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FEATURES

The Swarm of the Super-Applicants

Ivy League mania has created a generation of high-school kids so overqualified it's a wonder they even need college. But will they get in?

By Marisa Meltzer

How are these for alarming statistics: With more students than ever applying to college—a full 1.2 million more last year than in 2000—not even flawless SAT scores can open doors at Harvard, which rejects one in four applicants with a perfect 2400. Is your kid ranked first in his class? So are some 36,000 others: Last year, Penn and Duke rejected about 60 percent of the valedictorians who applied. If you know anyone in high school (or preschool) you're already aware that the annihilative admissions climate has spawned a new hyperspecies: the college super-applicant. But do so many hours spent filling in practice circles or hunching over petri dishes really work? We recruited some of the area's most credentialed college hopefuls, who gamely volunteered to have their grade-point averages, standardized test scores, after-school pursuits, and academic awards reviewed by Katherine Cohen, CEO and founder of IvyWise, a school-admissions consulting company. Cohen assessed their strengths and weaknesses and made a guess where each student will get in. She stresses, however, that this is only a partial picture; she'd need to see transcripts, essays, AP course load, and written recommendations to make an accurate evaluation. Disclaimer: The following material may not be suitable for anxiety-prone high-school students.



Courtney Sachs

Convent of the Sacred Heart, Manhattan

GPA: 97

SAT: 2340 (800 reading, 770 math, 770 writing)

AP scores: English lit (5), French language (5), and U.S. history (5)

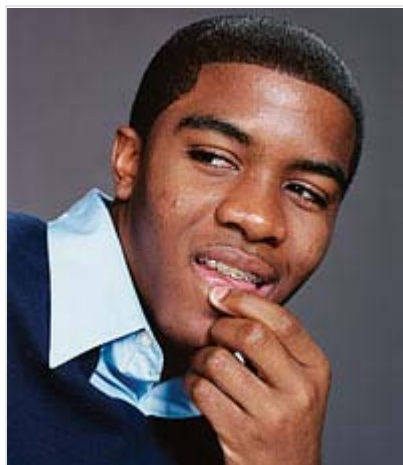
Academic honors: Bausch & Lomb Science Award, given to one junior per participating school. Ranked in the U.S. top 10 in the National French Contest. Wellesley Book Award for academic leadership, given to one junior per participating school. Ranked in the top 30 of the Catholic School Mathematics League.

Extracurricular activities: Stem-cell researcher at New York-Presbyterian's Columbia University Medical Center, approximately twenty hours per week. Wrote a research paper on the in vivo and in vitro growth of osteoblasts derived from fat stem cells. Has begun research on the repair of rat cranial defects using osteocytes differentiated from fat-derived stem cells. Editor-in-chief of the yearbook. As a

senior leader of Helping Hearts (the school philanthropic group), organized a fashion show to raise money to build a well in a village in India. Volunteers at Lenox Hill Hospital and Habitat for Humanity. Tutors disadvantaged students. Member, Model U.N.

Applying to: Princeton (early), Harvard, Yale, Brown, University of Pennsylvania, Cornell, Columbia, University of Chicago, Stanford, and Duke.

Her chances: “The fact that she has been doing independent research since ninth grade shows commitment to a single cause or passion, which the most selective colleges like to see. She is academically qualified to attend any college, but it is also important that she is not simply locked away in a lab all year; she is involved in her high school as editor-in-chief of the yearbook. I believe she has a strong chance of getting into Princeton early.”



Paul White

Urban Assembly School for Careers in Sports, the Bronx

GPA: 92

SAT: 1930 (710 reading, 650 math, 570 writing)

AP scores: Statistics (4), U.S. government (4), psychology (5)

Academic honors: Student of the Year (2004), for achieving highest GPA in his grade.

Extracurricular activities: One of 60 students (chosen out of 400) to participate in Leadership Enterprise for a Diverse America (leda), a fourteen-month academic program that includes Wednesday-evening and Saturday classes during the school year and summer sessions at Columbia. Works fifteen hours a week at leda to supplement his family's income. Research assistant for a Ph.D. candidate in the government department at Harvard. Member, Model U.N. Wrote application essay about his brother's imprisonment at Rikers Island.

Sports: Linebacker on high-school football team (grades 9 to 11).

Applying to: University of Pennsylvania (early), Amherst, Boston College, Bowdoin, Brown, Case Western Reserve, Cornell, Davidson, Emory, Georgetown, Morehouse, University of Virginia, and Wesleyan.

His chances: “His SAT score looks mediocre for Penn—especially his writing score—but it still puts him in the right range for a minority, socioeconomically disadvantaged student. He has a shot at Penn, which likes kids who put their ideas into action, and he seems to do that. When you consider the huge time commitment leda classes take, the fact that he is still actively involved in his high-school community shows superb time-management skills.”



Vadim Shteyler

Brooklyn Technical High School

GPA: 94.4

SAT: 1960 (650 reading, 750 math, 560 writing)

AP scores: World history (4), biology (5)

Academic honors: National Honor Society.

