

With the fees of applying to colleges and sending test scores, the actual tuition of universities is only part of

The price of education



Varshini Cherukupalli and Sabrina Ghaus | El Estoque Photo Illustration

by Christine Chang

Three thousand dollars can buy a lot of things: 21 TI-89 calculators, 40 ASB cards, or a 21-day day trip to Hawaii. For senior Vikram Nilakantan, that \$3,000 is paying for his college applications—28, to be exact. And this holiday season, many seniors like Nilakantan are emptying their wallets to pay for those college applications rather than splurge on Christmas gifts.

Applying to college is the notorious rite of passage faced by almost every MVHS student who's survived their first three years in high school. As many seniors are discovering, it's an expensive one, too. Application fees can cost anywhere from \$30 to \$90, and for applying to UCs and private colleges, a couple hundred dollars isn't anything out of the ordinary. Throw in SAT and AP score-reporting fees and the cost of sending transcripts, and the grand total really adds up.

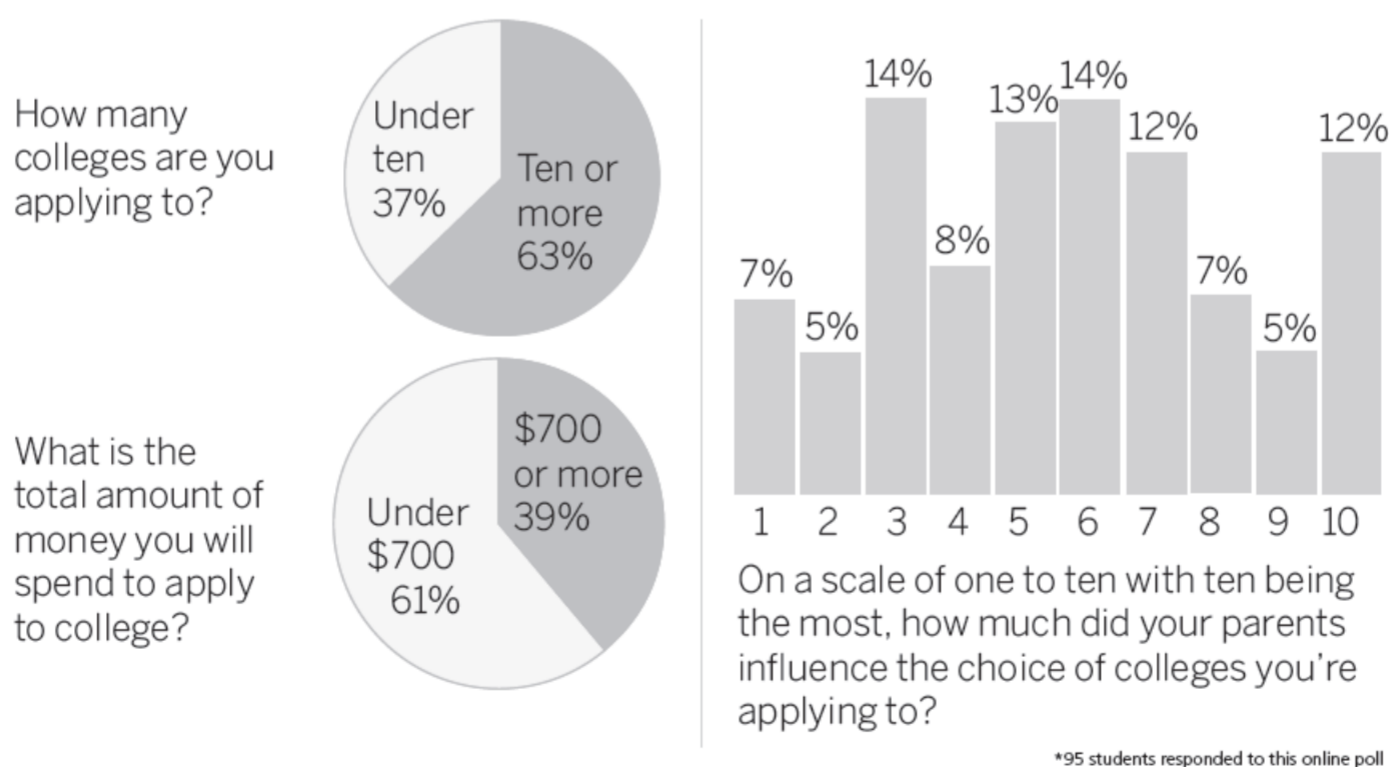
After hearing horror stories of hasty admissions officers, Nilakantan fears being rejected not because he isn't qualified, but simply because there are too many applicants to be thoroughly considered. With budget cuts in effect and competition rising, Nilakantan felt what he calls "backups for backups" were necessary.

"The lucky thing is that if I don't get into my top schools, I'll have plenty of backups and I can feel sure now that it will be okay," Nilakantan said. "I don't want to be stressed the next few months thinking, 'What if I don't get into a UC? Then what?'"

Registrar Pat Kruse feels that students who apply to more than 15 or 20 schools are just putting extra stress on themselves. However, she understands seniors' mentality of feeling more secure by applying to additional colleges.

"I think it's tough on seniors today in this situation.

BY THE NUMBERS



*95 students responded to this online poll

Especially now that budget cuts are all over the news, what's happening is [seniors] feel like they need to cover all their bases, so they end up applying to lots of privates," Kruse said.

Kruse also senses that more often than not, parents' dreams and aspirations for their children get in the way, and the college list becomes more ambitious than realistic.

"I understand that a lot of parents have hopes and desires for their kids, and that gets mixed up in there as well," Kruse said. "I really encourage parents to just let students take charge. The application process is like a university's first test. They want to see if a student can follow through with the process, jump through the hoops and leap the hurdles."

Career Center manager Miriam Taba, who counsels students in choosing suitable campuses and college programs to apply to, cites the incentive to boast "big-

name" admissions as another source of over-applying.

"I've heard some people who apply to a whole bunch of schools they know they won't even go to just for bragging rights," Taba said. "That is an entirely wrong reason to apply to a school. For all they know, they could be taking a spot from a classmate who really wants it."

On the other end of the spectrum, senior Tom Zick has taken a more financially conservative approach to college applications. Because she is supported by a single mother, Zick feels obligated to be extra conscientious and capped her applications at a total of 11. Over the summer, Zick worked as a camp counselor to help pay for college application fees and plans to work through college to cover the costs.

"Some people are really spoiled about applying to all the colleges they want and expecting their parents to pay for all of it," Zick said. "While I think it's important for parents to help their kids out on one hand, it's still our lives and our responsibility. We should do anything we can to help out."

To avoid the buildup of unnecessary application fees, Zick ended up eliminating two UCs she had originally planned to apply to. Still, Zick's total cost of applying to college, including sending scores and transcripts, comes out to almost \$1,000.

After years of experience, Taba sees sound reason in narrowing college lists during the application process, not after students have been accepted.

"I think [over-applying] wastes a lot of parents' time and money," Taba said, "because in the end, you're only going to one college. Students just need to have the confidence that they will get in somewhere and not be paranoid."

But for the cautious ones, that \$3,000 buys them admissions insurance.