepted to an EA/ED school is fully within their right to cancel an ED2 application *for which no decision has yet been announced*.

What the Data Says

One common notion we hear is that "no one gets in anymore" at selective institutions. While that claim is not entirely accurate, as these colleges do admit a fresh class of students each year, totaling nearly 40,000 students across the top 16 most selective private schools in the nation, admissions data suggests that there is some truth to this statement. In the past decade, we've observed a significant decline in the total number of students admitted to these top 20 schools each year.

Let's take a closer look at the Ivies, excluding Princeton, which no longer publishes admissions data. In 2012, they admitted 21,480 students. However, that number decreased to 20,141 in 2020 and further dropped to 19,338 in 2023, although in 2017 Yale and Cornell increased their class sizes by about 225 and 275, respectively. Even with 500 additional spots available, the total number of Ivy League admits has steadily fallen. This trend is not unique to the Ivy League. When we examined data from Duke, MIT, Northwestern, Vanderbilt, Rice, Georgetown, Williams, and Amherst, we found similar statistics. In 2012, this group admitted 22,573 students. By 2020, their admitted pool decreased to 21,118, and in 2023, it fell to 18,426.

While students are still getting accepted to these schools, it's evident that the total number of available seats has been decreasing. Interestingly, though, the number of students admitted through early application processes has increased during this period. For example, in 2012, the Ivies (excluding Princeton) admitted 5,372 students through early application cycles, which left 16,108 spots for Regular Decision admits. In 2020, though, these 7 schools admitted 6,547 students through early application cycles.

At the time of publication, Princeton is in the second year of a four-year expansion similar to that at Yale and Cornell. It is expected that the class size at Princeton will increase by approximately 125 students as a result of this change.

That increase of more than 1,000 students in early admission cycles meant there were only 13,594 spots left for Regular Decision admits: a decrease of about 2,500 students in that pool. 2023 saw a continuation of the trend, with a slight increase in early admits (6,574) and another significant decrease in the number of regular admits (12,411). Thus, while the Ivies reduced admissions offers by about 3,700 in their Regular Decision pool, they added approximately 1,200 offers to their early application pools.

This is a noteworthy detail because the overall change in admissions at the Ivy League during this period is only around 2,100. However, the actual trend becomes more pronounced when looking specifically at the Regular Decision data.

	Early	Regular	Total
2012	5,372	16,108	21,480
2023	6,574	12,411	19,338
Change	+1,202	-3,708	-2,142

It's worth noting that while the number of Early Decision applications has increased, Regular Decision applications have also seen growth. Therefore, the trend cannot be solely attributed to shifting application numbers.

- 2012 – 3,497 early; 27,697 RD
- 2020 – 5,176 early; 33,568 RD

The trend is similar for the "near-Ivy" schools. In 2012, they admitted 4,848 students through early application cycles and 17,725 students through Regular Decision. By 2020, the number of early admits increased to 5,285, and regular admits dropped to 15,833. The 2023 pool showed a small increase in early admits (5,358) and a significant decline in regular admits (13,058). Overall, these schools followed a similar pattern to the Ivies by reducing the Regular Decision pool by over 4,500 spots and adding approximately 500 spots to their early pools. The difference in balancing can be attributed to yield, as the Ivy League campuses generally have higher yield rates than the "near-Ivy" campuses. These schools have experienced similar increases in application numbers to those in the Ivy League, so the overall impact indicates a similar increase in the prioritization of early admits.

How to Explain This Behavior

Before we go any further, we should take a moment to explain the concept of “yield,” which has been mentioned a few times already.

In college admissions, "yield" refers to the percentage of admitted students who choose to enroll in a particular college or university. It is a key metric that helps colleges understand and manage their enrollment and admissions processes.

Here's how yield works:

- **Admissions Offers:** When a college extends offers of admission to applicants, it usually admits more students than it intends to enroll. This is because not all admitted students will choose to attend that particular institution.
- **Yield Rate:** The yield rate is calculated by dividing the number of students who enroll in the college by the number of students who were offered admission. It is typically expressed as a percentage.

$$\text{Yield Rate} = (\text{Number of Enrolled Students} / \text{Number of Admitted Students}) \times 100$$

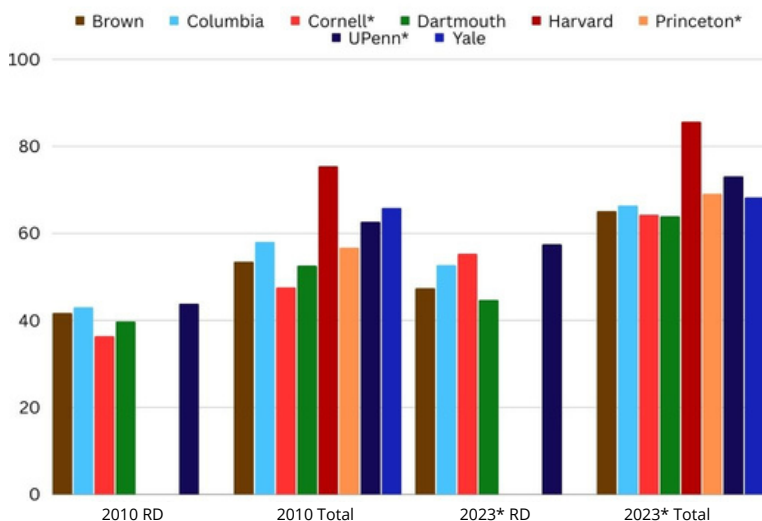
- **Enrollment Management:** Colleges use the yield rate to help manage their enrollment. If a college has a specific target for its incoming class size, it needs to admit a sufficient number of students to meet that target, taking into account the expected yield rate.
- **Competitiveness and Selectivity:** Yield rate can also be an indicator of a college's competitiveness and selectivity. A high yield rate suggests that a large percentage of admitted students choose to enroll, which can be a sign of a strong applicant pool and the college's desirability. Conversely, a low yield rate might indicate that admitted students are less likely to attend.
- **Financial Aid and Scholarships:** Colleges consider yield when making financial aid and scholarship decisions. They want to allocate resources effectively to attract and retain the students they admit. Some colleges may use financial incentives to increase their yield rate, such as offering generous merit scholarships or need-based financial aid packages.
- **Waitlists and Admissions Strategies:** Colleges use yield data to make decisions about waitlisted students and to refine their admissions strategies for future years. If the yield rate is lower than expected, a college may admit more students from the waitlist to meet enrollment targets.

In summary, yield is a crucial factor in the college admissions process. It helps colleges manage their enrollment, assess their competitiveness, and make strategic decisions about admissions and financial aid. For applicants, understanding a college's yield rate can provide insight into the likelihood of admission and the level of competition for spots in the incoming class.

It's also worth noting that at some schools—like Harvard and MIT—the yield is so high that it's actually one reason these colleges are accepting fewer and fewer students each year.

In fact, the Regular Decision yield at almost all of the schools being reviewed here has increased significantly during the approximately 10-year period in question.

Admissions Trends & Yield Rates (By School)



Brown

- 2010 RD Yield: 41.75%; Total Yield: 53.53%
- 2023 RD Yield: 47.46%; Total Yield: 65.16%

Columbia

- 2010 RD Yield: 43.06%; Total Yield: 58.06%
- 2023 RD Yield: 52.76%; Total Yield: 66.43%

Cornell

- 2010 RD Yield: 36.43%; Total Yield: 47.62%
- 2021 RD Yield: 55.31%; Total Yield: 64.34%

Dartmouth

- 2010 RD Yield: 39.79%; Total Yield: 52.61%
- 2023 RD Yield: 44.76%; Total Yield: 63.96%

Harvard (no ED)

- 2010: 75.46%
- 2023: 85.74%

University of Pennsylvania

- 2010 RD Yield: 43.88%; Total Yield: 62.74%
- 2022: RD Yield: 57.53%; Total Yield: 73.18%

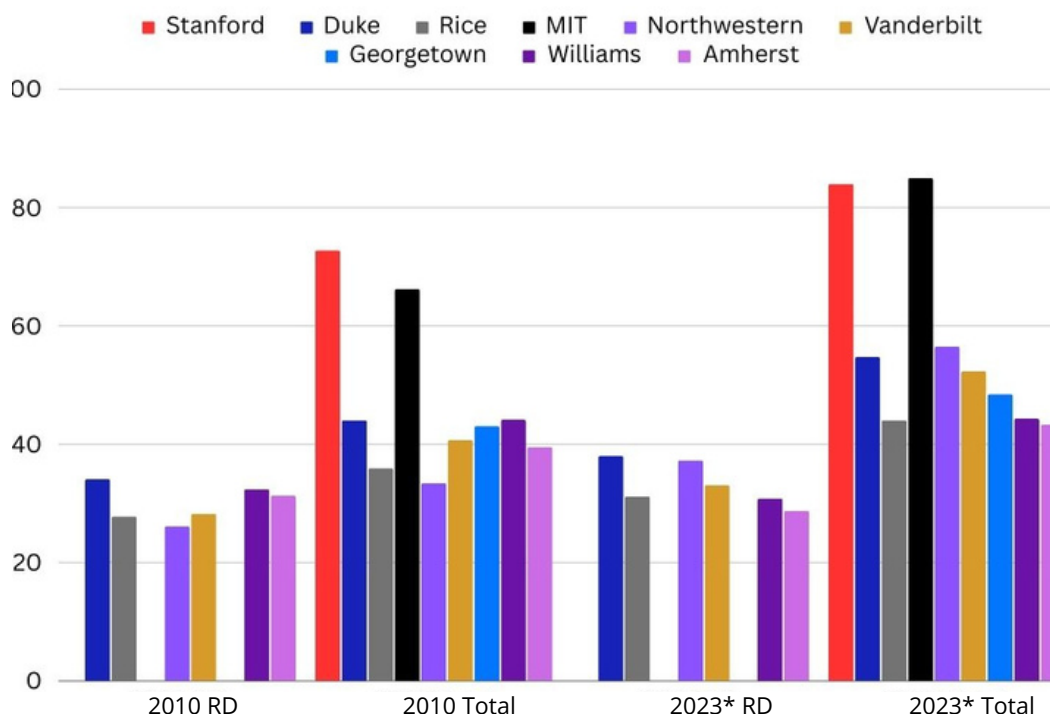
Princeton (no ED)

- 2010: 56.77%
- 2022: 69.17%

Yale (no ED)

- 2010: 65.91%
- 2023: 68.31%





Stanford (no ED)

- 2010: 72.78%
- 2022: 83.99%

Duke

- 2010 RD Yield: 34.10%; Total Yield: 44.09%
- 2022 RD Yield: 38.06%; Total Yield: 54.74%

Rice

- 2010 RD Yield: 27.81%; Total Yield: 35.96%
- 2022 RD Yield: 31.19%; Total Yield: 44.07%

Georgetown (no ED)

- 2010: 43.1%
- 2022: 48.45%

Amherst

- 2010 RD Yield: 31.32%; Total Yield: 39.52%
- 2022 RD Yield: 28.75%; Total Yield: 43.28%

MIT (no ED)

- 2010: 66.23%
- 2023: 87.87%

Northwestern

- 2010 RD Yield: 26.16%; Total Yield: 33.41%
- 2022 RD Yield: 37.30%; Total Yield: 56.5%

Vanderbilt

- 2013 RD Yield: 28.27%; Total Yield: 40.70%
- 2022 RD Yield: 33.09%; Total Yield: 52.34%

Williams

- 2010 RD Yield: 32.39%; Total Yield: 44.16%
- 2022 RD Yield: 30.82%; Total Yield: 44.32%

Of the 7 ED-option schools with the most pronounced increase in yield, we also see the largest decreases for RD and increases for ED. The data here suggests that the increases in ED admissions have largely been an enrollment management tactic.

