



The Gatekeepers: Inside the Admissions Process of a Premier College

By Jacques Steinberg

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"[*The Gatekeepers*] provides the deep insight that is missing from the myriad how-to books on admissions that try to identify the formula for getting into the best colleges...I really didn't want the book to end." —*The New York Times*

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Education reporter Steinberg presents a compelling tale in this account, told from the perspective of Ralph Figueroa, an admissions officer at Wesleyan University. Expanding on a series of articles in the New York Times, Steinberg provides an insider's look at how Figueroa and the school's admissions committee factored grades, test scores, essays, extracurricular activities and race into account as they winnowed 700 students for the class of 2004 from nearly 7,000 applicants. Using real names, applications and interviews, Steinberg follows six applicants of varying backgrounds from their first encounter with Figueroa to their final acceptance or rejection. Although not a how-to book per se, Steinberg's work does include helpful advice, such as "there's no way to outthink this process" and "if you've got something you want to write, then write it the way you want." Steinberg portrays Figueroa and the other admissions officers as doing the best they can to give each applicant a fair assessment, despite their responsibility for 1,500 of them. Among the book's surprises are that supplementary material, no matter how impressive, carries no weight in deciding who gets in, while honesty about a mistake in one case, an incident involving a pot brownie can influence an admissions officer to admit. Wesleyan's high standards e.g., a 1350 combined score on the SAT may put some readers off, but the process that Steinberg describes is similar at most private colleges and universities.

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School-Steinberg had unparalleled access to the admissions process for the class of 2004 at Wesleyan, an elite liberal arts college in Connecticut. Originally presented as a series of articles in the New York Times, the stories were so compelling and the subject matter so topical, that he was convinced to expand them to book length. He followed Ralph Figueroa, a veteran admissions officer, for eight months, encompassing initial "marketing" trips, contacts with high school guidance counselors, the early-decision process, reading thousands of applications for final admissions, wooing reluctant candidates, and fighting for specific marginal cases. Evident throughout is the truth of Figueroa's assertion that there is no way to guarantee admission or any one thing that will make a certain candidate successful. Several high school seniors allowed the author to record their thoughts and concerns as he simultaneously followed the progress of their applications. While the close examination emphasizes the seeming inconsistency of the process, the resulting epiphanies and changes in perspective of the individuals followed in the year's march to college allow readers to see that a big name is not necessarily everything and that some students are much happier in a different atmosphere. The stories are so well written that teens will find this title a pleasurable read in the midst of much practical advice.

Susan H. Woodcock, Fairfax County Public Library, Chantilly, VA

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From Library Journal

New York Times education reporter Steinberg takes us behind the scenes to experience the arduous and even grisly process of admissions at a major New England college. From fall 1999 to spring 2000, Steinberg shadowed Wesleyan University admissions officer Ralph Figueroa as he traversed the country recruiting students. The author had the unprecedented opportunity to attend admissions meetings with Figueroa and his colleagues in which the applicant pool of 7000 was reduced to 700 openings. Steinberg also followed six students through the admissions process and carefully documented their personal experiences, backgrounds, and interactions with the admissions officers to discover why some students stand out in the officers' memories and actually become bargaining chips in meetings with their colleagues. Although the author

explicitly states that this is not another "how-to" manual for gaining admission to college, it nonetheless reveals that there are no set formulas and that the decision rests on factors that may not be wholly within the control of the applicant. This insightful and readable book should be purchased by all academic and large public libraries.

Mark Alan Williams, Web Lib. & Document Storage Svcs., Hines VA Hosp., Chicago

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Vickie Flores:

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