

# Staff Editorial

## College has always been corrupt or The real college scandal

Imposters hired to take standardized tests; a tennis coach bribed to produce a fake recommendation; hapless children's faces photoshopped onto the bodies of real athletes. The details of the college bribery scam are as much a source of hilarity as they are of rampant outrage.

The reality is that this scandal shouldn't really surprise us, because nothing about the college system is particularly just or robustly rational in the first place.

Universities are supposed to be noble institutions founded in pursuit of truth and knowledge. But they are also non-uniquely human institutions: created by us, run by us, in service of us. Beyond the obvious exorbitant price of college and the exploitative loan process, who gets to attend what schools is largely predetermined by wealth and access to resources that will put one in a better position to get accepted. And along with wealth disparities, other intersecting issues, especially, race, made the college process rigged even before news of the scandal made headlines.

And it's a problem that will persist even after the fraudulent parents are indicted. Now the only thing helping wealthier students get into college is legacy admissions, sizable donations, private tutors, board member connections, unpaid summer internships, college coaches, and a lifetime of Ivy League grooming.

The accused families aren't the only ones to blame, either. Elite schools take more students from the top 1 percent of families than they do from the bottom 60 percent. The universities play into this ruse, pretending they're not considering an applicant's ability to pay full tuition — or in some cases, the capacity to give a building or endow a scholarship that brings in enough lower income students to make the whole operation look legitimate.

And while a clear line of legality separates the above list of activities that are common in this area from those indicated in the investigation, each are symptomatic of the same problem. Each stems from the greater issues of rampant hysteria over college admissions and the greater, more nefarious cycle of wealth determining access to higher education.

Condemning those who abused the system as those accused did might deter those seeking to do the same, but it also is a way of placing the burden of reconciling our own role onto someone else. As long as these 50 people are brought to justice, we don't have to accept any ounce of complicity for whatever ways we might unintentionally be benefiting and playing into this cycle.

It's true that since the incentives are aligned towards doing what we can to ensure any ounce of stability we can for our futures, that's the direction that we'll lean in. But in light of this scandal it behooves us to look at ourselves and accept responsibility for feeding into the obsessive college hysteria. Parents want the best for their children as those implicated in the scandal intimately did. You can't blame anyone for that, but what lies beneath it are the assumptions and judgements we make about schools and people that prop up this hysteria.

The real scandal is that those with the most wealth have always had a leg up in college admissions.

## How many times did you cheat? (A lot)



by Ezra Wallach

In the wake of the college admissions scandal that literally everyone was talking about last week, there was some very much expected discourse on the "New Trier Parents" Facebook page.

From what I heard, some of that discourse had to do with me. Well, it didn't have to do with me personally, but rather the article I wrote last year on how a quarter of New Trier juniors received accommodations on standardized tests, which happened to be almost five times higher than the national average. The article touched on how some students essentially finesse their way into these accommodations, at times by faking ADHD in order to get a diagnosis from a psychiatrist.

Rather than identifying this problem and attempting to solve it, some parents took an alternative route—the route of denial. Despite a quote from a local psychiatrist saying that she "has definitely seen New Trier kids come into her office and try to fake ADHD," and numerous quotes from students claiming they knew friends or family that had gamed the system themselves, along with other statistics, some still denied the possibility that the New Trier community could really just \*let\* this happen.

New Trier parents thinking that

other New Trier parents don't care about where their kid goes to college enough to get them a fake ADHD diagnosis that could vastly improve their score is like New Trier parents thinking that their kid is going on spring break to the Dominican Republic with a dozen of their friends to read books and play bingo.

While I understand that some of these parents were simply questioning how my article reflected upon students with real disabilities who needed the accommodations, which was a legitimate concern, I think it is important for our community to understand the advantages we have in the college process that don't really seem like cheating at all, and aren't considered to be actively "gaming the system."

And so, I decided I would use the attention you have given me from the "famous" article I wrote last week and use it to show how, in reality, some of us really were cheating on the ACT and SAT too. I mean we aren't actually cheating, but...you'll understand.

Cheat #1: Congratulations! You are enrolled in one of the best non-selective public high schools in the entire country, which also probably means that you were once enrolled in some of the best middle and elementary schools in the country too. In 2017, New Trier spent \$25,665.37 on each student, while the average high school in Illinois spent \$13,336.64 on each student. To make it even better, Illinois spends more on education per student than any other state in the Midwest.