Extracurricular activities: Volunteers at a suny Downstate Medical Center lab, running experiments on pancreatic carcinoma. Wrote research papers on the affects of p53-derived peptide on pancreatic-cancer-cell growth, submitted to the American Cancer

Society and American Association for Cancer Research. Involved in student government since freshman year. One of three student-government members to teach a leadership class. Member, the Brain Bee Club, an array of other clubs.

Sports: Member, Ping-Pong club (takes outside lessons as well).

Applying to: Yale, Cornell, Columbia, cuny Honors College, suny–Binghamton, B.A.-M.D. programs at Brooklyn College and suny–Stony Brook.

His chances: “Yale, Cornell and Columbia might be a stretch, but he definitely has a shot at the others. His SAT score is unbalanced, but his work with pancreatic carcinoma is very impressive, his GPA is strong, and he’s a leader at school. However, he seems to be a serial joiner. A red flag is the Ping-Pong club, given the fact that he has little community service.”



Jeremy Sklaroff

Edgemont High School, Scarsdale, New York

GPA: Doesn’t have one because some of his classes aren’t graded.

SAT: 2200 (760 reading, 700 math, 740 writing)

AP scores: Computer science A (4), biology (5)

Academic honors: One of twelve students a year selected for Edgemont’s alternative school within a school (no tests or written evaluations). Ranked nationally in the National Forensic League at the mid-level—Special Distinction. Cornell Book Award for academic achievement (2006), given to one junior per participating school.

Extracurricular activities: Member, jazz band and wind ensemble for four years. Interned at New York Civil Liberties Union and Autonomedia.

Applying to: Columbia (early), Tufts, Brown, Washington University in St. Louis, NYU, Wesleyan, and University of Chicago.

His chances: “As part of the alternative school, he is already distinguished from his peers. His SAT scores are high except for math. His main activity is debate, and his rank is distinguished, but he is not at the top level. I think he has a chance of getting into Columbia, but it will probably depend on the other debate applicants he is competing with and the type of debate he wants to pursue.”



Matthew Pincus

Dwight-Englewood School, Englewood, New Jersey

GPA: 3.93

SAT: 2270 (750 reading, 720 math, 800 writing)

AP scores: Calculus B/C (5), European history (5), Latin lit (5)

Academic honors: One of 22 students nationwide to achieve a perfect score on the National Latin Exam three years in a row. One of 385 students nationwide to win four gold medals for the written portion of the exam. Winner of his school’s Gaudeamus Latin Award (2006), given to one student a year for “the most exuberance in the study of Latin.”

Extracurricular activities: Serves as student body president. Undertaking an

independent study of Attic Greek—not for credit. Co-president of jazz-rock ensemble (plays guitar). Member, varsity debate team. Worked as a tutor after school and during the summers.

Sports: Cross-country and track (grades 9 to 12). Co-captain of varsity cross-country team. Named the team's Most Valuable Male Runner (2006).

Applying to: Williams (early), Georgetown, Wesleyan, Swarthmore, Middlebury, and Amherst.

His chances: "What looks outstanding is his excellence in Latin, and I like the fact that he is doing an independent study of Greek. This shows he is a self-starter and autodidactic. Plus he is a leader at school. Even more impressive, he manages this workload and the responsibilities of student-government president with employment. I think he has a good chance of getting into Williams."



Allie Ossa

The Mary Louis Academy, Jamaica Estates

GPA: 4.57

SAT: 2140 (700 reading, 690 math, 750 writing)

AP score: U.S. history (5)

Academic honors: Won a trip to Italy from New York's Italian Heritage and Culture Month Committee for her essay on Amerigo Vespucci. Honorable mention from American Association of Teachers of Italian for score on nationwide Italian exam. One of about 50 tri-state students selected for the American Chemical Society's Award for Excellence in High School Chemistry. School Leadership Award for her work with the dance team. National Hispanic Recognition Program Scholar for scoring in top 3 percent of Hispanic students nationwide on the PSAT. Contender for valedictorian. Expects to be

the first in her family to attend college.

Sports: Third-degree black belt in karate. One of 40 members of the USA Junior National Team for karate. Captain of the school dance team.

Applying to: Yale (early), MIT, Columbia, Harvard, Caltech, and Northeastern.

Her chances: "Academically, she is outstanding as a contender for valedictorian. Given her background, her scholastic achievements and commitment to karate look all the more impressive. I think her college list is problematic because it is not balanced; there is only one safety school: Northeastern. But I think she may have a shot at getting into Yale early depending on what she wants to pursue academically."



Harmain Khan

Staten Island Technical High School

GPA: 98.41

SAT: 1920 (660 reading, 600 math, 660 writing)

AP scores: World history (4), English language (4)

Academic honors: His paper "Tracing Early Hominid Migration in India: ESR Dating at Hathnora and Devni-Khadri" won the First Place Grand Award at the Intel Student Research Contest, first place for the Geological Society of America, second place for the American Geological Institute, and third place for Sigma Xi (2006). New York City

Science and Engineering Fair Grand Prize Winner (2006). NAACP Afro-Academic, Cultural, Technological and Scientific Olympics Gold Medalist for Drama and Chemistry; Bronze Medalist for Oratory (2006).

