
Communicating Reassurance to Prospective Applicants in Light of COVID-19: How Our Members are Communicating to Students and Families

College Board members have asked for guidance in communicating reassuring messages to students and families in the midst of the COVID-19 disruption. The examples provided below show how some institutions are providing clear and reassuring information to students. While they take a variety of approaches, they all seek to calm and reassure students. Many emphasize their commitment to evaluating applications in context, and stress that no applicant will be harmed by impacts they could not control.

Brown University (RI):

With notifications on regular admissions decisions approaching in the coming weeks, all applicants for admission should be assured that they will not be penalized in the admissions process for circumstances outside of their control. Brown will give full consideration to all applicants based on materials received.

Duke University (NC):

We are committed to giving all applicants a humane and contextual admissions review. As always, applicants will not be penalized for any situations beyond their control, and the admissions committee will give full consideration to all applications using the materials we have received. For students currently dealing with difficulties presented by coronavirus, we hope this reminder will be reassuring.

George Fox University (OR):

Don't stress about transcripts, test scores or final grades right now. We know the situation with your high school is in flux. For now, just know that we will work with you as needed. If you have concerns about the SAT, ACT, or CLT tests, let us know. We feel confident we can find a way forward for you.

Georgia Tech (GA):

Colleges Expect Variance. I don't know how your high school is currently teaching your courses. I DO know it varies widely across our nation and the world. We've heard some schools may only issue pass/fail grades for this spring. Others are saying they plan to simplify their grading scales for this term or may compress certain subjects into summer courses... This should not concern you, or make you fearful that you'll be at a disadvantage. First, everyone is dealing with this unprecedented new reality and continually adjusting to unfamiliar territory. Second, admission folks are used to seeing varying curriculum, grading scales, and delivery methods. They are trained to ask questions and dig deeply into your transcript. Holistic review means they are not putting your GPA into a spreadsheet and multiplying by some quotient. They don't expect uniformity. And given the global impact of Coronavirus, you should expect a lot of grace from colleges in the weeks, months, and year to come.

Harvard University (MA):

We know that there are fewer opportunities to take the SAT or ACT given the cancellations to date. This means that many students may not be able to take these tests more than once. The fact is that there are diminishing returns in taking these tests multiple times, and we hope students will not feel compelled to do so now or in the future. You will not be disadvantaged in any way if you do not submit subject tests. Similarly, you will not be disadvantaged if you are unable to submit AP results. Standardized testing is only one of many factors considered in our admissions process. Please refer to our application requirements for more information about our testing policies.

Pennsylvania State University (PA):

Penn State wants to help support our future students impacted by the outbreak. We understand that fulfilling all parts of the application process may be difficult at this time, so we will remain flexible and work with students on a case-by-case basis. We continue to encourage students to submit applications and supporting documentation, including test scores (SAT or ACT) whenever possible.

Pomona University (CA):

For juniors, we recognize that junior year is often seen as one of the most important of your high school career, and we understand that you may be undergoing minor and major changes to your schooling. Some schools may be altering their course offerings this semester (and possibly beyond). We plan to be as flexible as possible in adapting to the changes that are coming. We will honor the decisions made by your high school as long as they are official policy. Please review the recommendations on our website as you consider your options for course scheduling. As with all aspects of our admissions process, we take your context into account and will be accommodating if courses are no longer available to you.

Rice University (TX):

During this uncertain and challenging time, and in accordance with our commitment to a holistic review process, our offices will work with students, teachers and counselors to ensure applicants will not be penalized for any situations beyond their control. For applicants currently dealing with difficulties presented by the coronavirus (including school closures, cancelled tests, distance learning, lack of access to school documents or personnel, suppressed results on AP/IB/national exams, or other circumstances), we encourage you to contact the Office of Admission or the Office of Financial Aid. We will be as accommodating as possible within the constraints of the overall admission and financial aid processes.

Stanford University (CA):

We know the coronavirus situation is creating unprecedented challenges for students and families throughout the world. For those of you soon embarking on the college application process, we understand recent developments are adding stress, including exam cancellations and changes in spring semester grading. Please know we are committed to working with you and offering as much flexibility as possible. We want to reassure you that you will not be penalized or at a disadvantage in the review of your application...One of our core values is to practice holistic admission, and we will continue to review all pieces in the application as an integrated whole, in the context of the unprecedented events we are living through now. As the situation unfolds, we will continue to post updates as we have them. We are in this together, and we hope to navigate these difficult times with you and serve as a resource as you begin your college application journey.

Tufts University (MA):

If applicants would like us to consider their exam results as one component of their candidacy, we will do so in a nuanced and contextual way. If students choose not to submit exam results, we will evaluate their candidacy in a nuanced and contextual way without scores. Our holistic, committee-based approach to application review provides us with the flexibility to evaluate academic and extracurricular accomplishments within a student's individual context.

University of Chicago (IL):

The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting so many aspects of life and forcing changes, cancellations, and new policies at all levels of education. Many students and families have written to me and expressed their worries and frustrations, especially those just beginning the college search process. As Dean of Admissions, I want to assure all students and their families that we (and most of my peers at other highly selective institutions) will be understanding and accommodating of these changes. The current crisis will NOT negatively impact how we review your application, and there will still be time once this crisis is over for you to find your future college home. At UChicago, our goal is to assist students with as much flexibility as possible. Given the changing landscape in the admissions area, I hope this additional information about the admissions process will help ease some worry during this difficult time: