Some students and /or parents may be wondering why TAMS is setting a limit of 15 applications. They may have talked to previous TAMS students and found that no one seems to remember a limit being in place before. The previous students have not really remembered a limit because it only impacted a small number of students.  I did set a limit for them, but I was not super-strict in enforcing it.  I did require some students to make a prioritized list and when they complained that they were not getting enough sleep or were overworked, I told them over and over to drop the schools at the bottom of their list.  Whenever someone complained about essays, I told them to do fewer applications.

If you are going to do a GOOD application that will actually increase your chances of being admitted to an ultra-competitive school (reach school), you have to spend time on it.  A representative from Stanford several years ago stated that a student should spend at least as much time on the Stanford supplemental questions as they did on the entire main Common Application.  They wanted to see that the applicant had really researched Stanford, understood what made it unique, and spoke to how they would contribute to and benefit from that unique environment and community.  When students take the same supplemental essay and simply change the name of the school, the essay is not really effective at any school.  You can certainly adapt an essay from one application to another, but you have to do more than just change the name of the school.  You have to make other adjustments as well to truly “tailor” the essay to each individual school.

I can make a strong case that some students in the past who have been denied at UT Austin took that application too lightly or did not spend enough time on it.  I pushed them to get their application in early, so they turned it in without giving it the same care they would an application to Stanford, and you cannot do that.  UT Austin is the same as Stanford in many ways, and you have to give as much time to each application.  Most students are not willing to put in this much time for a state school they consider a “safety” school even though I have repeatedly stated that UT Austin and Texas A&M are NOT safety schools.

I am not saying that you would not, but I  want you to think about it carefully.  Applying to 10 schools that each have an admissions rate of 8% does NOT mean that you have a 80% chance of being admitted to at least one of them.  Applying to 10 more does not increase your chances of being admitted to any one of them.  A “shotgun” approach does not help you because it often divides your time and energy in too many different directions. A careful, focused set of applications can help you.

I set a limit to get students to build a real list, NOT a list of “in my wildest dreams.”  It does not always work, but I try.  If you have 16 schools, I will talk to you about it, but if your list is much larger, I will make you bring it to a reasonable amount.  Many high schools limit the number of transcripts or counselor recommendations they will send for this reason; other schools may charge large fees per transcript to discourage frivolous applications.

I realize that this is a very long explanation for a fairly simple question, but this is something that I struggle with every year.  I see students that plan to apply to every school that has a combined BA/MD program.  They do not know much, if ANYTHING, about most of the schools, but they are going to apply because of that program, which only admits 5 or 10 students a year.  They are absolutely not interested in going to any of those schools under any other circumstances.  These are wasted applications, wasted time, wasted money. If a student is interested in a BA/MD program, they should find one or two that are at schools they would be happy to attend even if they are not admitted to the program. I have had students that were admitted to a combined program and spent a year at a school they hated before leaving the combined program because they were so miserable on the campus.

Completing transfer applications is another long, tedious process with even smaller odds of success, so try to make your initial round of applications informed, dynamic, useful, and productive.

Sharon