Extracurricular activities: Established a date range for India's only known *Homo erectus* cranium and developed a method for dating crocodile teeth. Presented his paper "Developing ESR Dating for Crocodylian Teeth: Stability, Interference Signal Resolution and Applications to Geoarchaeology" at the conference of the Geological Society of America. Captain of the city's top team in the Envirothon, a national environmental-science competition.

Sports: Has run for the past four years on his school's cross-country team, currently in first place in the Public Schools Athletic League.

Applying to: Harvard (early), Princeton, Yale, Dartmouth, and Williams.

His chances: "He developed a method for dating crocodile teeth. How many people can say that on an application? He also has participated in his school community by running all four years. If Harvard is looking for a scientist with his particular skills, it will probably admit him despite his scores."



Liming Luo

Hunter College High School, Manhattan

GPA: 97.2

SAT: 2400 (800 reading, 800 math, 800 writing)

AP scores: Chemistry (5), U.S. history (5)

Academic honors: Vice-president and co-founder of her school's chapter of Mu Alpha Theta (a national math honors society). Scored 122.5 (fewer than 5 percent of all students score over 100) on the American Mathematics Contest 12, a national math competition.

Extracurricular activities: Member, Hunter's math A-Team, ranked second in New York City. Published "The Mathematics of Tic Tac Toe" in Hunter's math magazine, *Radicals*. Co-champion at the 2005 Vassar Invitational Forensics Tournament

(approximately 70 schools entered). Volunteered at a Chinese prep school teaching math to eighth-graders for one summer. Writes sci-fi and fantasy in her spare time.

Applying to: MIT (early), Harvard, Harvey Mudd, Columbia, Stanford, suny-Stony Brook, Cornell, and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

Her chances: "Her perfect SAT score is truly outstanding but not a free ticket. She is applying to many technical colleges, so she will be competing against a lot of other high-achieving math/science kids (and a lot of other Asian students in particular). While she may be admitted to MIT early, I am not convinced she's a shoo-in—I'd want to see more evidence that she's giving back to the community."



Diana Marin

The Hewitt School, Manhattan

GPA: 3.9

SAT: 2060 (690 reading, 620 math, 750 writing)

AP scores: U.S. history (4), biology (5)

Academic honors: National Hispanic Recognition Program Scholar for scoring in top 3 percent of Hispanic students nationwide on the PSAT. Wellesley Book Award for

academic leadership, given to one junior per participating school. Performing Arts Award, given to one junior at Hewitt.

Extracurricular activities: Founder and president of the Gay-Straight Alliance and co-founder of zap, the Zine Advocacy Project. Editor-in-chief of the newspaper and yearbook. On the Prep for Prep admissions committee. Interned at Lehman Brothers. Member of Students of Color Club, Earth Committee, and Chamber Choir.

Sports: Varsity gymnastics team (grades 8 to 11). Teaches gymnastics at the lower school.

Applying to: Harvard (early), Beloit College, Brown, Bryn Mawr, University of Chicago, Georgetown, Grinnell, Haverford, MIT, Pitzer, Scripps, and Swarthmore.

Her chances: "She is a real pioneer and self-starter. I tell my students that if you can't find it, found it! I also like the fact that she is a proponent for diversity and combines her own interest in gymnastics with a volunteer opportunity. She's not doing random community service to collect hours. There is one red flag, which is that she stopped gymnastics this year. Apparently, her school dropped the program; this should be footnoted on her résumé so she does not appear to be a quitter. She has a shot at Harvard depending upon what she wants to pursue; she's in the range of their typical applicants."



Megan Popkin

Marymount School, Manhattan

GPA: 4.3

SAT: 2230 (730 reading, 700 math, 800 writing)

AP scores: European history (5), U.S. history (5)

Academic honors: Best Feature Article Award at Columbia University's Journalism Workshop (2004 and 2005). Represented school at writing competition sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English. Ranked in the 95th percentile for the eleventh grade in the National French Contest. National Honor Society.

Extracurricular activities: Arts and Leisure co-editor of the newspaper and contributor to the literary magazine. Plays drums in the FMs, a band that includes her sister and brother. Percussionist for Marymount Singers. Works for the admissions office and at her parents' law office. Gave speeches about the black-footed penguin as a docent at the New York Aquarium. Volunteers at a soup kitchen. Spokesperson for Make-A-Wish Foundation after her cancer diagnosis the summer before freshman year. Designed her own physical-therapy plan after treatment left her with acute neuropathy in both legs.


Sports: Starter on the varsity field-hockey team. Played varsity softball and junior-varsity basketball.

Applying to: Brown (early), Harvard, Yale, University of Pennsylvania, Williams, Amherst, Haverford, Stanford, Pomona, Wesleyan, University of Chicago, Trinity College, Georgetown, and University of Virginia.

Her chances: "I love the fact that she plays in a band with her siblings. Maintaining a 4.3 GPA in high school must have been tough given what she went through. This is a girl who has overcome serious obstacles and setbacks and still excelled in high school. She also gave back to Make-A-Wish by becoming a spokesperson; her generosity of spirit is evident. Her story is compelling, and I think she has a shot at getting into Brown early decision."

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