

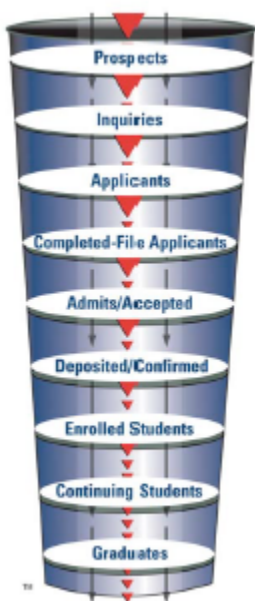
How Do I Love Thee? Demonstrated Interest and How Colleges Count the Ways

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Demonstrated Interest has become of growing importance in the college process over the past decade. According to the NACAC 2011 Factors in the Admissions Decision Report¹ and report by the Chronicle of Higher Education on the Dynamics of Demonstrated Interest², a total of 50.2% of all colleges consider Demonstrated Interest of Moderate Importance (29.7%) to Considerable Importance (20.5%, up from only 7% in 2003) in making admissions decisions. Increasing numbers of colleges are tracking demonstrated interest for their Strategic Management Enrollment (SEM) programs. A 2013 report on the IECA Conference in Philadelphia reported that Demonstrated Interest and Early Applications can result in the equivalent of a 100 point increase on the SATs and an extra .25 increase in a student's GPA³. My research paper will review what Demonstrated Interest is, how it is tracked by colleges, how to find out the level of Demonstrated Interest Importance for any college, and 13 ways a student can demonstrate interest during the college process.

What is "Demonstrated Interest"?

"Demonstrated Interest" is a term used by colleges to describe actions by a student that gauge how much he/she wants to attend their college. Every contact action by a student is tracked by the college to summarize the student expressing to the college "how much I love you". Demonstrated Interest is one of the factors measured in the Common Data Set (Section C7), and can improve a student's chance of acceptance. Demonstrated Interest can be shown at various entry points in the Strategic Enrollment Management Funnel (SEM Funnel) and is tracked using software by colleges. Below is the Noel-Levitz SEM Funnel diagram⁴. Students can show demonstrated interest in the top three sections of the SEM Funnel – Prospects, Inquiries, and Applicants, plus during the waitlist process. The purpose of an effective SEM Funnel is to advance the student from the prospect pool into the subsequent levels towards acceptance and enrollment. In order to remain successful in today's competitive college landscape, colleges need to use new metrics and tracking systems and improve the design of their targeted communications plan to attract the type of students they wish to enroll and accurately gauge which students are likely to accept an admit decision.



Noel-Levitz Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Funnel Diagram

How do Colleges Track Demonstrated Interest?

On June 19, 2013 in the Huffington Post, college enrollment expert and Executive Vice President of Augustana College in Illinois Ken Barnds created a buzz in higher education by blogging details of how college admissions offices spend large sums of money to track student data including demonstrated interest, using sophisticated data-mining software. In addition to purchasing names of students and their data from list providers like the College Board and ACT (at \$.35 per student), pulling a student's financial information off their website's Net Price Calculator, and even looking at the position of colleges listed on a student's FAFSA, colleges also pay a lot of attention to actions showing Demonstrated Interest. Since yield is crucial to the economic success of colleges, all this data gets entered into the college's SEM Funnel to predict which students will ultimately matriculate. Higher education research has proven, statistically, that students who demonstrate the most interest during the college process translate into students who are most likely to enroll at their institution. Sophisticated mathematical formulas in the SEM software track every contact a student makes – or does not make – totals weighted points for each demonstrated interest action, and then a code is assigned to each student which is used for their admissions decision. Often the biggest points go for actions like Facebook "Likes" and tweets about the college.

Mr. Barnds states: "From day one, a student who called, emailed or wrote a letter requesting information may receive more care and attention during the recruitment process. Why? Big data reminds us that the student took the initiative and sought our college out. We say thanks to big data."⁵ (Please see what happened when my student did this under #2 "Request Info" in the list of 13 ways to Demonstrate Interest).

Students need to approach the college process understanding that every interaction with a college – called a "Demonstrated Interest Trail"-- may be tracked and given points towards their admission decision. Even when a student is working on the Common Application and has entered a working list of colleges, any data entered like academics /GPA/standardized test scores, activities, and financial status can be mined and given points by the SEM software. If a student wants to keep this information private, much like their Facebook, they should change their profile so this information cannot be shared. Colleges are always watching and counting!

How can an IEC or student find out how much a college cares about Demonstrated Interest?

The Common Data Set (CDS), a common form which most colleges complete each year, is a compilation of data which includes, among other information, admissions and enrollment data from the college. Section C7 - "Relative Importance of Common Academic and Non-Academic Admission Criteria" lists factors important in the freshman admission decision, including "Level of Applicant's Interest". Different colleges have different relative importance of factors.

Following are three different C7 tables, which each demonstrate a different priority of importance in Demonstrated Interest. The first is Syracuse University's Table of Importance Factors where "Level of Applicant's Interest" (Demonstrated Interest) is listed as the most and only "Very Important" Factor in the admissions decision:

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY COMMON DATA SET 2012-2013

C7 Relative importance of each of the following academic and nonacademic factors in first-time, first-year, degree-seeking (freshman) admission decisions.

C7		Very Important	Important	Considered	Not Considered
C7	Academic				
C7	Rigor of secondary school record			X	
C7	Class rank			X	
C7	Academic GPA			X	
C7	Standardized test scores			X	
C7	Application Essay			X	
C7	Recommendation(s)			X	
C7	Nonacademic				
C7	Interview			X	
C7	Extracurricular activities			X	
C7	Talent/ability			X	
C7	Character/personal qualities			X	
C7	First generation			X	
C7	Alumni/ae relation			X	
C7	Geographical residence			X	
C7	State residency				X
C7	Religious affiliation/commitment				X
C7	Racial/ethnic status			X	
C7	Volunteer work			X	
C7	Work experience			X	
C7	Level of applicant's interest	X			

Now, as a contrast let's look at Cornell University's CDS for Section C7. Demonstrated Interest is not a factor at Cornell:

CORNELL UNIVERSITY COMMON DATA SET 2012-

C7 Relative importance of each of the following academic and nonacademic factors in first-time, first-year, degree-seeking (freshman) admission decisions.

C7		Very Important	Important	Considered	Not Considered
C7	Academic				
C7	Rigor of secondary school record	X			
C7	Class rank		X		
C7	Academic GPA	X			
C7	Standardized test scores	X			
C7	Application Essay	X			
C7	Recommendation(s)	X			
C7	Nonacademic				
C7	Interview			X	
C7	Extracurricular activities	X			
C7	Talent/ability	X			
C7	Character/personal qualities	X			
C7	First generation			X	
C7	Alumni/ae relation			X	
C7	Geographical residence			X	
C7	State residency			X	
C7	Religious affiliation/commitment				X
C7	Racial/ethnic status			X	
C7	Volunteer work			X	
C7	Work experience			X	
C7	Level of applicant's interest				X

As a final contrast, here is Connecticut College’s CDS Section C7 – Demonstrated Interest is considered, but is not considered very important.

CONNECTICUT COLLEGE COMMON DATA SET 2012-2013

C7 Relative importance of each of the following academic and nonacademic factors in first-time, first-year, degree-seeking (freshman) admission decisions.

C7		Very Important	Important	Considered	Not Considered
C7	Academic				
C7	Rigor of secondary school record	x			
C7	Class rank	x			
C7	Academic GPA	x			
C7	Standardized test scores			x	
C7	Application Essay		x		
C7	Recommendation(s)		x		
C7	Nonacademic				
C7	Interview		x		
C7	Extracurricular activities		x		
C7	Talent/ability		x		
C7	Character/personal qualities	x			
C7	First generation			x	
C7	Alumni/ae relation			x	
C7	Geographical residence			x	
C7	State residency			x	
C7	Religious affiliation/commitment			x	
C7	Racial/ethnic status		x		
C7	Volunteer work		x		
C7	Work experience		x		
C7	Level of applicant’s interest			x	

In general, the most selective colleges, like the Ivies, do not factor in Demonstrated Interest as they don’t need to since these colleges are so well subscribed by applicants. Many colleges that care a lot about Demonstrated Interest are in the middle range of selectivity rates. Before a student applies to any college, it would be wise for he/she or the IEC to check each school’s CDS to see how important Demonstrated Interest is (search on “Common Data Set ‘College X’” or go to the college’s Institutional Research webpage). When in doubt, it is always advised to demonstrate interest, as it can help, and rarely hurt, unless the applicant efforts become annoying to the admissions department.

