

Care Counts in Crisis: College Admissions Deans Respond to COVID-19

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PROJECT



Introduction

In 2016 Making Caring Common launched Turning the Tide, an initiative endorsed by almost 200 college admissions leaders, focused on shifting the messages high school students and parents receive about what's important in college admissions.

Turning the Tide underscored that what's important in college admissions is not long brag sheets of accomplishments but meaningful engagement in learning and meaningful ethical engagement, especially concern for others and the common good. Turning the Tide also promoted a variety of steps for increasing equity and access for underrepresented students. Over the last few years, Making Caring Common has collaborated with colleges to make institution-specific changes that are aligned with these goals. We have also partnered with admission leaders and researchers in several efforts to advance these goals, including a project on providing far better, more usable information to underrepresented students in the college search process and a project on assessing ethical character and social and emotional skills in college admissions.

Then came a pandemic, which has brought with it tremendous challenges and stresses for students, families, and schools in this country and around the world, and has

generated all sorts of questions, anxieties and misconceptions about what college admissions offices expect and value during this time. The deans' collective statement below, endorsed by more than 300 college admission deans, seeks to harness the collective voices of college admissions deans to break through these misconceptions and to clearly answer these questions. It also seeks to continue to advance the goals of Turning the Tide.

The deans seek in this document to underscore their commitment to self-care, care for others, equity, and meaningful learning. They express their commitment when reviewing applications to carefully taking into account the many challenges and obstacles students are currently facing, and they encourage students to share information about these challenges in their applications.

We hope this document will relieve some of the stress that students and families are experiencing. And we hope it will get us closer to a college admissions process that is saner and more equitable and that encourages young people to both care for themselves and to build a healthier, more humane, and just world.

—Rick Weissbourd, Trisha Ross Anderson, and Brennan Barnard, *Making Caring Common at the Harvard Graduate School of Education*

What We Care About in This Time of Crisis: A Collective Statement From College Admissions Deans

As admission and enrollment leaders, we recognize that we and the institutions we represent send signals that can shape students' priorities and experiences throughout high school. This collective statement seeks to clarify what we value in applicants during this time of COVID-19. We are keenly aware that students across the country and the world are experiencing many uncertainties and challenges. We primarily wish to underscore our commitment to equity and to encourage in students self-care, balance, meaningful learning, and care for others.

More specifically, we value the following:

1. Self-care

Self-care is of high importance, especially in times of crisis. We recognize that many students, economically struggling and facing losses and hardships of countless kinds, are simply seeking to get by. We also recognize that this time is stressful and demanding for a wide range of students for many different reasons. We encourage all students to be gentle with themselves during this time.

2. Academic work

Your academic engagement and work during this time matters to us, but given the circumstances of many families, we recognize that you may face obstacles to academic work. We will assess your academic achievements in the context of these obstacles. In addition, we will assess your academic achievements mainly based on your academic performance before and after this pandemic. No student will be disadvantaged because of a change in commitments or a change in plans because of this outbreak, their school's decisions about transcripts, the absence of AP or IB tests, their lack of access to standardized tests (although many of the colleges represented here don't require these tests), or their inability to visit campus. We will also view students in the context of the curriculum, academic resources, and supports available to them.

3. Service and contributions to others

We value contributions to one's communities for those who are in a position to provide these contributions. We recognize that while many students are not in this position because of stresses and demands, other students are looking for opportunities to be engaged and make a difference. This pandemic has created a huge array of needs, whether for tutoring, contact tracing, support for senior citizens, or assistance with food delivery. We view responding to these needs as one valuable way that students can spend their time during this pandemic.

We also value forms of contribution that are unrelated to this pandemic, such as working to register voters, protect the environment, combat racial injustice and inequities, or stop online harassment among peers. Our interest is not in whether students created a new project or demonstrated leadership during this period. We, emphatically, do not seek to create a competitive public service "Olympics" in response to this pandemic. What matters to us is whether students' contribution or service is authentic and meaningful to them and to others, whether that contribution is writing regular notes to frontline workers or checking in with neighbors who are isolated. We will assess these contributions and service in the context of the obstacles students are facing. We also

care about what students have learned from their contributions to others about themselves, their communities, and/or their country (Please see Turning the Tide for additional information about the kinds of contributions and service we value). No student will be disadvantaged during this time who is not in a position to provide these contributions. We will review these students for admissions in terms of other aspects of their applications.

4. Family contributions

Far too often there is a misperception that high-profile, brief forms of service tend to "count" in admissions while family contributions—which are often deeper and more time-consuming and demanding—do not. Many students may be supervising younger siblings, for example, or caring for sick relatives or working to provide family income, and we recognize that these responsibilities may have increased during these times. We view substantial family contributions as very important, and we encourage students to report them in their applications. It will only positively impact the review of their application.

