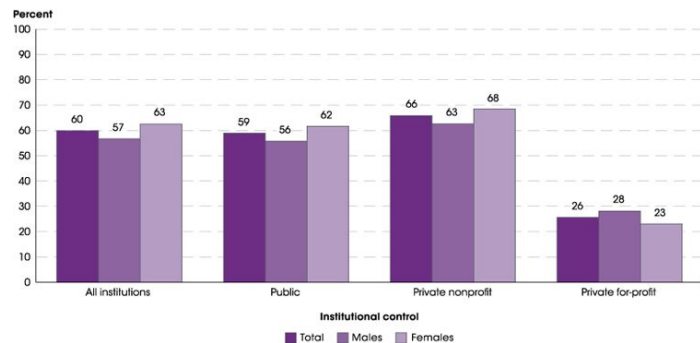


Building or Designing a Tool to Improve High School Student College Application Portfolios

Robert Reynolds

As I explored more deeply in the previous paper [for Assignment 2](#) the decision of where to go to college can have an immense impact on student success. This decision, though, is unfortunately made through an uninformed lense for many students, which has caused graduation rates to stagnate around 60% for 4-year colleges (see figure).



Much of the research to date has been done on the *why* of student dropout, and the one area I want to focus on is the idea of college undermatching¹, which is where a student goes to a school that is academically or culturally not a good fit for them. This is a main reason for only 81% of students returning for their sophomore year at the same school².

From a high level my goal will be to look at the way high school students select colleges they apply to today, and either build or design a tool to help simplify and expand that process.

Anecdotally, I have three unique experiences to share to explain how this impacts students and their futures. As the writing for assignment 3 was to be more informal, I hope these anecdotes will help explain why I am interested in this topic.

First, me - I was lucky to attend a well regarded private school for high school, and when I began my college search there were recruiters from around the country that would visit regularly and give ideas for schools that were in my range academically and extracurricularly, making it easy for me to create a portfolio of schools that I wanted to explore and potentially apply to. From there, I found a pretty good fit academically and great fit culturally after looking at all the schools.

¹ Jonathan I. Smith, Matea Pender, and Jessica S. Howell, "The Full Extent of Academic Undermatch," *Economics of Education Review*, 32: 247-261, 2013

² (n.d.). The Condition of Education - Postsecondary Education - Programs Retrieved June 1, 2018, from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_ctr.asp

Second, my now wife - she attended a public school in a rural town, and while she was 2nd in her class with awards and fantastic extracurriculars, her adviser gave her the advice that the schools she was looking at were out of her reach and that she should focus on going to the state school. While the state school is by no means bad academically, this story makes me realize that many kids nationwide are probably given the same advice. Luckily, my wife did not take the advice and applied to multiple schools nationwide, getting accepted to all but one (thankfully, because it was her first choice and the school we both went to was her second!).

And the third anecdote is a friend who works as an admissions officer in a college in New England. This person is tasked with helping students find out if they are a good fit for the school, and if the school is a good fit for them. A main part of their job is knowing schools, rankings, and admissions criteria to help make these decisions easier. This friend was unaware that Swarthmore and Haverford were not only great schools academically, but that they were schools in general.

Hearing my wife's experience, and seeing the level of knowledge a college admissions officer has about schools even just a few hours away, made me realize that my experience was by far not the norm. Most kids do not get recruiters nationwide coming up to talk about their schools or conferences, most kids do not have people that are knowledgeable about schools all over and where they might get in. This leads to, frankly, a limited scope for where that student could go.

As college tuition keeps rising, this decision of *where* to go, or even if you should go, becomes much more important.

The idea for my tool is simple - a way to connect students to colleges that may be a good fit. If you are a student, you can plug in your GPA, test scores, and awards and see what schools are potential fits for you. On the flip side, schools can actively recruit students that may be good fits for them. This enables both schools and students to actively increase their portfolio, getting better matches in the end.

One component of this tool that will be incredibly important is video. The inability to travel is a large barrier for many students nationwide. Not many people can afford to drive or fly all over to see multiple schools, so students will generally go local or in the same geographical area they are from. While this is fine, it may be contributing to the issue of poor fit. By using video, we can have virtual tours, virtual admissions interviews, all without students leaving their house. Admissions officers can do more interviews

every day, leading to finding better candidates. On top of that, as online classes become more prevalent, there is no need for students to visit the school at all.

My tool will focus on two things - creating better ways to matching schools and students, and helping improve the communication between those matches.

NOTE: One such tool that I will be modeling around is sportsrecruits.com. If you check out that site and it interests you, I will be looking to create or design something similar that focuses on all students, not just athletes.