The 3 schools with the highest overall yield have also been reducing their admit numbers, but the data suggests that for these three schools (MIT, Stanford, and Harvard) those numbers are being forced downward by student behavior: for those schools to maintain their standard class size on campus, they have to reduce the number of admits each year because yield is so high.

Why Early Application Cycles Matter

The reasons for offering—and in some cases prioritizing—Early Decision differ from school to school, but it's helpful to understand the most common benefits of the process when you are considering your strategy.

1 *Predictability*

Because Early Decision programs are binding, they allow colleges to gauge their incoming class size and composition earlier in the admissions cycle. This helps with resource allocation, such as housing and faculty assignments. At a small school like Barnard or Pitzer, for example, an unpredictable class size could be disastrous because even a difference of 10 or 20 students in either direction could mean a major financial gap or housing shortage.

2 *Yield Rates*

Colleges often use ED to increase their yield rate since students admitted through ED are typically more committed to attending that particular institution. This can help improve a college's ranking and overall reputation.

When asked about this, one former Northeastern University admissions officer said:

“Yield was really hard to predict without a reliable app base and an understanding of who would actually come if admitted, so demonstrated interest and ED became a huge part of that to compensate. The Enrollment Management team wanted us to fill a lot more of the class through ED: ideally 50+%.”

3 *Selective Admissions*

Colleges want to secure top-tier applicants before other institutions do. Early Decision programs can attract highly motivated and academically strong applicants, especially those who are risk-averse enough to commit via Early Decision rather than take their chances in the larger Regular Decision pool. This allows colleges to admit a portion of their class early, securing a group of students they believe will positively contribute to the campus community (and, in some cases, who might otherwise have chosen another campus).

When asked about this, a former Swarthmore College admissions officer had this to say:

“Swat (Swarthmore) cross admits with the Ivies and just almost never wins that battle, so locking in a good chunk of the class early is important to them—especially at such a small school where one student can literally change a statistic.”

4 **Financial Considerations**

Some colleges use Early Decision to identify students who require financial aid early in the process. This can help colleges allocate their financial aid resources more effectively.

Post-Pandemic Trends

Though the pandemic could not have been predicted, its impact on enrollment was equally unpredictable and it has since exacerbated ongoing concerns.

Many students re-evaluated their college plans due to uncertainties surrounding the pandemic. Some students chose to defer their enrollment or take a gap year to wait for more stable conditions. This led to fluctuations in the number of incoming freshmen for certain institutions.

The shift to remote and online learning during the pandemic led some students to question the value of paying full tuition for a virtual education. Some students opted to take a gap year or enroll in institutions that offered more robust online learning experiences.

The pandemic also resulted in economic hardships for many families, affecting their ability to pay for college tuition and other expenses. This led to increased demand for financial aid and scholarships, and many middle-class students struggled to justify higher-cost options in the face of financial uncertainty.

In the end, many colleges experienced a decline in overall enrollment due to a combination of factors, including disruptions in recruitment, economic challenges, and changes in student preferences.

As a result, many colleges have started to lean even more heavily on Early Application pools in the admissions process in an attempt to regain some control over their enrollment numbers.

The Early Decision Controversy

The Case Against

Early Decision (ED) programs in college admissions have faced criticism and scrutiny from various quarters. Common criticisms of ED include:

- **Access and Equity:** Critics argue that ED can disadvantage low-income and underrepresented minority students. Students from these backgrounds may be less likely to apply ED because they need to compare financial aid offers from multiple institutions. This can result in a system that benefits wealthier applicants who can afford to commit early.
- **Pressure and Rushed Decisions:** Some argue that the pressure to commit to a college early can lead to rushed and uninformed decisions. Students may not have adequate time to research and visit multiple colleges to make an informed choice about where they want to enroll.
- **Reduced Financial Aid Leverage:** Critics claim that ED can diminish a student's ability to negotiate for better financial aid packages. Because the student is committed to attending the ED college if admitted, they may have less leverage to negotiate for more favorable financial aid terms.
- **Limiting College Options:** Applying ED to one college restricts a student's options. They may have to forgo the opportunity to compare offers, financial aid packages, and different academic programs across multiple institutions.
- **Unequal Benefits for Less Qualified Students with More Privilege:** There's a perception that ED can be elitist, favoring students from privileged backgrounds who have early access to resources, college counseling, and test preparation. This is strengthened by data that suggests that the pools of students admitted in some ED rounds are—on average—less qualified than the students admitted in the RD rounds.

What Former Admissions Officers Say

“Sometimes we’d get a strong and compelling but mostly unhooked RD kid, and because it was so selective we’d say the line about ‘too bad they didn’t apply ED.’”
Former Swarthmore College Admissions Officer

“Though we would publicly tout that the academic profile of students admitted in ED was ‘virtually the same’ as that of those admitted in RD, the truth is that we were admitting students in ED who would not have been as competitive in RD.”
Former Vanderbilt University Admissions Officer

“We always advertised ED as ‘virtually the same’ as RD. We explained the reason for higher ED acceptance rates was because there were certain interest groups who’d already been vetted for their academics and were encouraged to apply early, such as athletes and fly-in students. But academic profiles were the same across both applicant pools!”
Former Williams College Admissions Officer

- **Impact on Application Volume:** Some critics argue that ED can inflate application numbers for colleges that offer it, making it appear more selective than it actually is. This can create an environment where colleges prioritize selectivity metrics over other important factors.

The Case For

At the same time, many college officials have spoken out in defense of Early Decision policies, often claiming that the process has the exact opposite effects than critics claim it does.

- **Demonstrated Interest:** College officials argue that ED is an effective way for applicants to demonstrate their strong interest in a particular institution. By applying ED, students signal a clear preference for the college and indicate their commitment to attending if admitted.
- **Predictable Yield:** ED helps colleges predict their yield. This predictability is valuable for colleges as they can manage their admissions process and enroll the desired number of students more accurately.
- **Boosting Enrollment Numbers:** ED can help colleges meet their enrollment targets early in the admissions cycle. This can be especially important for colleges aiming to fill specific programs, maintain a diverse student body, or ensure a certain class size.
- **Enhanced Selectivity:** ED allows colleges to admit a certain percentage of their incoming class with high academic credentials and strong qualifications. This can improve the overall academic profile of the incoming class, contributing to the college's reputation.
- **Reducing Application Volume:** ED can help colleges manage the overwhelming volume of applications they receive. By encouraging some students to apply ED, colleges can reduce the number of applications they need to review during the Regular Decision process.
- **Financial Aid Consideration:** Some colleges have indicated that they are committed to meeting the demonstrated financial need of Early Decision applicants, which can be an incentive for students who require financial assistance. This is especially true for colleges with limited financial aid budgets, as they often need greater assurance of the precise number of admitted students who will need financial assistance.
- **Benefiting Underrepresented Groups:** Some colleges use ED as a way to attract and admit a diverse group of students, including those from underrepresented backgrounds, which can contribute to a more inclusive campus environment. In the wake of the 2023 SCOTUS decision about the consideration of race in college admissions, this aspect of Affirmative Action in college admissions will likely become even more of a focal point for schools that use ED for this purpose.

For more information on the 2023 SCOTUS Affirmative Action decision, click the link below to access our free white paper.

[Download Now](#)

How Families Should Use This Information

Now that we have examined the data let's shift gears and discuss what we recommend readers do with this information.

First, we suggest taking a moment to consider your college list strategy and priorities. Do you have one primary school in mind, or is there a shortlist of dream schools? Answering this question can be challenging, as it involves both strategic and emotional considerations. **At Collegewise, our counselors advise students not to tie their happiness solely to the admissions outcome from one school.** However, we understand that some students may still have a strong emotional attachment to a particular institution. Nevertheless, we are honest with our students about the importance of maximizing their chances of getting into one of their top options, rather than focusing solely on one school. Achieving this requires assessing the benefits of each school's decision plan.

Now, let's look at some notable trends specific to certain schools:

- Harvard has been decreasing early applicants since 2018, with a 7.6% Early Action (EA) admit rate compared to a 2.6% Regular Decision (RD) admit rate.
- Dartmouth has reduced RD admits by about a third, and now over 50% of the freshman class is filled with ED applicants, resulting in a 21% ED admit rate versus a 4.5% RD admit rate.
- Cornell has cut around 2,500 RD admits in the past 12 years, and their ED admit rate has consistently been about 600 higher than in the early 2010s (19.2% ED admit rate compared to a 5% RD admit rate).
- MIT has nearly halved its RD admits since 2010, though EA numbers have remained relatively consistent: 5.7% EA admit rate and a 3.8% RD admit rate.
- Duke has reduced RD admits by about a third (a drop of approximately 1,100) and increased ED admits by about 200, resulting in a 16.5% ED admit rate versus a 4.8% RD admit rate.
- Northwestern decreased RD admits by about 3,000 since 2010 and increased ED admits by about 500, leading to a 21.3% ED admit rate compared to a 5.5% RD admit rate.
- The University of Pennsylvania has decreased ED admit numbers, while RD numbers have remained fairly consistent, resulting in a 15.6% ED admit rate and a 5.9% RD admit rate.
- Columbia has maintained consistent ED admits, with RD numbers only changing as required by increased yield (a decrease by about 150 in the past 12 years), resulting in an 11.3% ED admit rate versus a 3.9% RD admit rate.

Based on these examples, it's worth noting that for schools like Harvard and Penn, applying early may not provide a significant advantage in the admissions process. Sending an early application to one of those schools would mean a student may have to forego the ED application option at schools like Dartmouth, Cornell, and Northwestern, where an ED application comes with significant statistical benefits.

- For example, if a student's "Top 3" includes Harvard, Penn, and Dartmouth, we might advise them to send their ED application to Dartmouth, assuming the three schools are similar substitutes in the student's mind.

Some schools, like Columbia, present a more ambiguous situation regarding the costs and benefits of an early application. In these cases, students should focus on making the best use of their time and be aware of when their application will be the strongest. Furthermore, schools like Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Stanford create additional complexities in early application considerations due to their Single Choice Early Action policies. While these schools do not offer a binding Early Decision option, students would have to forgo potentially advantageous Early Action options at other schools on their lists.

Given these factors, we emphasize the importance of accounting for the entire college list when developing an early application plan. Every choice involves opportunity costs, so it's important to consider what other benefits a student may be giving up by applying early. For example, applying early to Harvard may provide a slight advantage, but it could mean giving up a significant increase in chances at schools like Northwestern or Dartmouth.