5. Extracurricular and summer activities

No student will be disadvantaged for not engaging in extracurricular activities

during this time. We also understand that many plans for summer have been impacted by this pandemic, and students will not be disadvantaged for lost possibilities for involvement. Potential internship opportunities, summer jobs, camp experiences, classes, and other types of meaningful engagement have been cancelled or altered. We have never had specific expectations for any one type of extracurricular activity or summer experience and realize that each student's circumstances allow for different opportunities. We have always considered work or family responsibilities as valuable ways of spending one's time, and this is especially true at this time.

Reporting information that is important to students and to us

We will gather information from schools themselves about curriculum and academic resources and supports, but we

encourage students to communicate any factors specific to their circumstances that impeded their academic performance. Those factors might include, for example, lack of access to the internet, no quiet place to study, or the various family responsibilities described above. We encourage students to describe concretely how any of these circumstances have negatively affected their academic performance or ability to engage in activities that matter to them. It is helpful to know, for example, how much time students spent per week taking on a family responsibility, such as taking care of a sick relative. This information will be treated completely confidentially.

Both the Common Application and the Coalition for College application provide opportunities for students to describe how they have been impacted by the pandemic.

Current Endorsers (as of June 2020)

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Adelphi University

Alexa Gaeta, Vice President for Enrollment, Dean of Admission and Financial Aid, Agnes Scott
College

Dwayne Walker, Vice President for Enrollment Management, Albright College

Cornell B. LeSane II, Vice President for Enrollment & Dean of Admissions, Allegheny College

Mary Alice Ozechoski, Vice President of Enrollment and Marketing, Alvernia University

Sharon Alston, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Enrollment, American University

Heather A. Kim, Vice President for Enrollment, Marketing and Communication, Anderson University

Gariot P. Louima, Vice President for Enrollment and Student Success, Antioch College

Matt Lopez, Associate Vice President, Enrollment Services and Executive Director, Admission
Services, Arizona State University

Amanda Parker-Wolery, Director of Marketing and Admissions, Art Academy of Cincinnati

W. Kent Barnds, Executive Vice President for External Relations, Augustana College (IL)

Courtney Minden, Vice President of Enrollment Management, Babson College

Scott A. Schulz, Vice President for Enrollment Management, Baldwin Wallace University

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Jennifer Fondiller, Vice President for Enrollment, Barnard College

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E. Whitney Soule, Senior Vice President, Dean of Admissions and Student Aid, Bowdoin College

Jennifer Walker, Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid, Brandeis University

Matt Thomsen, Vice President for Enrollment Management, Briar Cliff University

Logan Powell, Dean of Admission, Brown University

William Larrousse, Vice President for Enrollment Management, Bryn Athyn College

Logan Powell, Dean of Admission, Brown University

Cheryl Lynn Horsey, Chief Enrollment Officer, Bryn Mawr College

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Lori Greene, Vice President for Enrollment Management, Butler University

Stephen Quinn, Vice President, Enrollment Management and Communications, Caldwell University

Nikki Kahealani Chun, Director of Undergraduate Admissions, California Institute of Technology
(Caltech)

Matthew Ward, Vice President, Enrollment Management & Marketing, California Lutheran University
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Lee Coffin, Vice Provost for Enrollment and Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid, Dartmouth College
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Jason Good, Vice President for Innovation and Student Recruitment, Eastern Mennonite University
Genesis Meaderds, Director of Admissions, Eastern Oregon University
John Sullivan, Vice President for Enrollment Management, Eckerd College
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Sandra Robbins, Dean of Enrollment, Emmanuel College
Evan Lipp, Vice President of Admission and Financial Aid, Endicott College
Alison Hildenbrand, Director of Undergraduate Admission, Fairfield University
Luke David Schultheis, Vice President for Enrollment, Planning, and Effectiveness, Fairleigh Dickinson University

