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The Surprising U.S. Colleges Joining America's Most Competitive Admissions Tier

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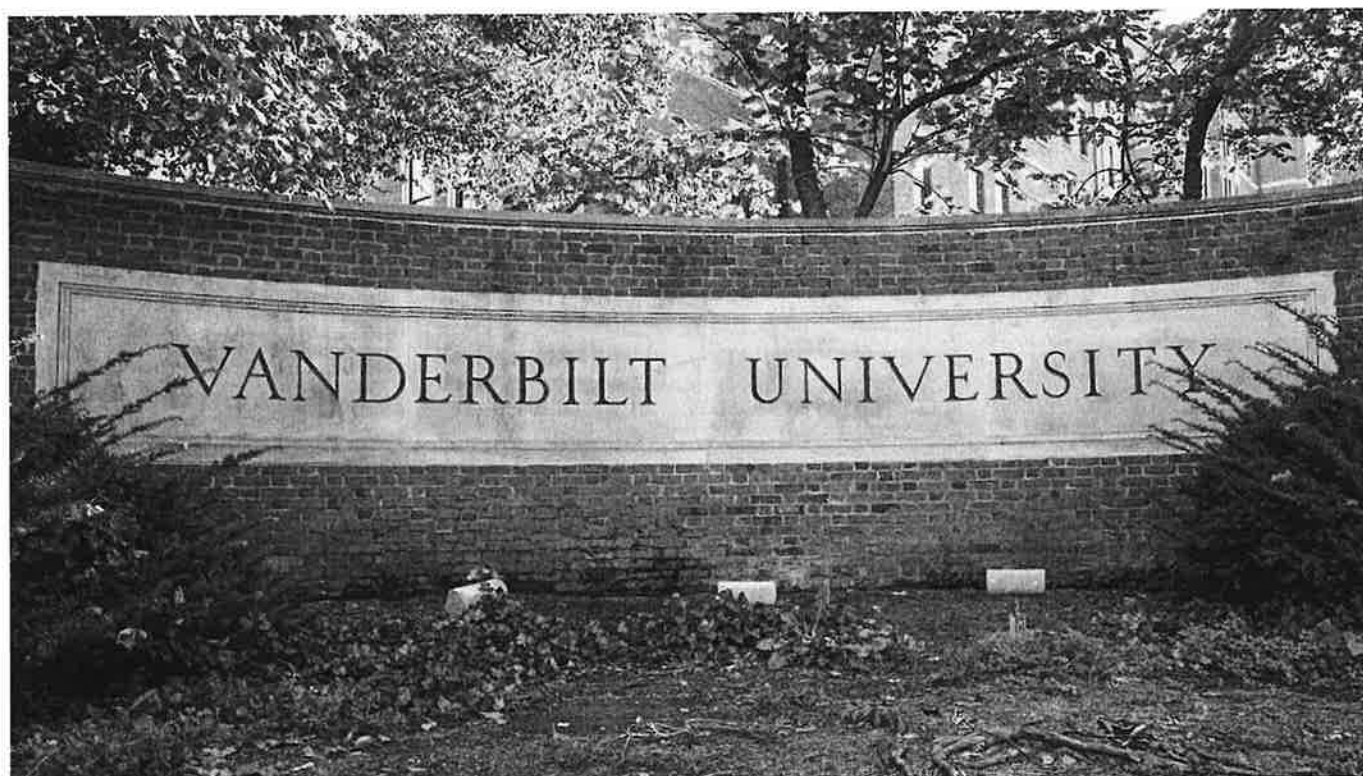
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Nashville, Tennessee - October 9, 2017: Sign at the entrance to Vanderbilt University
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In the days since [Ivy Day results](#) were released, many other top schools have published their admissions results, providing a more holistic view of this cycle's admissions landscape. Significantly, a growing number of schools outside the Ivy

League are matching or surpassing their storied peers in selectivity. And this growing selectivity is evident across a range of institutions and school types, from major research universities to small liberal arts colleges.

Nowhere is this more apparent than at Vanderbilt University. At Vanderbilt, 1,382 students were admitted out of 48,720 regular decision applicants—the largest pool in the university's history—for an RD acceptance rate of just 2.8%. Combined with roughly 920 students admitted through early decision at an 11.9% ED acceptance rate, the school's overall admissions rate will fall around 4%. This number represents a precipitous decrease from roughly two decades ago, at a time in which the acceptance rate was 32.8 percent. These results indicate that Vanderbilt is now admitting regular decision applicants at a rate that rivals or undercuts nearly every Ivy that publishes its data.

A similar trend has emerged at Duke University. Duke received a record number of 61,935 total applications and admitted 2,930 students for an overall acceptance rate of 4.7%, a figure that is lower than the overall published rates at both Brown and Dartmouth. The regular decision round was even tighter at 3.7%. Duke's acceptance rate has been cut roughly in half over the past decade, and the school now sits squarely in the same tier as the most selective institutions in the country.

Many small liberal arts colleges, which have historically garnered less prestige than their research university counterparts, have been under intense pressure in recent years, as financial struggles and enrollment declines have pushed many to shutter their doors in recent years. However, this cycle saw a noteworthy boom for some liberal arts colleges. Bowdoin College received 14,727 applications, admitting 962 students for a 6.5% acceptance rate—the lowest in the school's history. Williams College posted a 7.4% overall acceptance rate for the Class of 2030, also a record low. Although neither school has the brand recognition of an Ivy, both are now admitting students at rates that would have seemed unimaginable even a decade ago. These results may signal a renewed interest in the unique offerings of a liberal arts education after the declines of the Covid era.

The increasing desirability at these institutions is the result of an array of factors. Application volume has surged across the board, driven by Common App expansion,

the lingering effects of test-optional policies, and a growing tendency among students to apply to more schools per cycle. But schools like Vanderbilt, Duke, and Bowdoin have also seen a rapid rise in institutional prestige that has outpaced their ability or willingness to expand class size. As a result, there is an increasingly widening gap between applicant demand and available seats.

This does not mean that the Ivy League has lost its luster. Harvard, Princeton, and

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lowest in the country. But the data from the Class of 2030 makes clear that the group of schools admitting fewer than 5% of applicants is no longer an Ivy-exclusive club. For students anticipating the college admissions process in the coming years, these results should signal the critical importance of starting early. Schools that were once matches for highly motivated students have become high reach schools for applicants, regardless of their credentials. The more that students can begin intentionally developing their profile with these institutions or their unique program offerings in mind, the more likely they will be to stand out in the overwhelmingly competitive landscape.

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