

Will the college accept or deny your application: Risk Management

Criteria for admission

Colleges and universities have objective criteria for admission. These include the student's grade point average, SAT or ACT scores, and the rigor of the student's curriculum (e.g., how many AP classes and honors classes are on the transcript and what kind of grades the student earned in these classes as well as in all classes in general). Top tier colleges (all Ivy League schools as well as those schools having similar criteria of admissions) also look for local, state, national and international awards or honors earned by students, and given by professional or academic institutions. Colleges also consider substantial talent, documented by relevant activities, membership in clubs or organizations, and performances or art shows (in the case of the visual and performing arts). Auditions or portfolio submissions are frequently part of the application process for the visual and performing arts. Athletic talent can be important only if the coach at the college is directly supporting the student's application to the admissions committee.

Reach, target, and likely categories

The following model works to increase chances of admission and to make sure students have choices in the college admission process. Schools can be thought of in three main categories: reach; target; and likely. A fourth category may be included in some cases: unlikely. A "reach" school is one we define that will offer no more than a 30 percent chance of admission. "Target" schools are those that will offer between a 30 to 60 percent chance of admission; "likely" schools will offer between a 60 to 100 percent chance of admission. Of course, these categories will be unique to each student, as they are determined by the student's GPA and SAT (or ACT) scores

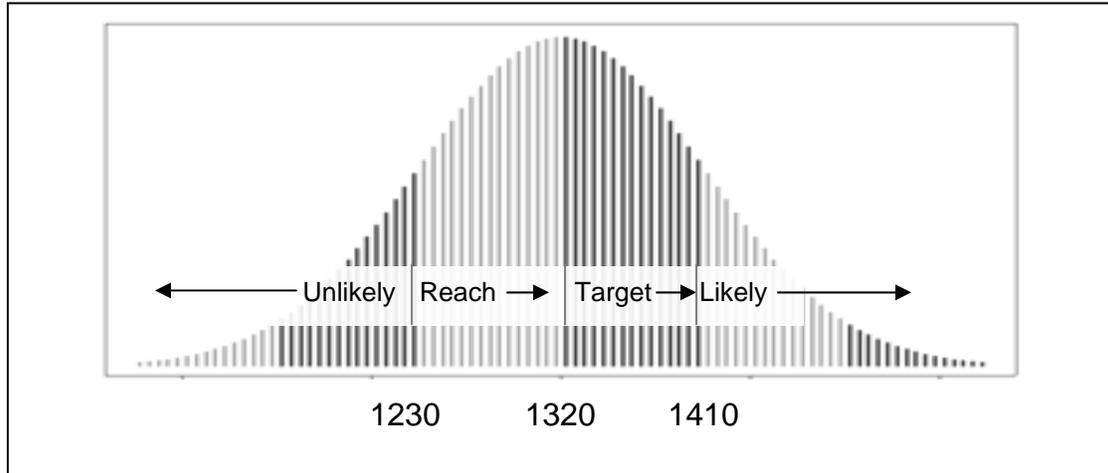
Determining your chances

We will use a Hypothetical University in the following example to help clarify how to determine these categories for a specific school. HU publishes a middle 50 percent range for admitted students' SAT scores (they use the first two components, critical reading and math, and add them). This range is 1230-1410 for the incoming class of 2005. This means that the majority of students have this range. There are a few outliers both below and above, but they are not significant to determine the student's chances (remember that the HU only accepts 48 percent of all applications). For a student who applies with a combined SAT score (do not include the writing portion) *below* HU's lowest number (1230), the application is "unlikely." This is self explanatory. For a student whose score lies between the low end of the range to the middle (1230-1320), this school is a "reach." For a student whose score lies between the middle of the range to the top (1320-1410), this school is a "target." If the student's score is above the high range (1410) this school is a "likely" admission. The following diagram will help visualize these categories:



Definition of “Reach,” “Target,” and “Likely” admission possibilities Example: Hypothetical University

SAT critical reading + math range = 1230 to 1410



If the student has an SAT combined score of 1420, this is a likely school. For the students whose scores are 1340, this is a target school. For the student whose scores are 1280, this is a reach school. For the student whose scores are 1200, this is an unlikely school. To increase chances of admission and to manage risk so that students will have at least one college admission, it is essential that students apply to all three categories of colleges. They should work closely with their counselor and research schools on their own to create a list that includes “likely,” “target,” and “reach” schools. For example, if a student with a combined SAT score of 1240 only applies to the HU, there will be an unlikely chance for admission. Managing this risk means that this student should apply to other schools whose range is between 1100 to 1200 (for likely admissions) and 1150-1300 (for target admissions).

Students should neither neglect their “likely” schools, nor their “reach” schools. A general guide would be to apply to three schools from each category, making nine total college applications. There is nothing wrong with applying to more schools, as long as at least three are “likely” schools. The anxiety of college admission can be significantly ameliorated by following this important model.