Rachel Branch, Dean of Admissions, Flagler College
Jody E. Glassman, Director of University Admissions, Florida International University
Hege Ferguson, Director of Admissions, Florida State University
John W. Buckley, Vice President for Admission and Student Financial Services, Fordham University
Jess Savage, Director of Admission, Fort Lewis College
John Chenier, Assistant Dean of Admissions, Framingham State University
Jimmie Foster, Jr., Vice President of Enrollment Management, Franklin & Marshall College
Arlene Wesley Cash, Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Success, Frostburg State University
Melissa A. Bevacqua, Director of Undergraduate Admissions, George Mason University
Rick Clark, Director of Undergraduate Admission, Georgia Institute of Technology
Gail Sweezey, Dean of Admissions, Gettysburg College
Erin Hays, Director of Admission, Gonzaga University
Dominique Burgunder-Johnson, Vice President for Marketing and Enrollment, Goshen College
Jonathan Lindsay, Vice President for Enrollment Management, Goucher College
Jodi M. Chycinski, Associate Vice President and Director of Admissions, Grand Valley State University
Rebecca Chabrow, Director of Enrollment Management, Gratz College
Victoria Clark, Director of Admissions, Greenville University
Kyle Wooden, Director of Admission, Guilford College
Monica C. Inzer, Vice President for Enrollment Management, Hamilton College
Mai Nhia Xiong-Chan, Vice President of Enrollment, Hamline University
Fumio Sugihara, Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid, Hampshire College
Chris Gage, Vice President for Strategy and Enrollment, Hanover College
William Fitzsimmons, Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid, Harvard University
Thyra Briggs, VP for Admission & Financial Aid, Harvey Mudd College
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Jess Lord, Vice President & Dean of Admission and Financial Aid, Haverford College
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Anthony E. Jones, Associate Provost/Assistant Vice President of Enrollment Management, Howard University
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Evan Wilson, Dean of Admission and Student Financial Services, Illinois College
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Stephanie Levenson, Vice President for Enrollment Management, John Carroll University
David M. Phillips, Vice Provost for Admissions and Financial Aid, Johns Hopkins University
Jason Moran, Vice President for Enrollment and Marketing, Juniata College
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Chris Ellertson, Vice President of Enrollment, Lake Forest College
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Jody Goins, Vice President & Dean, Enrollment and Student Affairs, Lincoln Memorial University
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Matthew X. Fissinger, Assistant Vice Provost, Undergraduate Admission, Loyola Marymount University
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Jonathan Squire, Dean of Admissions, Moore College of Art and Design
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James W. Smith, Vice President of University Relations, Mount Vernon Nazarene University
Melissa Falk, Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid, Muhlenberg College
Dave Follick, Dean of Admissions, Nassau Community College-SUNY
Angel Perez, CEO-Elect, National Association for College Admission Counseling
Megan Kokenge, Director of Enrollment Services, Nebraska Methodist College
Stephen Eck, Executive Director of University Admissions, New Jersey Institute of Technology
Jon Westover, Associate Vice Provost & Director of Admissions, North Carolina State University
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Elizabeth Cheron, Assistant Vice President of Enrollment & Dean of Admissions, Northeastern University
Gerri Daniels, Executive Director of Admissions, Northern Michigan University

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Dawn Aubry, Vice President of Enrollment Management, Oakland University

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Stefanie D. Niles, Vice President for Enrollment and Communications, Ohio Wesleyan University

Emily Roper-Doten, Dean of Admission and Financial Aid, Olin College of Engineering

Noah Buckley, Director of Admissions, Oregon State University

Brittany Preston, Director of Admission and Recruitment, Oregon State University-Cascades

Kathleen Chambard, Assistant VP, Enrollment Marketing, Pace University

Anna Miltenberger, Director of Admissions, Pacific Northwest College of Art

Debbie Bazarsky, Dean of Enrollment, Engagement, and Diversity, Pennsylvania College of Art & Design

Kristy Paredes Collins, Dean of Enrollment Management, Pepperdine University

Yvonne Berumen, Vice President of Admission and Financial Aid, Pitzer College

Seth Allen, Vice President for Strategy & Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid, Pomona College

Matt Ogawa, Director of Admissions and Recruitment, Portland Community College

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Raul Fonts, Associate Vice President/Dean of Admission and Financial Aid, Providence College

Mitch Warren, Director of Admissions, Purdue University

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Todd Burrell, Director of Undergraduate Admissions, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

Enga Almeida, Strategic Coordinator, Southwestern Adventist University
Tom Delahunt, Vice President for Recruitment and Enrollment, Southwestern University
Cory Piper-Hauswirth, Associate Vice President of Admissions, College for Women, St. Catherine University
Drew Nichols, Dean of Admission, St. Edward's University
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Lee Ann Backlund, Vice President for Enrollment & Dean of Admission and Financial Aid, The University of the South
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Adrienne Amador Oddi, Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid, Trinity College
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J.T. Duck, Dean of Admissions & Enrollment Management, Tufts University
Satyajit Dattagupta, Vice President of Enrollment and Dean of Admission, Tulane University
Dale Bittinger, Assistant Vice Provost, Undergraduate Admissions and Orientation, UMBC - University of Maryland, Baltimore County
Matt Malatesta, Vice President for Admissions, Financial Aid and Enrollment, Union College
Kasey Urquidez, Vice President for Enrollment Management & Dean of Undergraduate Admissions, University of Arizona
Lisa Przekop, Director of Admissions, University of California Santa Barbara
Gordon D. Chavis, Jr., Associate Vice President-Enrollment Services SDES, University of Central Florida
Clark V. Brigger, Executive Director of Admissions, University of Colorado Boulder
Catherine A. Wilson, Director of Undergraduate Admissions, University of Colorado Denver