The information we have provided about admissions statistics does not take into account the nuances of institutional priorities and individual student profiles. We recommend that all students, families, and counselors using this information to plan application strategies leverage those specifics against the data we've shared. College admissions is never just a numbers game, and Collegewise counselors use data like this in conjunction with detailed analysis of profiles, preferences, and qualifications before confirming any suggested strategies.

How we strategize with students

Our Collegewise counselors, financial aid experts, and other valued team members work with every student to build a strategically balanced college list, understand the costs and benefits of each combination of choices, and maximize the chances of an outcome they'll be excited about by picking the right combination of EA/ED, ED2, and RD choices. In each case, we also factor in a few details that are specific to each student, rather than to the colleges on the list:

- **Financial Considerations:** Each family should understand the financial implications of ED. While some colleges are committed to meeting demonstrated financial need for ED applicants, it's crucial to discuss financial aid options with the college's financial aid office and be confident in your ability to meet the expected costs. Be aware that if the financial aid package is insufficient, you may still be obligated to attend the college.
- **Academic Preparedness:** We work through scenarios with each student to ensure that they will have completed all necessary standardized tests and coursework required for their ED applications. We also take the time to consider any potential changes in their personal and academic profiles that may surface after the ED application deadline and decide whether or not the benefits of an ED application outweigh the benefits of including that information in their application.

Conclusion

For some of our students, ED doesn't even factor into the picture. While there are strategic advantages to some ED options for some students, we take each applicant's unique circumstances into account and are deliberate about identifying the situations in which ED is not in a student's best interest. Sometimes there are significant milestones coming in November or early December that would have to be left out of an ED application. Sometimes there are important financial considerations that prevent a family from being confident in committing to an unknown cost. Sometimes a student's dream schools don't offer any kind of early application options. There are so many reasons that a student might decide to apply without pursuing an ED option, and that is not an inherently unwise decision. ED can be a valuable tool in planning this first step in the college journey, but--as we say to every family we meet--no part of this process is one-size-fits-all.

For the counselors reading this study, as you delve deeper into our insights and findings, we hope you find it helpful as you guide students through early college application deadlines. We also invite you to learn more about how Collegewise can be your trusted partner during this process. Collegewise's free webinars, application accelerator courses, and professional development for counselors are some of the many ways we help. To learn more, [click here](#).

About Collegewise

Since 1999, Collegewise has built a proven, effective methodology for guiding students through the college application journey. We support through the many decision points that come up - selecting the right classes, deciding between the SAT/ACT, exploring summer options, curating a school list, navigating the application process, and crafting compelling essays, with time left over to simply be a kid!

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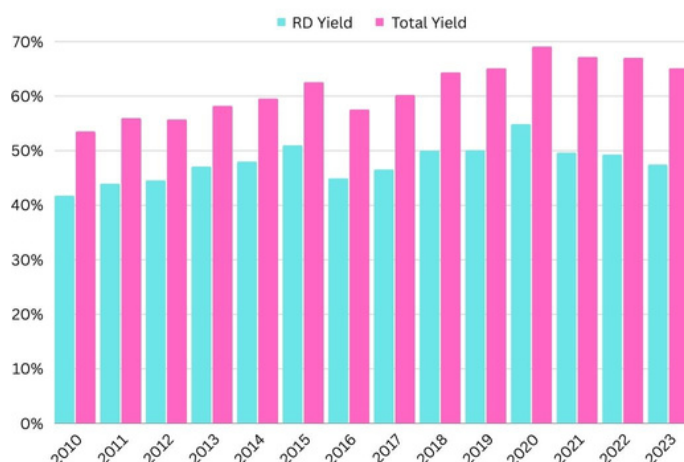
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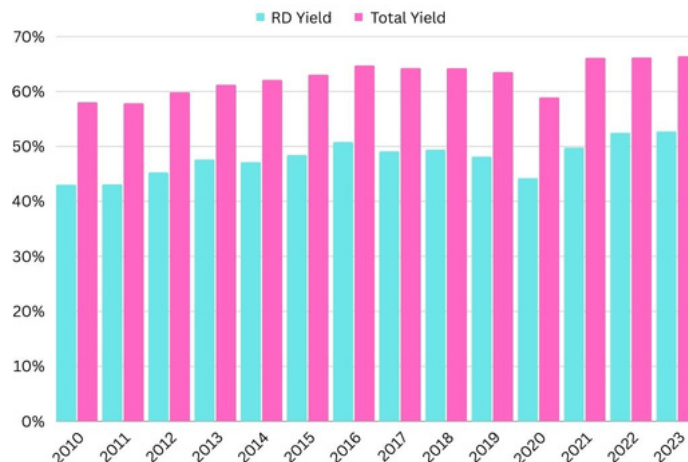
Appendix 1: Yield

ED, being a binding commitment, results in an almost 100% yield rate for those admits. Larger ED admit pools produce a significant total yield increase as compared to the Regular Decision yield.

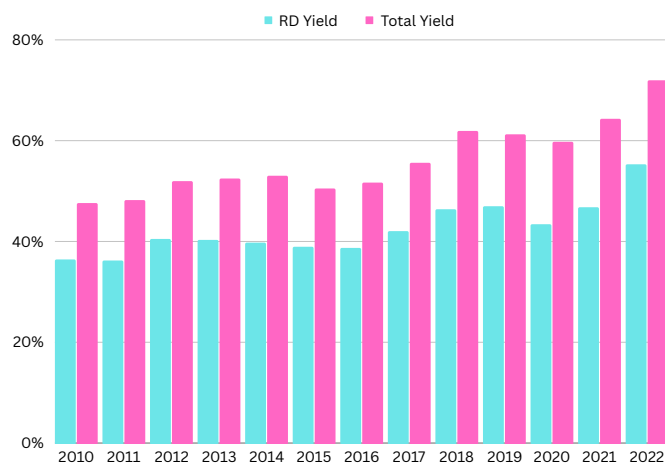
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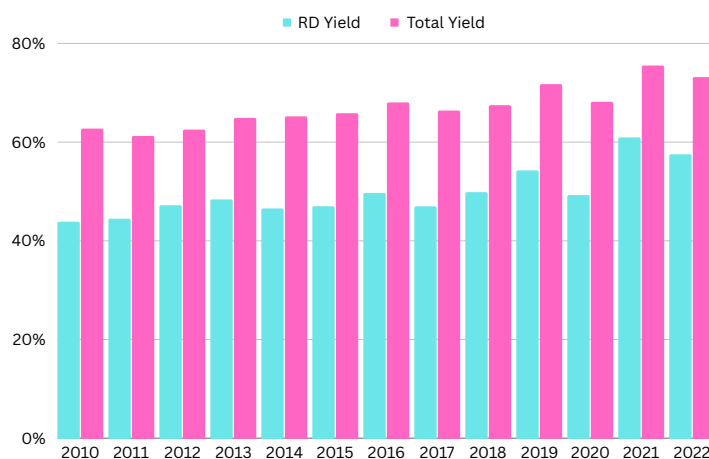
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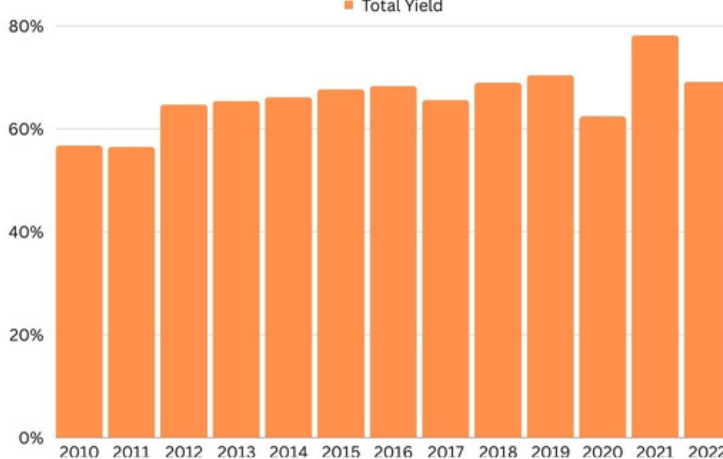
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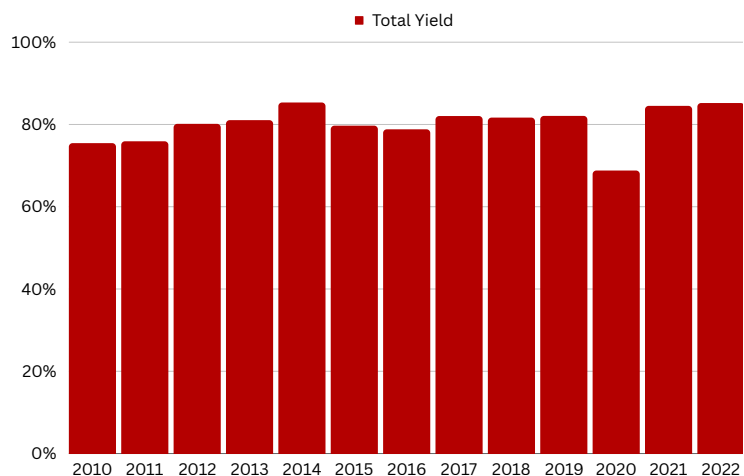
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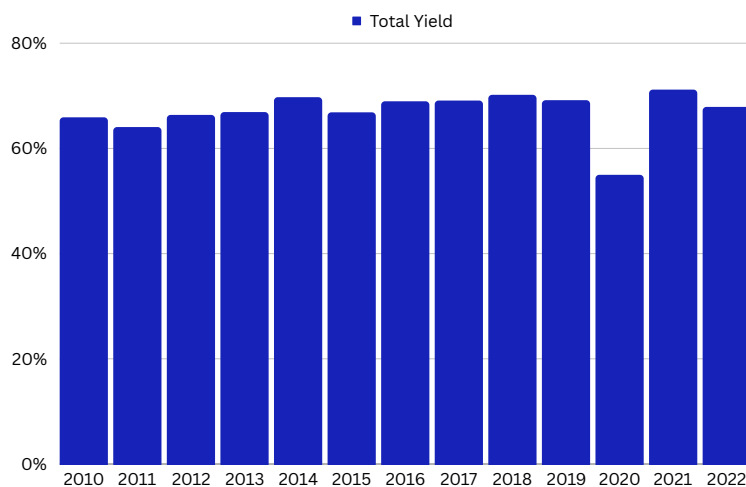
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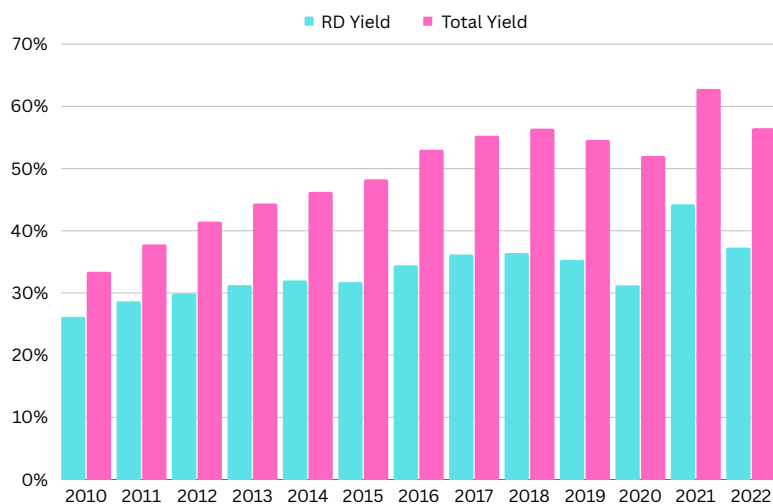
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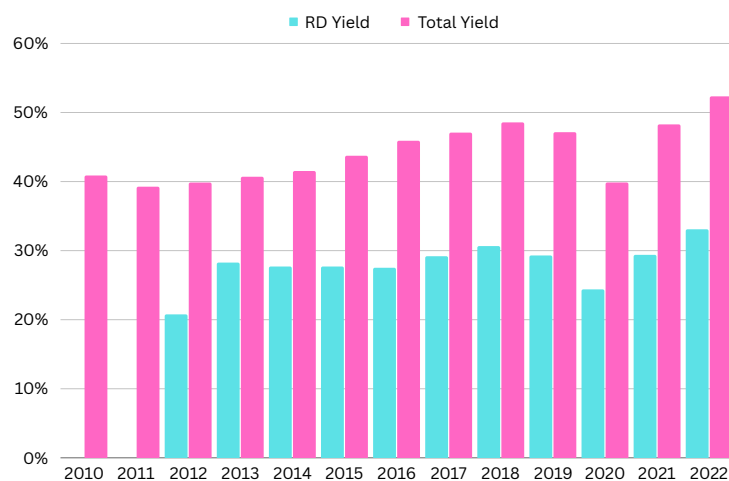
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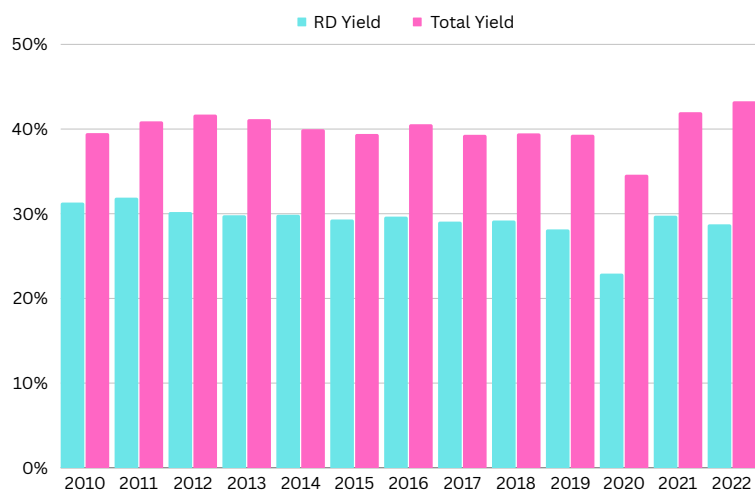
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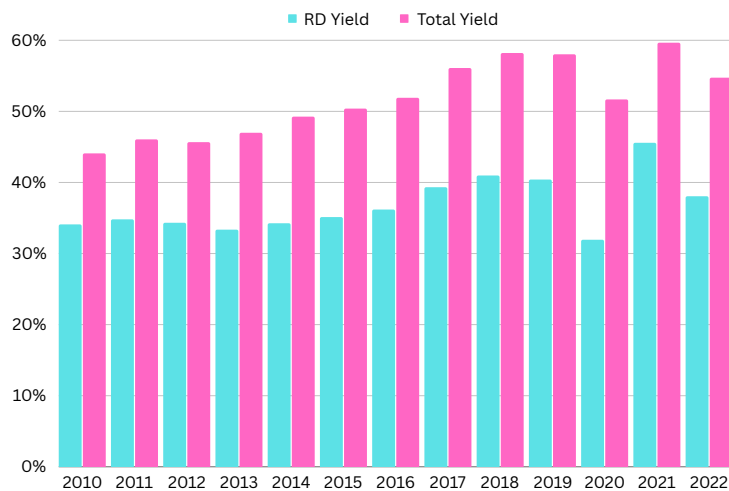
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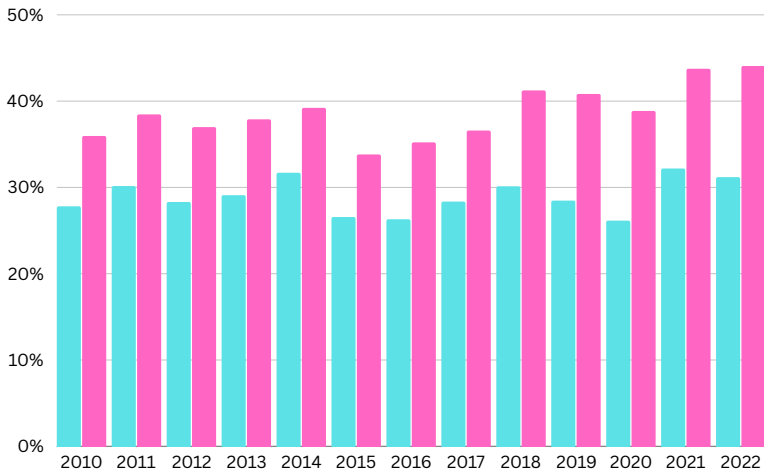


