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## Children of the Ivies: Being a Legacy Has Its Burden

By PAMELA PAUL

HOPE. Fear. Ambition. Desire. Guilt. All parents of children applying to college go through a set of stomach-churning emotions, but parents who graduated from [Ivy League](#) schools experience their own particular set of competing emotions and expectations.

Will having parents who have attained what many consider the brass ring of academic achievement inspire them? Or will it completely freak them out? Should their children apply to Yale, too, even if they're not quite Ivy material? What if they don't get in?

"I really, really, really want my daughter to go to an Ivy League school but feel like the more I bring it up, the more she will rebel against it," says Clint Arthur, an '87 University of Pennsylvania graduate. Mr. Arthur made up his mind at age 14 to go to Wharton. "But just because I had the guts to want it and go for it doesn't mean she will. There's a lot of potential for disappointment."

Mr. Arthur worries that "the whole Ivy League school thing" will intimidate her. At one point, his daughter, a high school junior with a 4.0, burst into tears and said, "I don't have the grades for Harvard!"

The assumption that Ivy League children will veer in a certain direction often starts young. "When my daughter was born, I naturally assumed she would go to Barnard without even thinking about what she may want," explains Jamie Rubin, a 2001 Barnard graduate married to a Columbia alumnus. Their daughter, Julian, 3, already wears Columbia T-shirts, though, Ms. Rubin insists, "We don't want to pressure her."

Certainly, admission is easier for children of alumni, whom colleges want to keep happy, and donating. Most elite institutions give preference to graduates' children, sometimes even to grandchildren and siblings. The more selective the school, the more helpful that advantage.

Admissions offices have long defended legacy consideration as merely a tiebreaker among equally high-qualified applicants. But among legacy applicants for Princeton's class of 2015, 33 percent of those offered a spot were the children of alumni. Harvard generally admits 30 percent, and Yale says it admits 20 percent to 25 percent. For all three, the overall rate is in the single digits.

According to "The Impact of Legacy Status on Undergraduate Admissions at Elite Colleges and Universities," a study of 30 colleges [published in June](#) in *Economics of Education Review*, the closer the relation, the greater the benefit: children of parents who attended a school as an undergraduate saw a 45 percentage point increase in the probability of admission; for children of graduate students — or those who had a relative other than a parent attend — the increase in probability was about 14 percentage points.

Over the long haul, though, legacy enrollment has declined. In 1980, 24 percent of Yale's freshman class had a parent who had attended, but in the class of 2014, 13 percent were legacy students. At most Ivy

League schools, 10 percent to 15 percent of those who end up enrolling are the children of former students.

And with college enrollment at an all-time high, admittance has become tougher for everyone; acceptance rates are far lower than a generation ago. An applicant from the Harvard class of 1985 would have faced an admission rate of 16 percent, compared with 6 percent for the class of 2015.

“I’d imagine that most of my classmates at Dartmouth couldn’t get in now,” says Bill Carpenter, a ’62 Dartmouth alumnus. “I probably couldn’t.”

Mr. Carpenter comes from sturdy Ivy League cloth: his parents both attended Harvard, as did his brother, and his sister went to the University of Pennsylvania. “So that was in the air” for his two sons, Mr. Carpenter says. His older son ended up at Dartmouth — “It was definitely a fun father-son bond,” Mr. Carpenter admits — and when it came time for his younger son to apply to college, his counselor at St. Paul’s, an elite boarding school in Concord, N.H., pushed Dartmouth for him, too.

Mr. Carpenter saw applying to his alma mater as less pressure for his son, not more. “My main feeling as a parent was that I didn’t want him to be disappointed,” Mr. Carpenter says. “So I was for Dartmouth because I thought he’d have a better chance there.” His son applied early to Columbia instead and got in.

Not applying at all is one way to avoid rejection. Peter Yarlow, the son of two members of the Harvard class of ’86, had visited the college while growing up and certainly wanted to attend. But by the time he was a freshman in high school, it was evident he would never get in, he recalls, “even as a double legacy.”

Mr. Yarlow, now 19 and a freshman at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, didn’t even apply.

“It was pretty depressing.”

Being turned down as a legacy is particularly painful. The rejection from Cornell still stings, says Michael Crawford of the university attended by his mother and two siblings. “I’m sure you can imagine the pressure when your entire family has gone to the same Ivy League school to be at least accepted,” he says.

Though happy now at the University of Mary Washington, in Virginia, he says, “I was really self-conscious of my failure for the first two years of school.”

Parents can set a daunting example. “The dilemma for the children of parents who went to Ivy League schools is identity. Will I measure up? Will I be as good?” says Madeline Levine, a clinical therapist and author of “The Price of Privilege.” “Those kids tend to go one of two ways. They either go to the local arts school or they try very hard to follow in their parents’ footsteps. But it doesn’t allow them the psychological space to really figure out who they are.”

When Peter Gudmundsson, a father of four who went to Brown for his B.A. and Harvard for his M.B.A., was touring campuses with his eldest, their first stop was Brown. “To me, there’s a difference between presenting alternatives and putting undue pressure on your child,” he says. And a parent’s Ivy League credentials can cut both ways. “Imagine,” he says, “a conversation with your 30-year-old saying, ‘Why

didn't you encourage me to go to Brown? Did you not think I was good enough?' Or, alternatively, 'Why did you? I would have been better off at Juilliard.' ”

Before they arrived in Providence, R.I., Mr. Gudmundsson said to his daughter: “I will probably have a big smile on my face and you'll think I'm trying to push you to go here. But I want to be clear. My enthusiasm is about me, not you. So don't mistake it for pressure.”

Mandee Adler, a '94 Penn graduate who met her husband at college, is now an independent college counselor in Hollywood, Fla. For her clients, it's not simply about passing down a legacy out of parental responsibility.

“For a lot of Ivy League parents, the desire to give their child the same kind of education comes from a position of love,” she says. “I've had opportunities I never would have had if I hadn't gone to Penn. Obviously, I would like my children to have those opportunities, too.”

#### RESOURCES:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/06/education/edlife/being-a-legacy-has-its-burden.html?src=me&pagewanted=print>