Nathan Fuerst, Vice President for Enrollment Planning and Management, University of Connecticut
Donnell W. Wiggins, Assistant Vice President of Recruitment and Admission, University of Dayton
Rodney Morrison, Vice President for Enrollment Management, University of Delaware
Todd Rinehart, Vice Chancellor for Enrollment, University of Denver
Zina Evans, Vice President Enrollment Management, University of Florida
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Kedra Ishop, Vice Provost for Enrollment Management, University of Michigan
Heidi Meyer, Executive Director of Admissions, University of Minnesota Twin Cities
Lindajean Heller Western, Vice President for Enrollment Management, University of Mount Union
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Robert McGann, Director of Admissions, University of New Hampshire
Stephen Farmer, Vice Provost for Enrollment and Undergraduate Admissions, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Claire Kirby, Director of Admissions, University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Marcio Moreno, Director of Admissions, University of North Carolina Wilmington
Don Bishop, Associate Vice President for Undergraduate Enrollment, University of Notre Dame
Jim Rawlins, Assistant Vice President, Director of Admissions, University of Oregon
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Robert Alexander, Dean of Admissions, Financial Aid, and Enrollment Management, University of Rochester
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Minh-Ha Hoang, Director of Admission, University of San Diego
Michael Beseda, Vice Provost for Enrollment, University of San Francisco
Mary Wagner, Assistant Vice President for Enrollment Management, Executive Director of Admissions, University of South Carolina
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Kristen Hatfield, Director of Admissions, University of St. Thomas (MN)
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Fabrizio D'Aloisio, Assistant Vice Provost for Enrollment Management and Director of Undergraduate Admissions, University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Rachelle Hernandez, Senior Vice Provost for Enrollment Management and Student Success, University of Texas at Austin
Scott Smiley, Director of Admissions, University of Texas Permian Basin
Steve Robinson, Senior Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management, University of Utah
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Derek Kindle, Vice Provost for Enrollment Management, University of Wisconsin-Madison
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Jeffery T. Gates, Senior Vice President for Student Life and Enrollment Management, Utica College
Ray Brown, Vice President for Enrollment, Valparaiso University
Douglas L. Christiansen, Vice Provost for University Enrollment Affairs and Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid, Vanderbilt University
Sonya Smith, Dean of Admission and Student Financial Services, Vassar College
Brian Emerson, Vice President for Enrollment Management and Operations, Villa Maria College
J. Leon Washington, Dean of Enrollment Management, Villanova University
Vernon L. Beitzel, Director of Admissions, Virginia Military Institute
Karen Vargas, Dean of Admissions, Wake Forest University
Bart Blankenship, Director of Admissions, Warner University
Sally Stone Richmond, Vice President for Admissions and Financial Aid, Washington and Lee University
Ronné P. Turner, Vice Provost for Admissions and Financial Aid, Washington University in St. Louis
Dawn Medley, Associate Vice President of Enrollment Management, Wayne State University
Joy St. John, Dean of Admission and Financial Aid, Wellesley College
Amin Abdul-Malik Gonzalez, Vice President & Dean of Admission and Financial Aid, Wesleyan University
George M. Zimmerman, Executive Director of Admissions and Recruitment, West Virginia University
Phil Moreno, President, Western Association for College Admission Counseling
Jay Murray, Associate Vice President for Enrollment, Western Connecticut State University
Alicia Kornowa, Director of Admissions, Western Michigan University
Kelly L. Hart, Director of Admission, Westfield State University
Walter Caffey, Vice President for Enrollment and Dean of Admission and Student Aid, Wheaton College Massachusetts
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Mary Randers, Dean of Admission, Willamette University
Tim Wolfe, Associate Vice President for Enrollment, William & Mary
Colleen Murphy, Vice President, Enrollment Management and Marketing, William Peace University
Liz Creighton, Dean of Admission and Financial Aid, Williams College
Amanda James, Director of Admissions, Winthrop University
Brand Stille, Vice President for Enrollment, Wofford College
Andrew B. Palumbo, Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid, Worcester Polytechnic Institute
Robert F. Durdle, Chief Recruitment and Admissions Officer, Wright State University
Jeremiah Quinlan, Dean of Undergraduate Admissions and Financial Aid, Yale University

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Making Caring Common Project
Harvard Graduate School of Education
14 Appian Way
Cambridge, MA 02138

<https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/>