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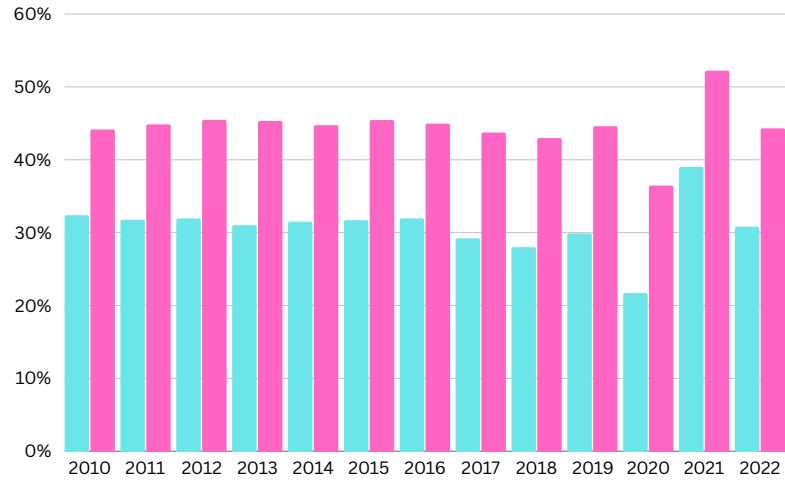
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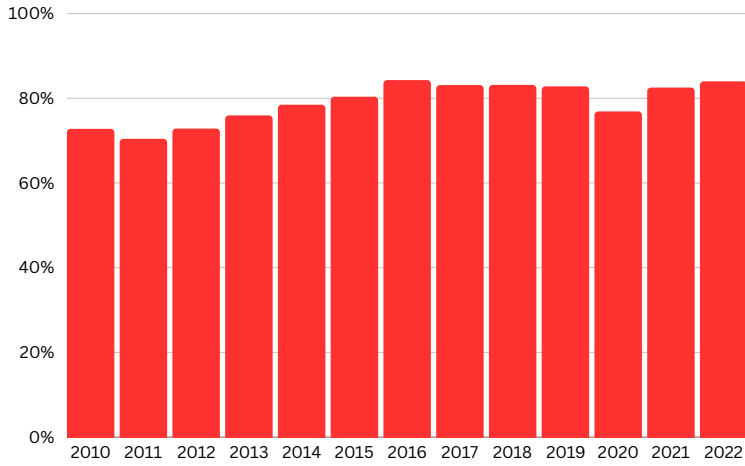
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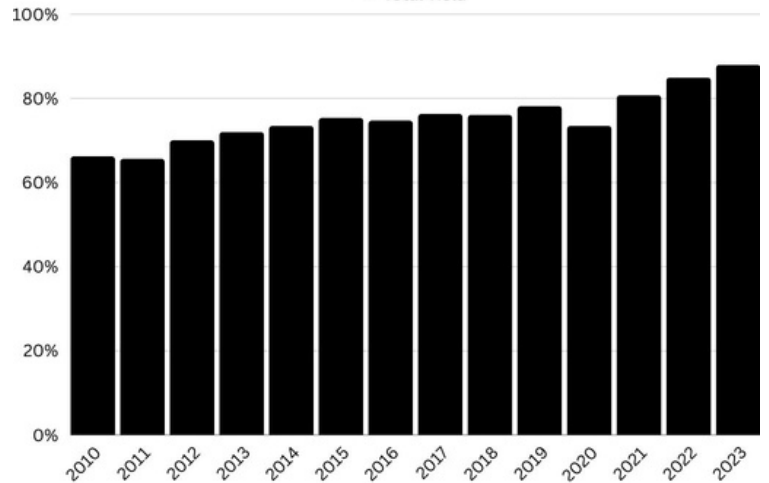
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Total Yield



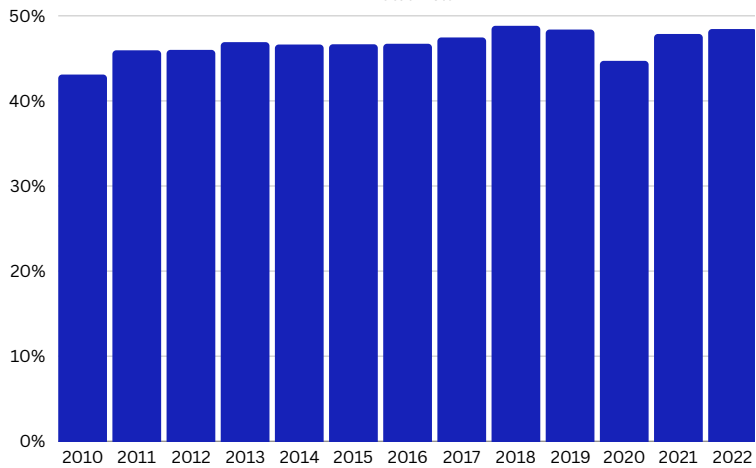
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Total Yield



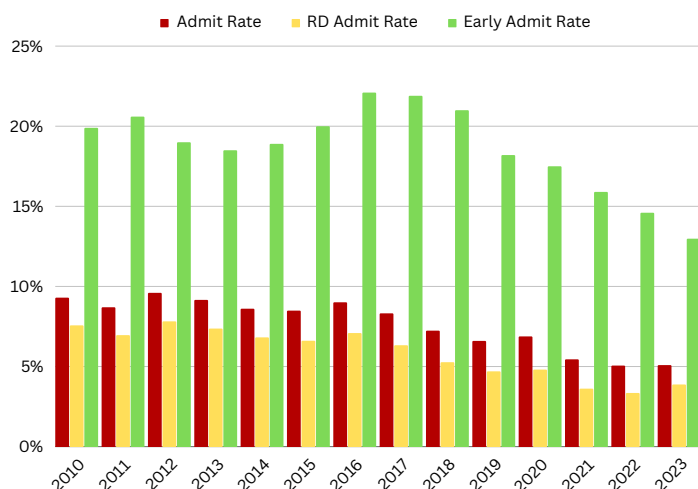
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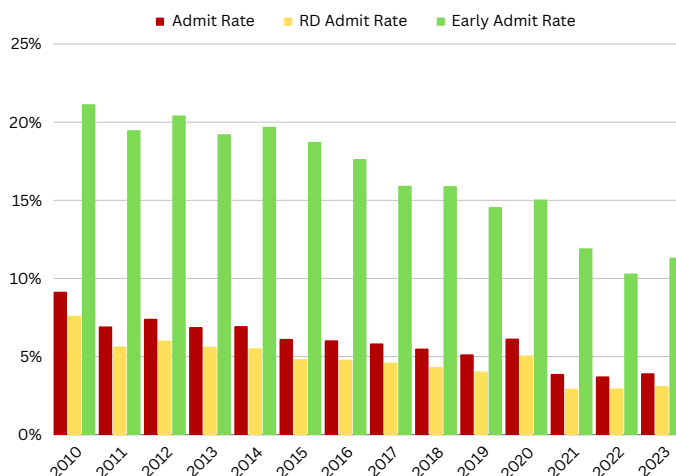


