February, 3rd, 2015

“Modified” Rolling Admission

Like many peer institutions Saint Mary’s offers an Early Action admission option and has a priority deadline for regular fall freshman admission (this year it was moved early to January 15, but in response to feedback we extended it two weeks till February 1 because many said that they’d only recently learned we’d moved it earlier this year.) It needs to be noted though that we have always continued to accept applications after our published deadline.

So, we often hear the questions: “why establish a deadline if you’ll continue to consider applications” and “what does ‘rolling admissions’ mean?”

We establish application deadlines to assure students who meet them (i.e. apply by those dates) a reasonable time frame in which to expect an admission decision. Traditionally we have told students who apply by the deadline that they can be assured an admissions decision by the beginning of March. That gives us enough time to work with students, and their school counselors, to get the materials we need to make informed decisions and, in some cases after an initial review, to request more information to help determine whether a student is sufficiently prepared to attend Saint Mary’s. We give “priority” consideration to those who apply by that deadline, meaning they’ll get a decision on or --often-- before when we promised, and that they’ll be assured our undivided attention. (Come March and April our focus is on communicating with accepted students, managing events for them to attend to decide whether SMC is “the right fit”, and working with our colleagues in financial aid in an effort to provide them financial aid opportunities.)

Deadlines also allow us to prepare for the possibility that we might get a huge number of applications by that date, significantly reducing the percentage we can admit. While that happens occasionally, that isn’t typically the case at Saint Mary’s, or at our peer competitors. So, we continue to accept applications as long as it appears we aren’t running a risk of ending up over enrolled. We’re committed to maintaining small classes as well a personalized student life program, so we continually keep a close eye on our number of admission decisions offers. While we keep admission open, we also realize that we need to guarantee every admitted student who commits by the National Candidates’ Enrollment Date (aka “the May 1 deadline”) the chance to enroll.

Rolling admission means that we send out acceptances on a weekly basis as we review and determine whether students are prepared, until we believe we have admitted as many as we dare to risk accommodating (again, we want to keep enrolling numbers small in order to keep the quality of the Saint Mary’s educational experience high.) We make our decisions “rolling”, rather than “batching” them like some peer institutions. (Another definition: “batching” is where institutions release all their acceptances --as well as denial and waiting list letters-- on the same date.) At Saint Mary’s all students applying our priority deadline are assured --priority-- consideration, but some students learn earlier than others (usually meaning that their applications were received earlier.)

Understandably the phones start ringing when some students get letters before other students. This could be that we’re still matching documents with those students’ applications. Other times it’s
because we are still carefully considering whether applicants are sufficiently prepared to be successful here. Rest assured that all students who applied by February 1 will get an admissions decision by the first week of March.

New applicants, or those who might still apply, should know that they’ll get the fullest possible consideration provided that we believe we have space available. And, we’re committed to supporting the students we admit financially. So as long as we admit students they will be eligible to be considered for scholarships and need based aid.

Each year many well qualified applicants apply well after the deadline. Some may determine they won’t be successful in being admitted to most selective schools, or that they wouldn’t be happy at one. Others only then realize that a quality private education is actually within reach for them, after having assumed they’d need to attend public colleges. And we continue to consider them for admission – provided that we are confident that space remains available. But, while we guarantee all those who apply by the deadline a decision by early March, if we experience a surge in commitments (aka deposits) we might need to close admission and not consider late applicants. So now we are accepting new applicants on a space available basis. And, accordingly, we are now waiving the application fee for new applicants. So, new applicants will be considered on a first come, first served, basis.

So, if you haven’t applied and want to be considered for admission, the good news is that we are still accepting applications and, better yet, the fee is now waived for everyone. But don’t delay since we don’t know how long we’ll be able to continue admitting students who applied after the priority deadline.

We ask those who have submitted applications to be patient. Processing applications and reading them to give students the fullest possible consideration takes time. We want to make sure our decisions are the best possible ones, for you as well as for us.