

ChatGPT and the College Admissions Process

By Haley Phillips

With the rise in functionality of A.I chatbots such as ChatGPT comes an increase in anxiety over what tasks will be taken over by this technology. That leads into the other big debate over the ethics of using an A.I chatbot. Since ChatGPT has the ability to write essays, people have begun to worry about how this will impact college admissions. Despite the debate surrounding whether to allow for A.I tools, such as ChatGPT, to be used in the college admission process, it appears that ChatGPT does not yet have the ability to out-perform what can be done by humans.

People in the college admission business have opposing views on whether ChatGPT should be allowed for writing applications. On one side, many argue that it is not right to use ChatGPT and are worried about what this technology means for the future of college admissions. For example, [\(Singer, 2023\)](#) talked to many different admissions officials and also listened to podcasts. One podcast is called "Inside the Yale Admissions Office" and they had an episode on A.I where they argued that using these tools is a form of plagiarism and if students submit essays which were written by chatbots, that would "violate the university's admissions policy." They also argued that since these essays were supposed to emphasize each person's uniqueness, A.I would not be able to replicate the personal aspect of the essay. Furthermore, the Dean of admissions at Dartmouth is saddened by the potential use of A.I because she does not like how the one part of the application which is supposed to show the individuality of the student can now be written by someone other than them [\(Singer, 2023b\)](#). Teachers are also worried because they see the process of writing essays for college as a point where students can find their "writing voice" and these A.I tools will take that learning away from them [\(Singer, 2023a\)](#). I think those are all great points, but one opinion which really emphasizes the negative effects of ChatGPT on college applications is from a high school senior in Atlanta. He said, "I feel a little more pressure to create, like, this super unique, interesting topic because a basic one these days could just be generated by ChatGPT [\(Singer, 2023a\)](#)". The use of ChatGPT is creating a new standard for college essays.

On the other hand, many see that this technology can benefit students and the admission process. For instance, an admission officer from Virginia Tech argued that ChatGPT can actually be helpful because it can equalize the playing field by,

as she said, "simplifying this complex process" of brainstorming and writing a personal essay ([Singer, 2023b](#)). Not only does this tool simplify the process, but other teachers see the positive in the use of A.I tools because they point out how wealthier students usually use additional resources to complete their applications such as paid writing coaches. They believe that tools such as ChatGPT can act as those resources wealthier students have already tapped into and therefore expand access to more students ([Singer, 2023a](#)). Moreover, ([Singer, 2023b](#)) interviewed a college outreach coordinator in Atlanta who brought up the point that these A.I tools could be a resource for students to find schools that meet certain criteria as well as condensing their extracurricular activities list. Lastly, Rick Clark (executive director of undergraduate admission at Georgia Tech) summarized the positive attributes of ChatGPT when he said, "It's free, it's accessible, and it's helpful. It's progress toward equity" ([Singer, 2023a](#)).

Despite all of these back and forth views, as of September, not many universities have created policies surrounding A.I tools for their application process. Georgia Tech tried to find an equilibrium between banning and allowing applicants to use A.I tools by saying that students in high school should use the tools as a way to "brainstorm, refine, and edit" their ideas, but to not use them to fully write their essays ([Singer, 2023a](#)).

Another important aspect of the conversation around ChatGPT and the college admission process is looking at the capabilities of the technology. ([Giunti et al., 2023](#)) wanted to look at how two versions of ChatGPT (ChatGPT-3.5 and 4.0) do on admission tests. The tests were the SAT (used for college admission in the U.S), the BMAT (used for admission to biomedical programs) and the IMSAT (used for admission to medical school in Italy). They used practice tests on College Board for the SAT, but for the BMAT and IMSAT they chose past tests that were published. ([Giunti et al., 2023](#)) found that on all of the tests, ChatGPT-4 did better than ChatGPT-3.5 overall. Interestingly, the two versions of the chatbot did better in the Reading and Writing section than the Math section in the SAT test. For the IMSAT test, the two versions did best in the General knowledge area, but the worst in Logical Reasoning and in the middle were the subject areas on science. For the BMAT tests, both versions did the best in Understanding argument-Critical thinking area. Version 3.5 did the worst in Biology and version 4.0 did the worst in Mathematics. The authors underscored how all of the areas that ChatGPT did the best in relate to language and how to use it in general, while the areas in which they performed poorly relate to specialized skills/knowledge ([Giunti et al., 2023](#)).

It is clear that ChatGPT still has some shortcomings. However, Sanibel Chai, a college essay tutor, is now nervous that ChatGPT is going to take over his job

(Chai, 2023). In order to test out what it is capable of, he paid for access to version 4.0 which allows for more creativity. At first, after he fed in the original prompt and provided some feedback, he was nervous by how ChatGPT could accomplish in minutes what would take hours of his help to revise a student's essay. Then when he went back to really look at the essay, he realized that the writing it produced was too general and contrived for it to pass as a unique and successful college admission essay. Furthermore Chai writes, "ChatGPT failed hardest at the most important part of the college essay: self-reflection" (Chai, 2023). Therefore, right now he believes A.I is not the fix for college essays.

(Rim, 2023) also wanted to test out how well ChatGPT can write a personal essay for college admissions. Overall, Rim found that ChatGPT makes the same mistakes that high school students frequently make. The first mistake is that it doesn't have the necessary aspects of storytelling and instead it tells rather than shows the reflections made by the fake applicant. The second mistake that the essay made was that it seemed vague and repeated ideas to eat up the word count. The third mistake was that the essay did not demonstrate any insightful reflections on who the student is. The fourth mistake was that the essay lacked an anecdotal hook to contextualize the applicant's thoughts. Lastly, the fifth mistake the essay made was that it sounded like any student could have written it instead of it having a distinct voice. Therefore overall, "ChatGPT did not produce a stand-out essay" (Rim, 2023). Furthermore, Khan Academy made their own A.I chatbot called Khanmigo and they added a feature to help students with brainstorming college admissions essays. (Singer, 2023b) argues that this might be helpful for students who can't pick an essay topic. Overall concludes that A.I tools can't fully replace humans who help with the college admission process, but it can provide helpful feedback. Jim Jump provides a slightly different perspective on the capabilities of ChatGPT. He organized a talk on ChatGPT and brought in David Mabe who is the director of college counseling at Woodberry Forest School. David noted how admissions offices can use ChatGPT's summarizing skills and use it to condense information from applicants. This though, as Jump notes, make universities try to increase the number of applicants while not increasing the staff, putting even more on their plate than they already have (Jump, 2023). Jump also brought up the point that as ChatGPT gets more advanced, there are fewer free versions and this might "increase the digital divide, hurting students and counselors without access" (Jump, 2023).

Overall, ChatGPT's impact on the college admission process is still fairly new. It will be interesting to see after this round of applications what information that brings to light.

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