Appendix 2: Admit Rates

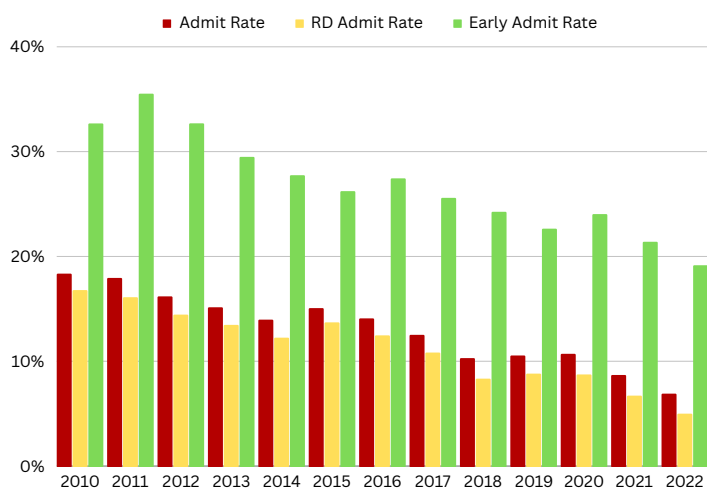
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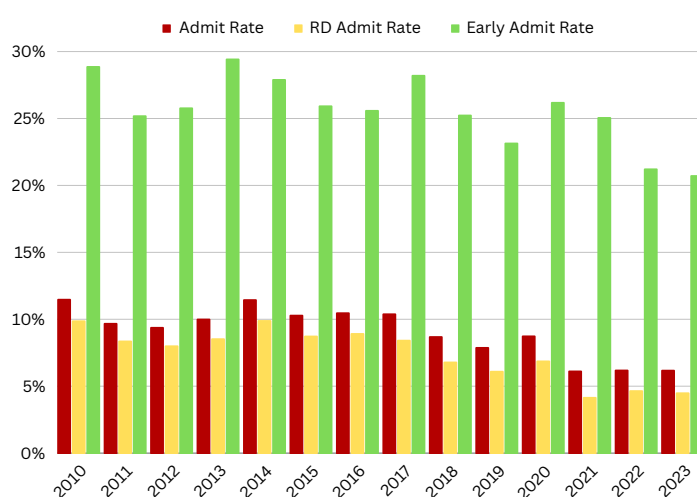
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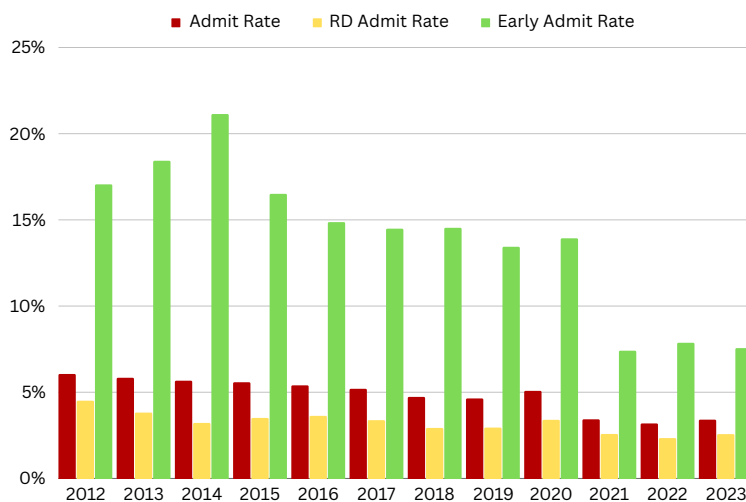
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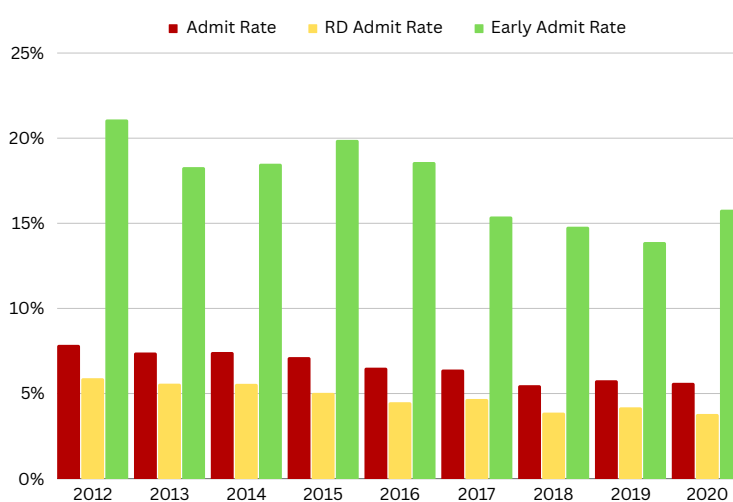
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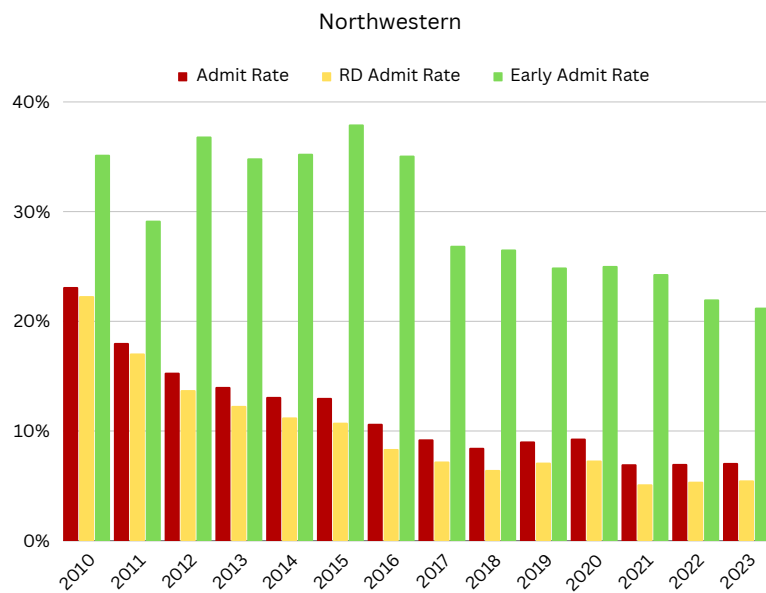
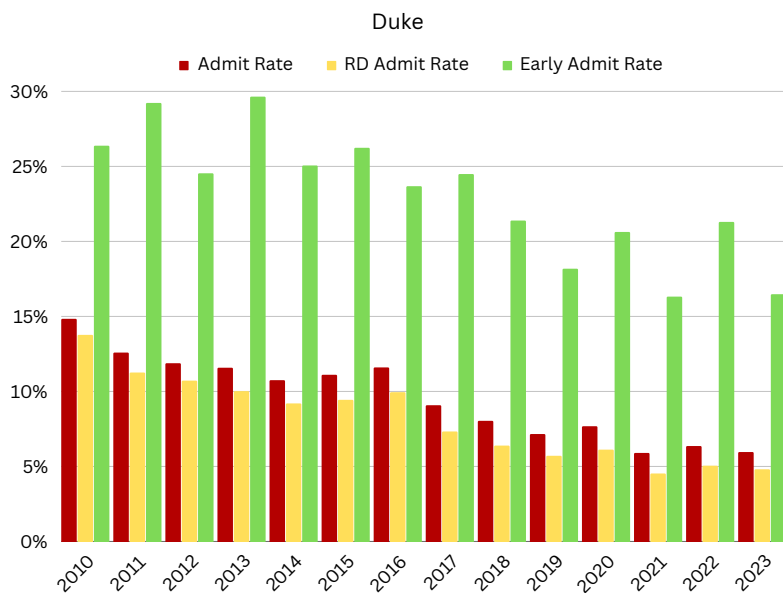
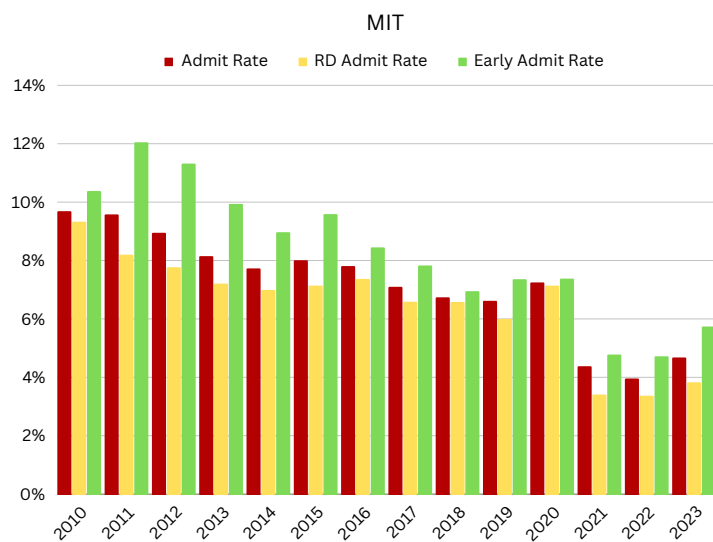
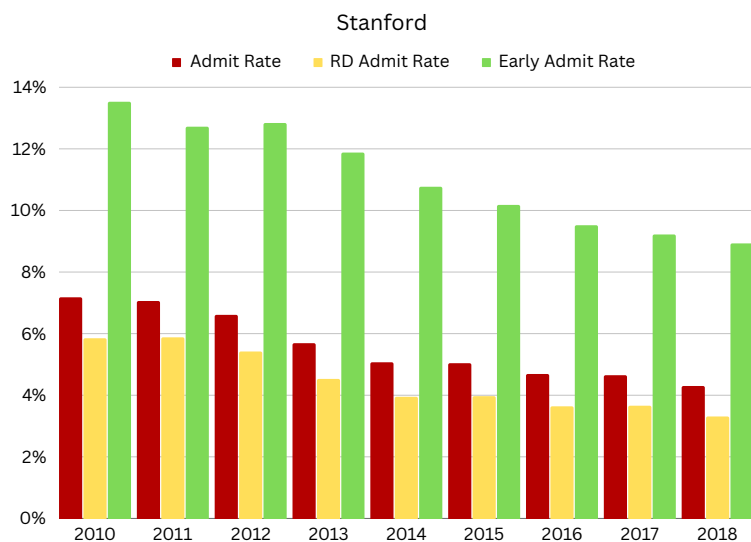
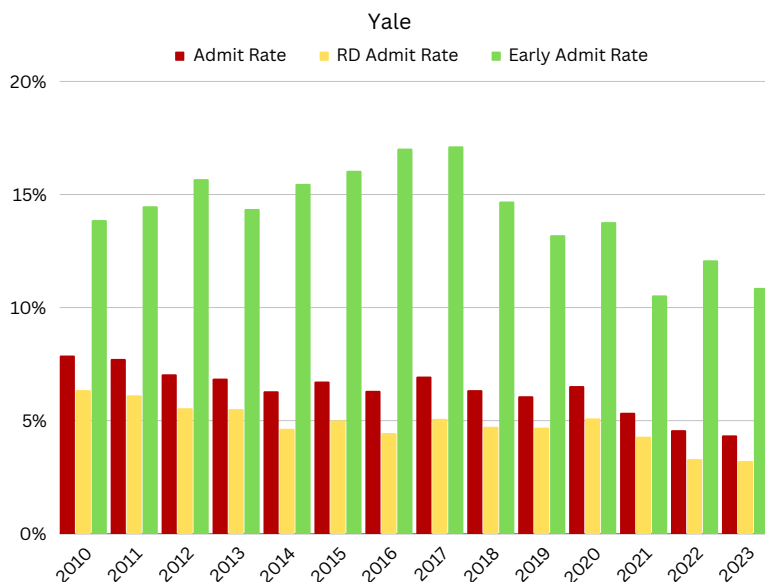
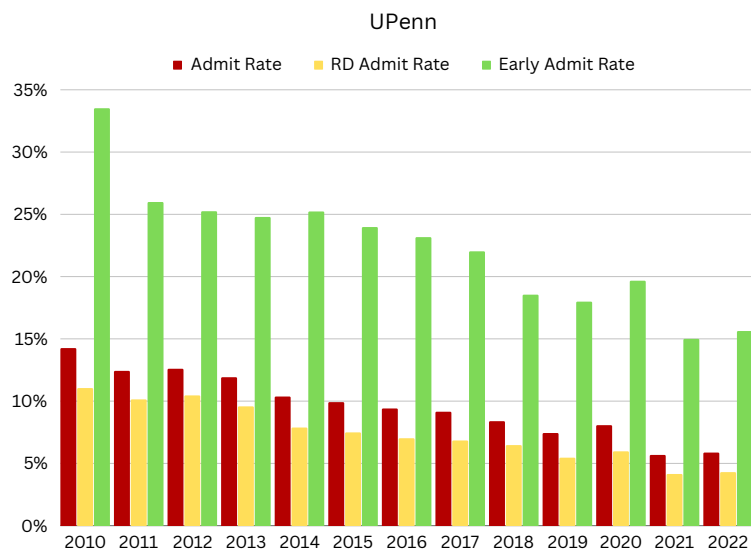


