Late Early Action: an Oxymoron.

Oxymoron is a great SAT word (yes, I know, you are done with the SAT.) An oxymoron is a figure of speech in which apparently contradictory terms appear in conjunction. We usually try to avoid using oxymorons or mixed metaphors. But, I am going to create and use one: late early action.

Saint Mary’s published fall 2015 Early Action deadline is November 15. Now, as educators, we recognize the danger of discouraging the meeting of deadlines and appropriate time management (for example, taking an incomplete in a college course, unless for some truly compelling personal reason is not a good idea!) But, we’ve also gotten a tremendous number of calls from students lately indicating that they’d only recently learned about our new academic scholarship opportunities, or the chance to compete for one of our other additional departmental scholarships (for example, a physics competition was added for this year) and that they’d now like to apply for Early Action consideration.

We realize there is a lot of “noise in the system” and that students considering Saint Mary’s are being bombarded with information by many good colleges with varying deadlines, who hope they’ll apply. So, following a fall of deadlines for the SAT and ACT, as well as your senior year term papers and lab reports, various practices, and volunteer work, it’s difficult to keep on top of all the opportunities.

One of the great things about independent colleges like Saint Mary’s, is that we can be responsive when the situation recommends it. So, we’ve decided to extend our Early Action deadline to December 1: so any person completing the Common Application and checking Early Action will be considered an on time application. And, if you submitted your application for regular consideration but now want to be considered Early Action, call and let us know. Early Action applicants—with complete applications—will be sent notification by Christmas.

Now other callers are panicked because they are worried some parts of their applications will not be received on time. Again, at Saint Mary’s we try to be reasonable. If your letter of recommendation arrives after December 1, we’ll consider it on time if arrives a few days later. But, we want to understand whether your academic and test performance indicate if you are sufficiently prepared and motivated, so we need recommendations to help us put those numbers in perspective. And, we can’t make a decision on your application unless it’s complete. We’ll do our best to work with you, but if your test scores, transcript, or your recommendation arrive December 20 we’re not going to be able to get you a decision by Christmas. You’ll be place in consideration with applicants for regular decision.

So on the oxymoron tangent, let me point out the “hurry up and wait” aspect of Early Action freshman admission. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is required to apply for financial aid. But, you can’t submit it until after January 1. So, early action financial aid doesn’t exist (sorry, not even as an oxymoron.) What we can do, however, is to advise you when you are admitted whether you automatically qualify for a merit scholarship. But, the FAFSA is needed to determine your need, so we can’t send students complete financial aid packages—factoring need—until the FAFSA has been received. We plan to start mailing financial aid packages in late February to students who have submitted the FAFSA before our deadline of February 15. Please, please, please remember to make sure that we have your social security number or we can’t download your FAFSA. Also, please be sure to tell
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your parents, since they will probably be completing your FAFSA, it must be YOUR social security number, not one of theirs. (This is a pretty common mistake.)

Now some worried students call us up and say they can’t make a decision whether to enroll until they’ve gotten a financial aid package. Understood. That’s why Saint Mary’s offers Early Action instead of Early Decision consideration. Unlike Early Decision programs, Early Action gives you until the national Candidate’s Reply Date of May 1 to make up your mind whether you want to save your place in the entering class and commit to Saint Mary’s. Many students will do so earlier, but that is the deadline. But be sure that you want to enroll at Saint Mary’s and that you have determined you can manage the investment before sending us a deposit. We simply can’t return deposits.

We do this for a living so the deadlines and procedures all make sense to us, but they might be as clear as mud to you. So, if you have questions, please call Admissions and we’ll try to help you make sense of it all.