

From the Dean of Admissions-Pomona College

We don't send out formal missing items emails or snail-mail until we have almost completely entered information for students but many new data web systems (in many ways, unfortunately) include web portals for students to 'self-service' their question about any missing items. The systems are working but the students are seeking instant gratification to the answer.

When we move toward application deadline times, we post clearly on our site that because the vast majority of materials all arrive on the deadline, it could for regular decision literally take weeks before we receive, print, collate, enter into the system and ultimately file the application materials.

If students and counselors want to cut down on that unfortunately large lag time, they should get materials to us earlier than midnight of deadline day! (I really am not trying to be snide.)

We try to be clear that students and parents need to bear with us and we discourage calls to us or to counselors and teachers until at least a greater period of time has passed. We do that on our website and in the missing item itself. (Not sure if other institutions do the same.)

Do they listen? Probably not. They are anxious. We all know that. But, somewhere between informing and inducing panic there is a logical mid-point. The world is too accustomed to pressing "send" and thinking that everything is instantly complete. At the other end of that "send" is "receive" and we have armies of staff working to assemble the files as rapidly as possible and a great irony of the information age is that instead of receiving printed and complete applications in an envelope, we now have to

1. download them,
2. print them and
3. collate them before we can even get to the filing part.

Multiply this not only by thousands of applications received right on deadline but by the multiple parts of each application. To coin a phrase, "do the math".

Even in colleges geared up for nearly full electronic receipt, this represents a massive transfer of labor from students and teachers and counselors to support staffs at admissions offices. There is no malice or finger pointing intended on either side and we are clearly caught in the struggle between providing too much or too little information in a timely way.

And, frankly, sometimes, sent or not, we just don't have the piece of the application we need to complete the reading. Sometimes things can get lost and it unfortunately gets read as blaming someone else when all we are trying to do is meet our obligation to the student to read her application and provide a decision. Heck, we know sometimes admission decisions which are mailed are never received, too. We just re-send them.

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