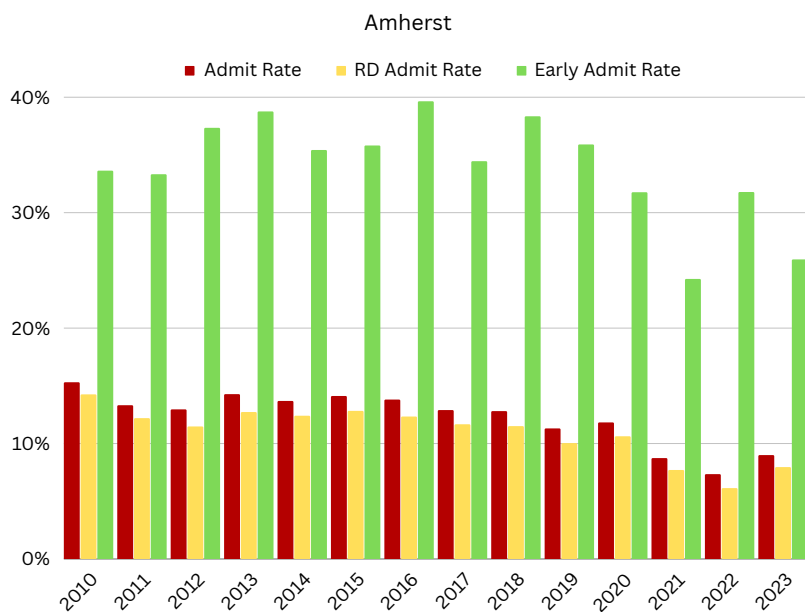
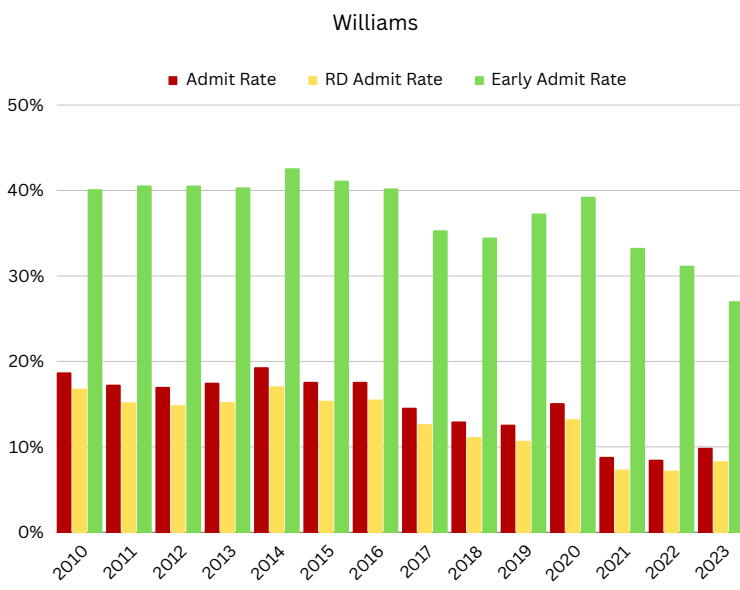
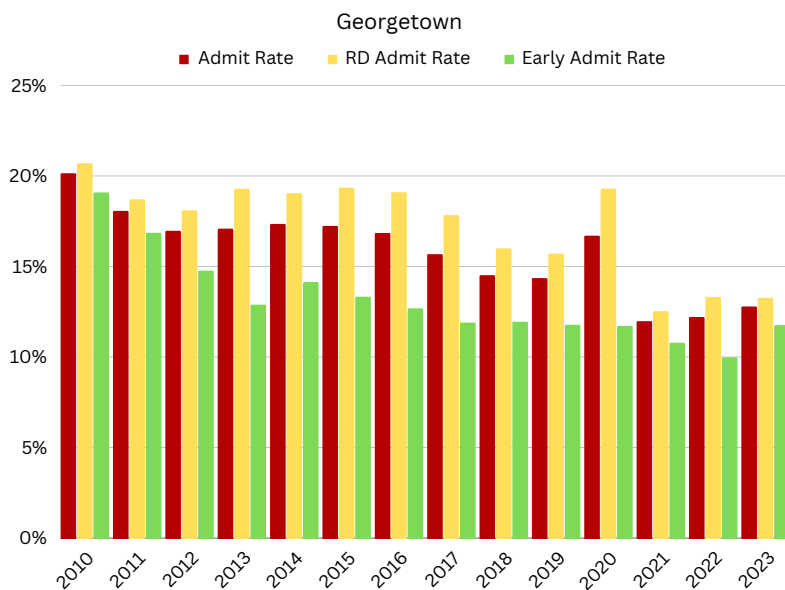
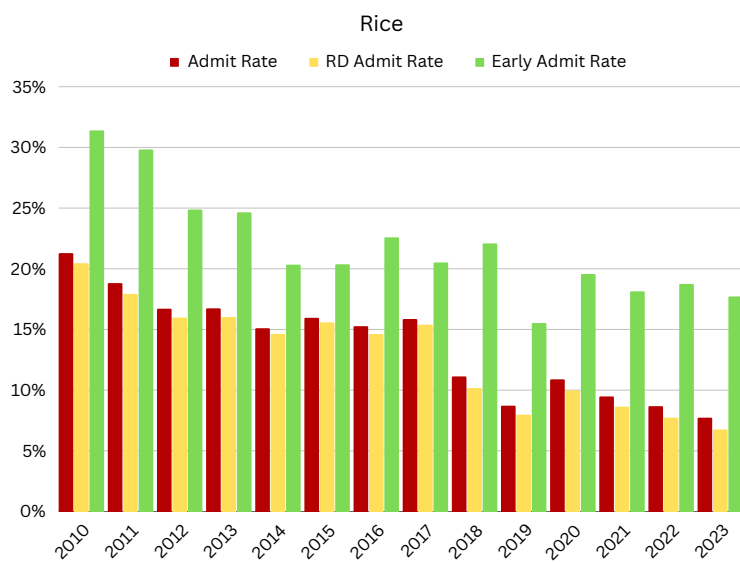
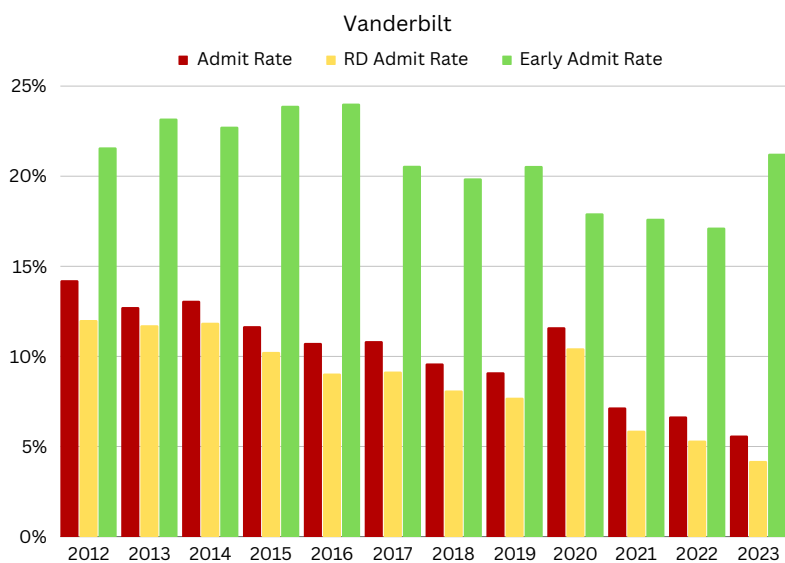
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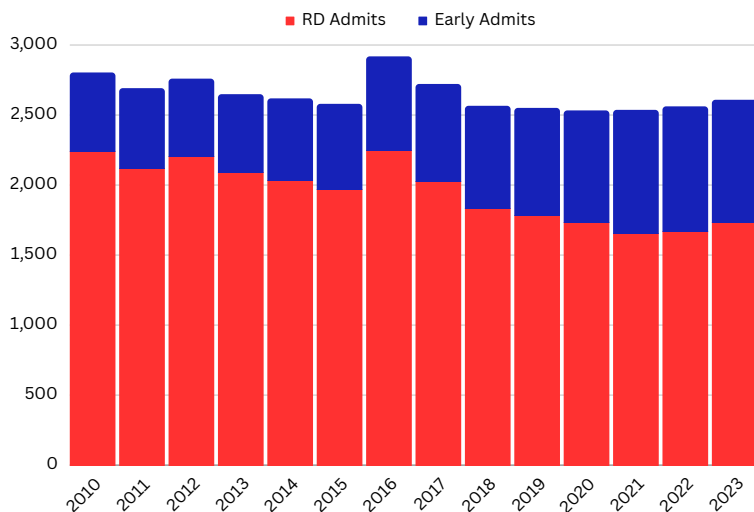