13 Ways Students Can Demonstrate Interest (in order of the college process)

1. **Recruitment Material:** Respond early to recruitment mailings and e-mails from colleges to get on mailing lists.
2. **Request Info:** Fill out “Request Info” form on college admissions website to get on mailing lists. (Note: My practicum student did this for Tulane and received an e-mail back the same day saying thank you and his admissions fee would be waived.)
3. **Become “College Literate”:** Research college websites to become literate about specific strengths and signature programs at each school in preparation to talk with college representatives on campus, online or by phone.
4. **College Fairs:** Attend College Fairs, ask questions, and sign up for more info or give the college rep your card.

5. **Contact Local Admissions Rep:** Contact the college's local admissions rep with to start to develop name recognition. Consider setting up a Google e-mail account for college correspondence with your photo attached to put a face to the name.
6. **Social Media:** "Like" the college's Facebook page or other Social Media. Be careful with this if you have a Facebook page with any inappropriate comments in the news feed. Admissions officers can also find you this way.
7. **Campus Visits:** Sign up for and attend campus tours and information sessions. Many colleges pay attention to the efforts that students take to visit their college, especially full pay students. According to The Chronicle of Higher Education, many colleges will not accept students if they have not taken the time to visit their campus if it is within 6 hours of the student's home². Some colleges waive the admissions fee if the student comes for a campus tour. Always try to find out who the local admissions rep is while at a campus visit, and ask for his/her card.
8. **College Interviews:** Interviewing with either an alumni interviewer, and especially an admissions officer, puts your face to the name on your application, and gives you the opportunity to talk about your strengths and how they would fit with the strengths and mission of the school, which you have already researched.
9. **Supplemental Essays:** A targeted supplemental essay showing you understand the strengths and programs of the college to which you are applying and how it fits with your strengths will show admissions that you will be a good match for their school. If you really feel that this college is your first choice, state it clearly in the supplement.
10. **Apply EA or EA, REA or SEA:** Applying Early Decision shows the college that the student believes this is the best fit college for them. Applying Early Action, although non-binding, shows proactivity in the process and interest in the college. Restricted Early Action, an option for colleges like Harvard, Stanford, and Yale, is similar to ED except it is non-binding, but restricts the applicant from applying early to any other private college, so in that way it shows singular focus. Selective Early Action is an option at Tulane (which offers EA and SEA), and lets the student tell the school just how interested they are without the decision being binding. Acceptance rates are usually higher for Early Applications; however, the applicant pool is usually stronger.
11. **Apply Before Any Deadline Date:** Instead of waiting until the deadline date to submit an application, submitting an early Rolling Admissions application or any other type of EA/ED/RD application in the weeks before the deadline gives some admissions offices a chance to consider your application first and make a decision before the rush of other applications. As a Cornell admissions rep stated this year, "Better to be the #2 tuba player considered than the #20 tuba player."
12. **Thank You notes or e-mails:** If an Admissions Officer or Alumni Interviewer has either interviewed you or been of help in answering questions, students should at the very least send a thank you e-mail and preferably a hand-written and mailed note. Since hand-written notes are a dying tradition, this will especially make the student stand out for the effort they took. Plus, it is the polite thing to do!
13. **Waitlist:** If a student is waitlisted and interested in attending a college, he/she should mail their waitlist reply card ASAP and discuss with their high school counselor and IEC the best way to communicate with the college during the waitlist period. Generally, I recommend a student write a note to the school including any new information that would show positive progress and reiterate interest, and then follow up with another short note about a month later. Even if the student does not get off the waitlist, they can look back on the process and know that they did everything in their power to communicate their interest.

Final Recommendations

When in doubt, students should always demonstrate interest in as many appropriate ways possible, as most colleges will track their interest and give them points in the SEM Funnel. Students should also be very aware about how colleges track their information, and protect their information if desired. Treat each college as if it is your first choice. For students that have a hard time executing this concept, I suggest that they think of each college as a friend on their birthday: that person may not be your very best friend, but on that day, you focus on your friend and reflect on their special and unique qualities. When touring a campus, interviewing, or writing a supplement for a college, students should “celebrate” that school. Often, strongly tracked demonstrated interest will help an admissions committee feel confident about an admit decision, or separate a student from the pack of applicants who have similar profiles.

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