



I was in love with the idea of being in New York City, but that's where my compatibility with Columbia ended. It was my first choice for all the wrong reasons.

I felt I had a decent chance of getting into a prestigious college. But I was really nervous about applying and became super obsessive about every detail of my applications. I drove everyone—including myself—crazy.

Drawn to NYC and Columbia

Since my grades and background were strong, I focused only on highly selective, big-name schools. I also applied to a few colleges in Europe as my back-ups. (Because I was born overseas, I have an EU passport.) My first choice was Columbia College at Columbia University. Even though its Core Curriculum and campus weren't really of interest to me, I was very attracted to the idea of living in New York City. I thought the rest of it would grow on me eventually.

Hometown: Winter Haven, FL
High School: Private
GPA: 4.0
SAT: 2180
Major: Undeclared
Goal: Prepare for an international career in law or business.

The agony of deferrals, and deciding

After I received my early decision deferral from Columbia, I waited in limbo for months until I got my official rejection—which felt almost liberating.

In the end, I was also rejected from Stanford and Princeton, and waitlisted at Yale. But the great news was that I was accepted to U-Chicago, Dartmouth, Cornell, Duke, and Brown! Strangely, however, there was no jumping up and down and calling my extended family and friends. I did not want to get overly excited about any one acceptance, fearing that it would affect my decision-making process. I wanted to make sure that I would be making the right decision. It took me three weeks to decide.

College	Status
Brown University	Attending
Columbia College at Columbia University (ED)	Denied
Cornell University	Accepted
Dartmouth College	Accepted
Duke University	Accepted
Princeton University	Denied
Stanford University	Denied
University of Chicago	Accepted
Yale University	Waitlisted

Prestige takes a back seat

From the beginning, I really liked Brown's open curriculum. It was the opposite of Columbia's Core Curriculum, which felt too defined. At Brown, I could be the director of my own education. None of the other colleges on my list let you do that. And this was very appealing, since I'm not certain of my major.

At first, I thought I should go to U-Chicago or Cornell because they are better known worldwide, and I want an international career in business or law. Then I

Freshman Year Update

My first day, I felt slightly lost, with so many opportunities and so much more control over my time. There were distractions everywhere, and no matter what I was doing, I felt

realized that the acclaim for these schools is from their research and graduate schools. They don't necessarily have better undergraduate programs. So it came down to how I felt about the school. And I felt Brown's curriculum and location in the Northeast was a better fit for me.

My ups and downs

I was so stressed out during the entire process! If I got rejections, I felt I'd be letting people down—and they would no longer see me as special or smart. So I was super obsessive about every detail of my applications. I think my Common App essay went through 15 rewrites! Then things got worse. I discovered on Dartmouth's website—one week before its application was due—that a letter from a peer was "highly recommended." This was stated nowhere on the Common App! After that, I constantly worried that I would forget something, or miss requirements I didn't know about.

The highlight of the entire process was when I got to take a week off in the fall of my senior year and go on a trip to visit schools with my father. I got to spend some quality time with my dad, which felt extremely special. We had all kinds of conversations and kind of bonded over the whole experience.

What I learned

I was nervous about applying to these prestigious colleges. But what calmed me down was an overnight visit I took to Columbia. I got to hang out in the dorms with a lot of the students. I was nervous about meeting them—these top scholars at an Ivy League school. But I came to realize that they're just kids like me.

It was hard when I got deferred, and later rejected, from Columbia. But now I think it was all for the best. Columbia was my first choice for all the wrong reasons. I was in love with the idea of being in New York City, but that's where my compatibility with the school ended. I was trying to force myself to fall in love with things about Columbia that weren't for me. Success in college really is all about fit, and that's something you can't fake.

The money factor

I am getting some funding from private scholarships and some financial aid. My parents are covering the rest.

My advice

Follow instructions. Be sure to double-check all application requirements on the college website. Be as careful and precise as you can with your applications so that you're judged on who you are and not on some silly error.

Finally, make sure you really want to attend any school you're thinking about applying to. Sit down and try to write down your answer to the question "Why do you want to attend X college." If you can't write 250 words that would justify your choice, you are wasting your time and the application fee.

like I was missing out. Once I figured what I wanted to dedicate my time to, I became a lot happier.

Having a roommate definitely requires compromise. My roommate and I are very different and don't get along that well. So I only use the dorm as a place to sleep. But finding friends here is as easy as knocking on your neighbor's door or asking to sit with a group of people in the dining hall. I have found my closest friends in my classes, which are often very small.

Brown has very liberal curriculum requirements, and it's been hard for me to figure out what I want to study. But it's great being surrounded by people who are as enthusiastic about learning as I am.