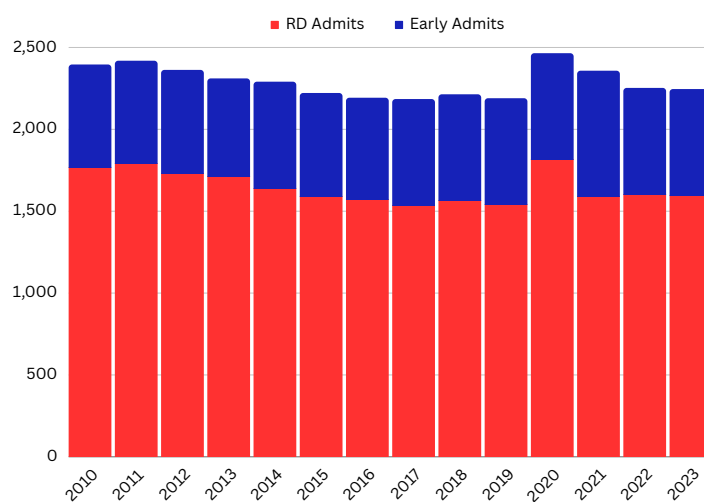


Appendix 3: Admit Numbers

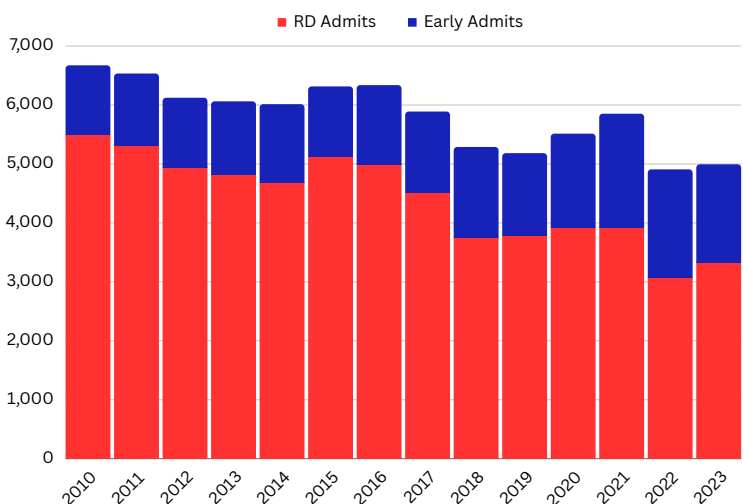
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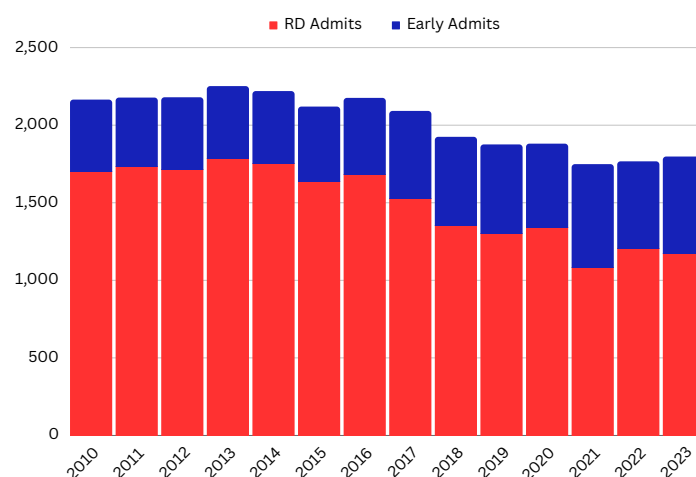
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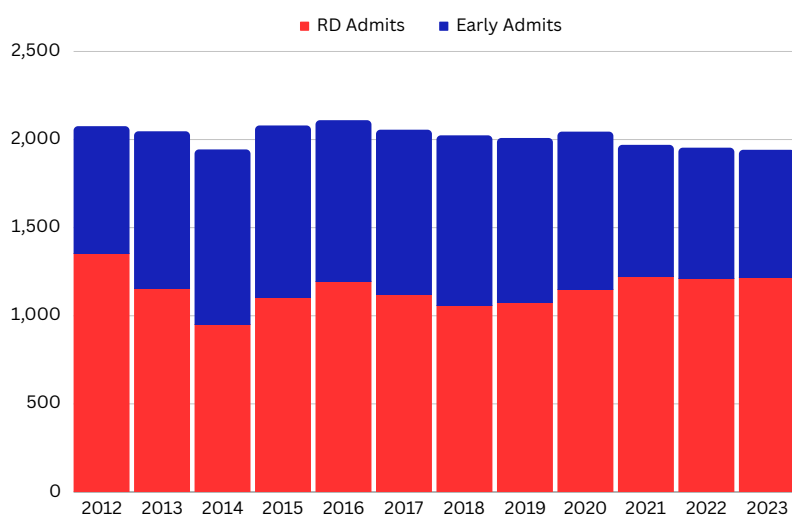
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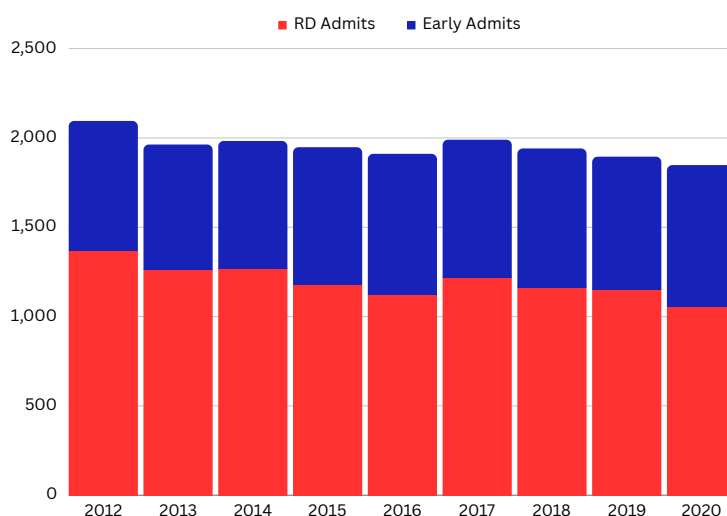
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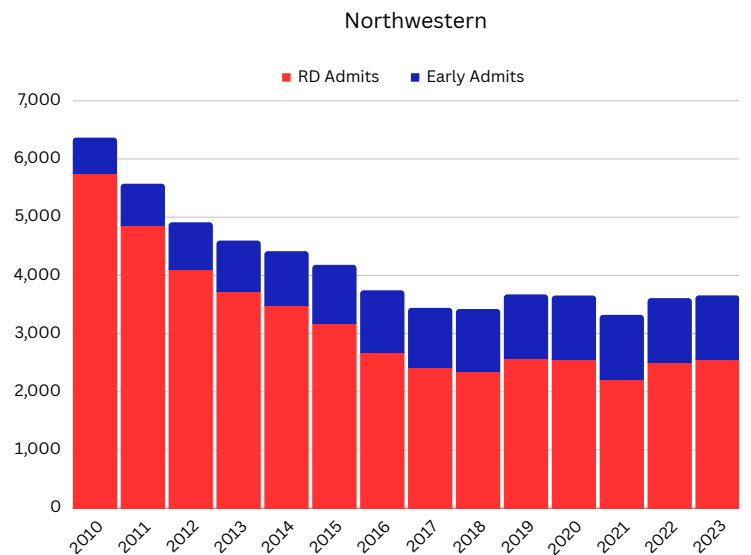
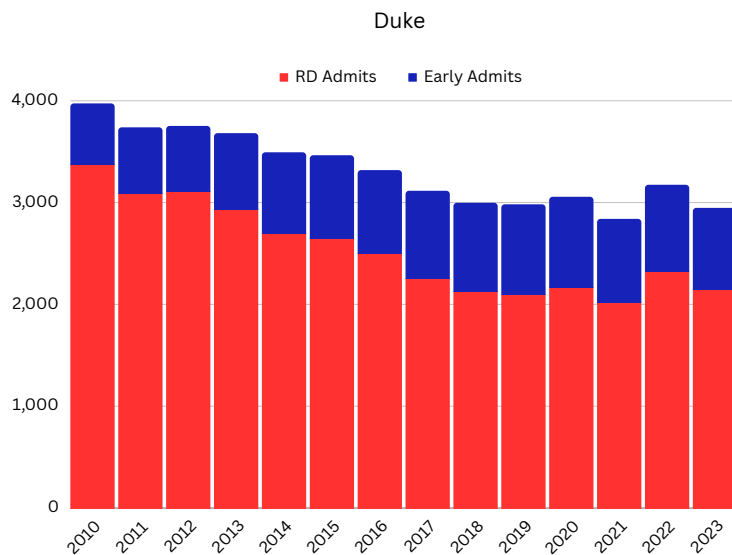
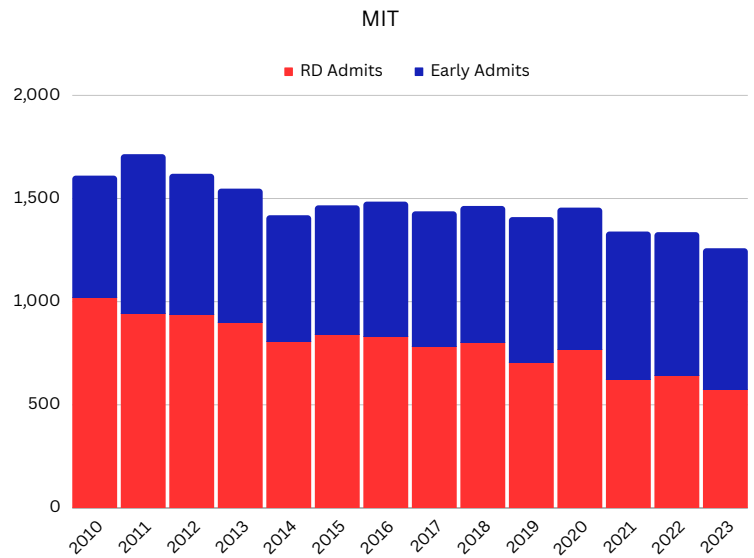
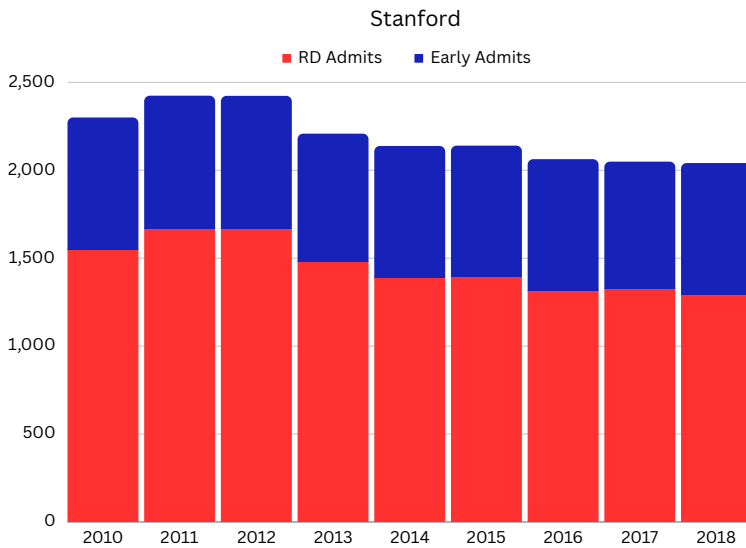
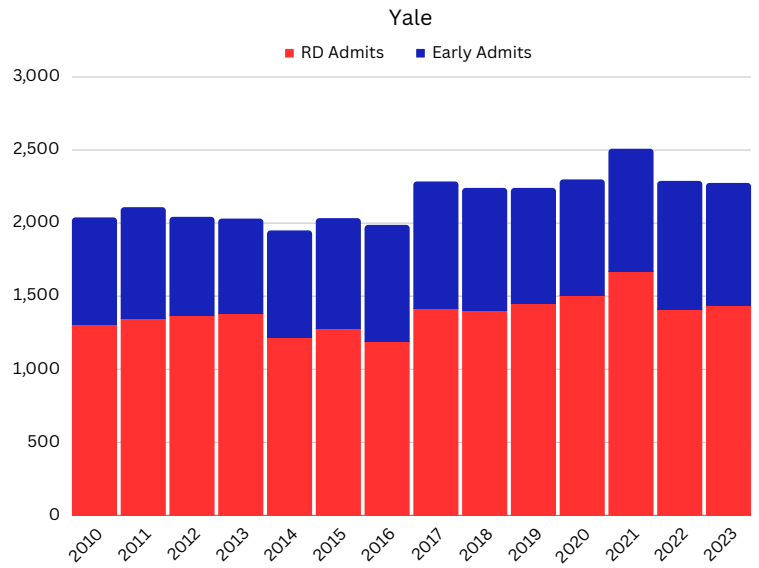
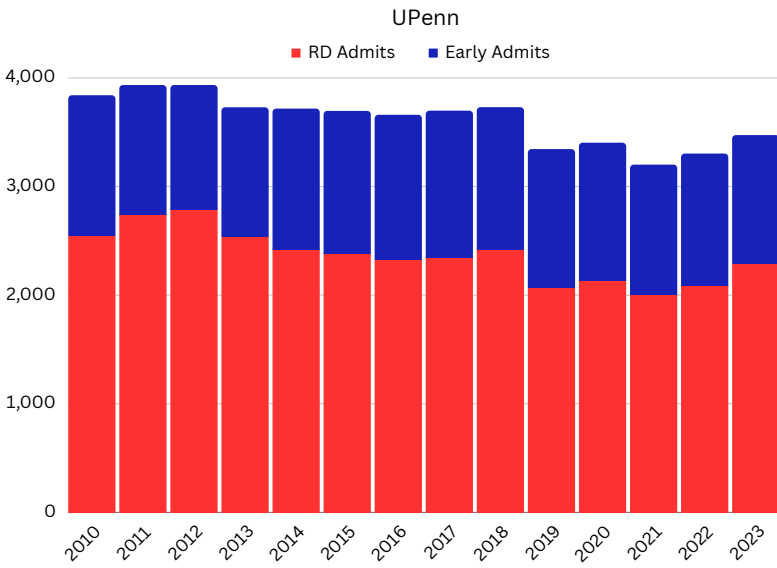