Cheat #2: ¡Felicitaciones! Instead of being forced to use the free Khan Academy online tutoring for the SAT, your parents decided

that they would opt to use private tutoring! Despite the upwards of \$165 an hour price tag (yes, it is that expensive), your family believes that the 5-7 point increase that "Academic Approach" boasts about on their website is well worth the dent.

While obviously not all students at New Trier opt to use private tutors to help them with their ACT or SAT, many of us do, as these services could make or break our acceptance into a school, or even give us more scholarship money that could easily outnumber the amount we spent on tutoring in the first place. No one calls this immoral or irresponsible, because it's not, and we shouldn't expect our community not to use these resources. But, when you think about it, even though it isn't illegal, parents paying for their kids' ACT scores to go up automatically makes the test easier for richer students, thus making the entire process—well I shouldn't speak too soon. We are just getting started...

Cheat #3: Regardless of whether or not students are justly receiving their accommodations or not, the idea that students at New Trier are even able to get them for their given disabilities should not be taken for granted. A 2016 study from the American Academy of Pediatrics concluded that white students are nearly twice as likely to have received an ADHD diagnosis than their African-American or Latino peers by their sophomore year in high school. Contrary to what the diagnosis numbers suggest, black students are actually more likely to truly have the disorder, as those who experience adverse childhood (cont. page 4)

## A guide to discussing while uninformed

by Eleanor Kaplan

I sat down to write this article about the Paul Manafort trial and my opinions on how his sentence was only (after being doubled a few days after the initial decision) seven and a half years long. This is obviously something I find frustrating--why should a rich, public figure be given a shorter sentence than someone of lower standing in the same situation?

I then realized that I have absolutely no answers to this question. I don't even know how to approach such a big topic. I've read some articles from The New York Times and The Washington Post, but do I actually know enough to write about this?

A similar situation happened in my English class the other day. We were discussing the meaning of morality and I just sat there in the corner wondering if I actually knew enough about this topic to talk about it.

The answer is, well, no. But that doesn't mean I shouldn't try.

I then began realizing that I should just write about how to talk about what we don't know enough to talk about. Then it came to me that I don't even know enough about how to talk about what I don't know enough to talk about.

So I reached out to some friends and one gave me the following quote from Socrates: "The only true wisdom is knowing you know nothing."

That makes for a good starting point. The first step in having these difficult discussions is being aware of your own limitations. No matter how many news clips you see or articles you read, you'll never know

everything.

We're all experts at some things and novices at others, so don't make people feel bad about what they don't know. The same goes for yourself. It can be embarrassing to be thrown into a conversation in which you have no idea what you're doing. Embrace this. Admitting what you don't know is better than hiding it.

Step two, ask questions. We've all heard teachers say that there are no such thing as a "dumb question." That can seem wrong, but in this case, what you think to be an overly basic question may be something that everyone is trying to figure out. For example, what did Manafort actually do? (okay I know, but isn't 'collusion' super vague?)

These conversations should be ones in which everyone is learning. This learning, however, doesn't have to be just understanding a new viewpoint. It could be learning the facts of the situation as well.

We're often told to not have an opinion until we know all the facts, but conversations are driven by opinions. Of course it's better to hold off on having a strong opinion until you know the situation from front to back. However, people don't typically operate this way. We form opinions on first look, which is okay, but it should be acknowledged that this isn't a totally informed viewpoint.

In addition to asking questions, if someone else asks a question, don't laugh it off. Let this person learn. And if you don't know the answer, or don't feel qualified to answer, seek some outside source.

Luckily nowadays it's easy to consult the internet whenever you're

unsure of a fact, but don't forget that friends and family can also be resources for understanding.

Step three, know who you're talking to. Is this a person who sways either right or left politically? What sort of news sources do they use? Are they overly emotional? Do they hold a grudge against a certain type of person? All these characteristics can cause someone to, either intentionally or unintentionally, present the facts in a biased way.

To this point, it's essential that you don't take whatever someone says as fact right away. Even if you trust this person, check with other reputable sources.

Lastly and most importantly, when you're talking about something that you are unqualified to talk about, be open to being wrong. Opinions form quickly, but should be malleable enough that new facts (please check your sources, though) or viewpoints can make you question them. If everyone's opinions were just set in stone there would be no purpose in having conversations at all.

As is evident by me hiding in the back of my English class because I have no idea how to talk about the meaning of art, conversations in which we don't feel qualified enough can be intimidating. But by letting go of expectations of always having the right answer and knowing exactly what to say, these discussions can greatly inform our understanding.

The next time you're thrown into a political discussion about something you barely know about, don't be afraid to talk and share what you think. Just keep an open mind, do your research, and learn.

