

COLLEGE BOUND

Helpful tips for getting into college and the smartest ways to pay for it.

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The Case of the Curious “Like” Letter

*Did you ever hear of a “Like” letter? Did you ever get one?
Here’s what you need to know if one arrives in the mail*

Just when you thought the college admissions process couldn’t get any more complicated comes another twist in the game. It’s called a likely letter or love letter. Colleges and universities send these letters to their strongest candidates, telling them that their applications are impressive.

A like letter is not an offer of admission (further underscored by the fact that it comes in a #10 envelope). Rather, it’s a way for a college to say, “We like you!” and “Don’t forget us as you’re considering other schools.” Implied in the letter is the message that if you don’t mess up (wink, wink) and start flunking all your classes (nudge, nudge), there’s likely to be a spot for you in the class of 2017.

The number of schools sending these letters is relatively small. Many Ivy League schools send likely letters, as well as several elite private colleges. Some universities send one round of likely letters; others send two rounds during the year.

The percentage of students who get these letters is less than 10%. In other words, over 90% of applicants will never receive these letters. So if you do receive one, it’s quite an honor.

Turn the page to see an example of one of these letters. It shows a likely letter from the University of Virginia, received by one of our client students.

I believe the likely letter has its roots in

college athletic departments. Coaches at selective schools wanted a way to stay in front of top recruits and not lose them to a rival school.

If your student receives such a letter, remember two things. First of all, a “Like” or “Love” letter doesn’t guarantee the college or university will accept your student. It’s just likely that it will. So, continue to pursue other options.

Secondly, just because an elite school will accept your son or daughter doesn’t necessarily mean the school is a perfect fit. Be sure you consider all factors, such as the size of the school, the financial aid package, and your student’s interests when weighing offers.

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Spotlight On University of Mary Washington



Location: Fredericksburg, VA

Undergraduates: 4,464

Male/Female: 35%/65%

Acceptance Rate: 75 percent

SAT Math Avg: 555

SAT CR Avg: 586

SAT Writing Avg: 570

ACT Composite: 25

Cost of Attendance: Out of state, \$35,498

Average High School GPA: 3.57

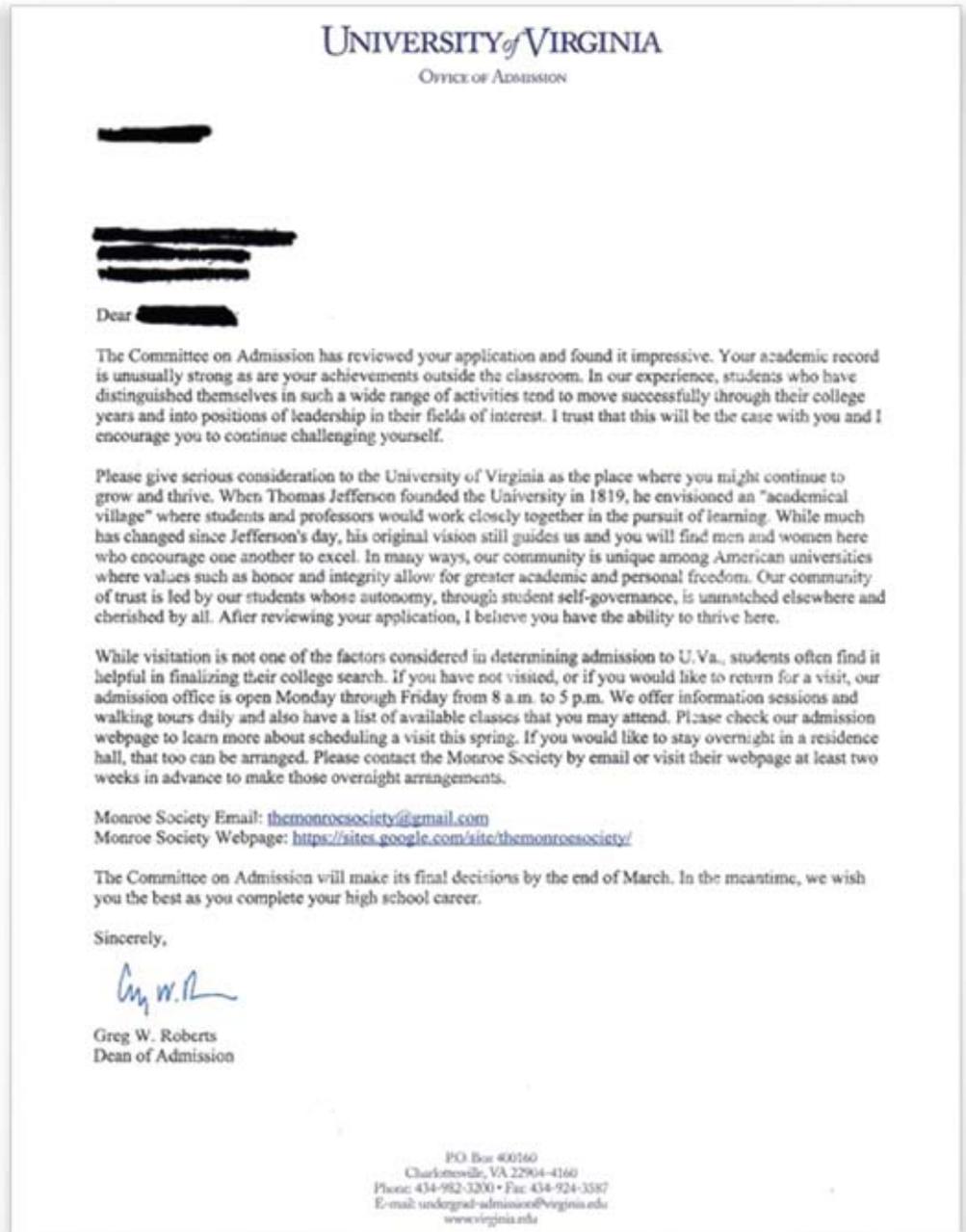
First-year students returning: 84%

Students graduating within 4 years: 62%

Fun Facts:

- A small, public liberal arts college located between Richmond, Virginia and Washington, DC
- The student/faculty ratio is 15:1
- Athletics include crew, badminton, rugby, bowling and fencing
- Ranked as one of the top liberal arts schools in the country by Fiske, Peterson's, Princeton Review and Forbe's
- Student activities include a student run radio station, student newspaper, drama and choral groups
- Majors include English, Biology, Philosophy, History, Visual Arts, and Interdisciplinary Studies
- Famous grads: Jin Wong '97, director of baseball administration with the Kansas City Royals; Sheila Shadmand '95, one of the first female partners of any U.S. firm in the Middle East; Liam Cleaver '92, director of collaborative innovation for IBM.

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This is an example of a "Like" letter from the University of Virginia, received by one of our clients

Students Beware Social Media Traps

If your child is getting ready to go through the application process, you've probably been thinking a lot about GPA, SAT scores and extracurricular activities. But families should also talk about Facebook, Twitter and other social networking sites, and the impact they have on the application and admissions process.

Like it or not, your child's personalized page on Facebook, Twitter or MySpace reflects on him or her, and that's serious business when it comes time to apply to college, or even for a job. Families should sit down and talk about the dos and don'ts of posting, and the consequences should that advice be ignored. Be sure your teenager understands:

- Admissions officers from colleges and universities admit that they may take a look at an applicant's page and postings. Your child needs to understand that all photos and updates should be PG. In other words, don't post ANYTHING that you wouldn't want your grandmother to see.
- Foul language is a no-no. Again, the grandmother test is a good one to apply here.
- Avoid comments about movies, politics, music and celebrities. Even casual comments can send the wrong message.
- Accentuate the Positive. If your child keeps his or her page positive, instead of negative, mean or offensive, then he's probably on safe ground.
- Be careful what you write about school, teachers, learning or even about your college visits. For instance, avoid bashing a school, its

students or your college visit to that school. In addition, do not post any information about your first choice school, or reveal any information about where you're applying or why. This can be leveraged against you.

- Talk to your friends about what they can and can't post on your page. If necessary, use the social networking site's tools to limit who can post on your page.
- Google your child's name to see what comes up and encourage your student to spend a little time on social media housekeeping. Remove photos, updates or anything that might be taken out of context or make your child look bad in the eyes of an admissions counselor.
- Finally, use social networking sites to help you accentuate all the positive things you do, and that you're well rounded, and well-adjusted.

On the flipside, parents and students should look to social media as a means to learn more about a college or university. Be sure to "Like" the Facebook pages of any school your student is interested in, and follow them on Twitter. Encourage your student to participate in online conversations, forums and chat sessions that will let your child connect with representatives for information and tips.

School-sponsored pages may even offer advice to prospective students on the application process, deadlines, and financial aid. And don't forget about YouTube. Many schools offer virtual tours via YouTube as well as videos on specific school sponsored activities or opportunities.

News You Can Use

Did you know that last year Harvard turned down 500 students with **perfect SAT scores**?

That's an eye-opening statistic and shows how competitive it is to get into Ivy League colleges.

So, how do you stand out?

One way is your essay.

My friend Randy Levin is a multi-talented guy. Among other things, he's a former high school English teacher, a published writer and editor, a speechwriter, a creative writing curriculum developer, and -- get this -- a professional comedian (he's actually very funny -- check him out on YouTube).

Randy is also an expert on helping students write college essays that get to the top of the pile in the admissions office. Recently he made a video (http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=iLlFkzjlzq8) that explains the difference between a college essay that gets noticed and a college essay that gets ignored.

I recommend you watch it. Lots of good info. And he makes you laugh. Besides, it's free. On this video, you will learn:

- why writing college essays is not as hard as it looks
- how to know if you're trying to hard
- the cure for swallowing a thesaurus
- the hidden traps in a college's website
- what's wrong with the words myriad and plethora
- how to avoid the "Usual Suspects" when writing an essay
- when not to write about Grandma

One caveat: Randy likes puns. Don't hold it against him. Fortunately, he gets them out of the way early. So if you can get by the punny stuff, the video is definitely worth a look.

Here's the link again: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=iLlFkzjlzq8



Ask the Professor

Q: College is so expensive. What should we do when applying that will help our child secure financial aid?

A: One way for smart students to improve their chances for merit aid is to apply to schools where they will be in the top 10% to 15% of the incoming freshmen class. The bulk of merit aid funds are distributed to this top segment.

Did You Know?



- ✓ *Between college applications, standardized testing fees, test prep and college visits, the average family spends over \$3,500 just getting ready for college.*
- ✓ *More parents than ever — 75% — reported that the state of the economy is affecting decisions about applying to college. Over half of the families reported that they are applying to more “financial aid safety schools.”*
- ✓ *During the last decade, college tuition and fees have increased at an annual average rate 2.6% greater than the Consumer Price Index.*

College Match Game



Which college did Olympian Kerri Walsh Jennings attend?

- A) Stanford University
- B) University of Virginia
- C) Texas A & M
- D) UNC

Answer: Kerri Walsh Jennings graduated from Stanford University with a degree in American Studies.



Upcoming FREE workshops

Oct. 25 - 7:00 pm at Ridge Performing Arts Center, Basking Ridge High School

Nov. 7 - 7:30 pm at Caldwell College, Werner Hall

Reserve your seat online at www.ccpsnj.com or by calling (973) 467-0101. There is no cost to attend.



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