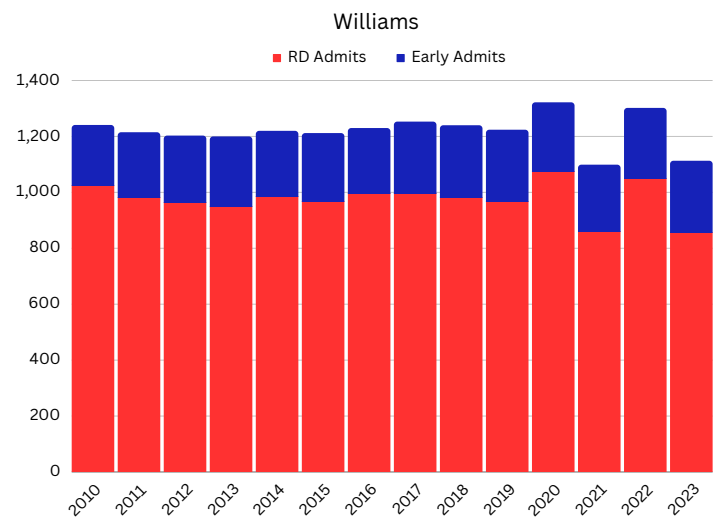
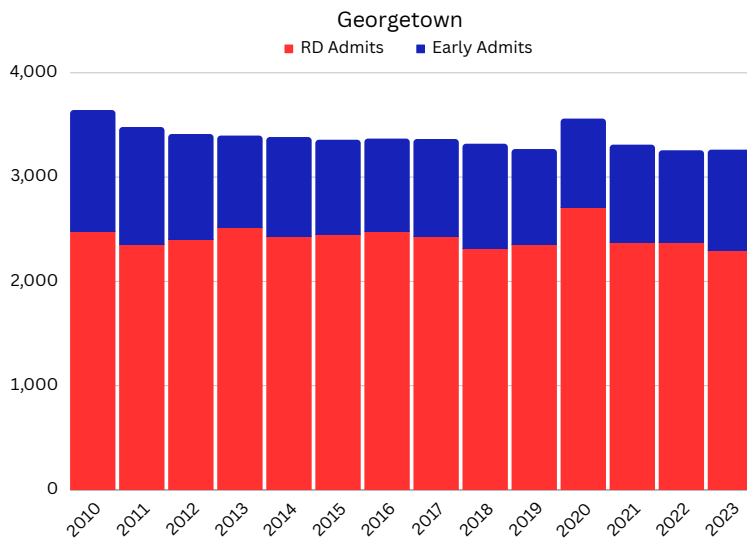
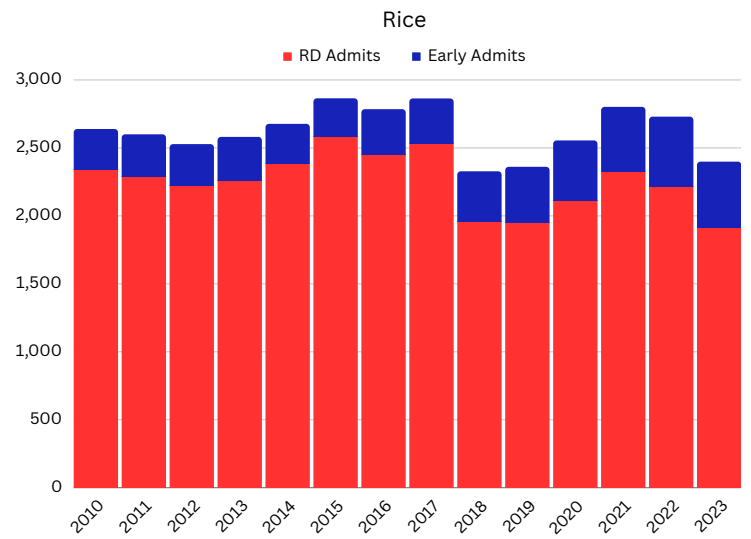
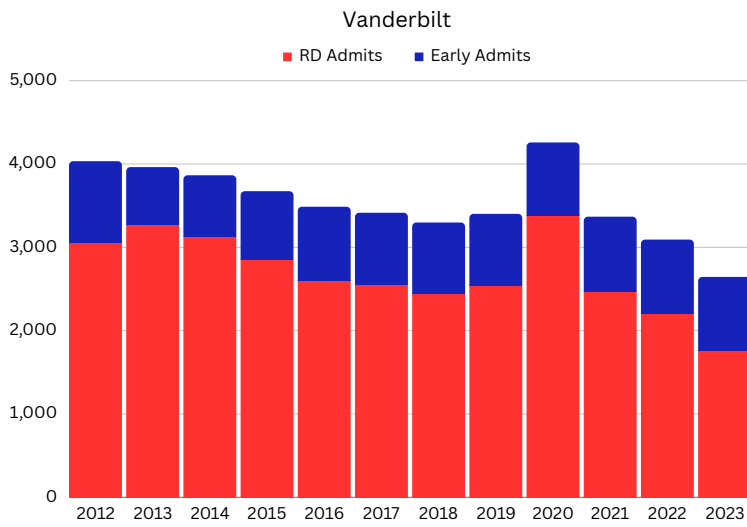
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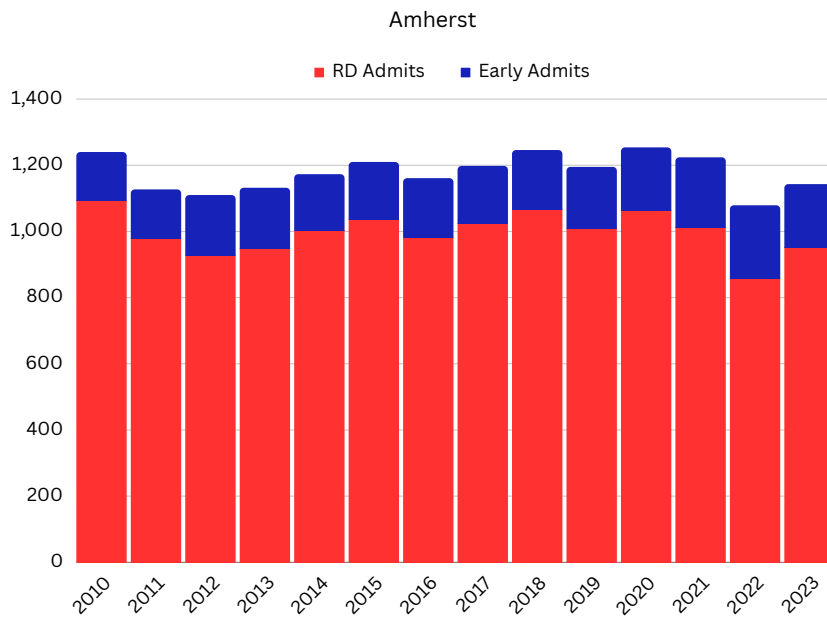


Princeton









References

Dear Reader,

We sincerely appreciate you getting this far into our guide. As you can imagine, a lot of data went into this study, but listing our sources in this document would've taken away from the focused approach we aimed to achieve. To ensure the best possible reading experience for you, we've decided to stash away our 42-page reference list in a separate document.

If you're craving a deeper dive into the resources we used to put this study together, click the link below to access the full list.

We hope you found this study a helpful resource on your journey through the college admissions process, and if you're one to venture through our mighty reference list, we hope you find them as useful as we did.

Cheers,
The Collegewise Team

To access our full list of references, please click the link below.

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