

HARVARD HAS A SECRET BACK DOOR FOR ULTRA-RICH KIDS WITH LOUSY GRADES

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What does Harvard University do when faced with well-connected applicants — the children of mega-donors or other highly influential people — who have less-than-ideal SAT scores and GPAs?

The put them on the Z-List, according to a college admissions coach.

That means the students are advised to matriculate after taking a gap year, making them so-called “data ghosts” — meaning their lackluster academic statistics are not reported in the incoming freshman class.

That way Harvard doesn’t take a hit to its stellar academic averages — or institutional rankings.

“If Harvard doesn’t want the student hurting their US News and World Report ranking with their GPA and test scores, they admit them through the Z list,” Brian Taylor, managing partner of Manhattan-based [college admissions firm Ivy Coach](#), told The Post. (While Harvard’s Law and Medical Schools both pulled out of US News and World Report’s college rankings, the university at large has not.)

“It often means that the student really doesn’t qualify for admission on their own.”

[According to Ivy Coach’s website](#), roughly 60 students get a spot on the Z list annually, and are sent a letter that effectively says “we will be pleased to consider your admission in one year.”

“They’re not reapplying,” Taylor explained. “They’re admitted, and they’re guaranteed a spot in a year.”

In his practice, Taylor says he sees a client admitted on the Z List roughly every other year — though he estimates they account for a single-digit percentage of the students he works with who get into Harvard.

“It’s for people who are important,” he said. “We’ve had clients who have been admitted on the Z list who are close friends or family of major world leaders or major donors.”

When a Z-List letter arrives, Taylor says it's "never a surprise."

Inevitably, he said, it's for students who he tells at the beginning of the admissions process: "I don't know if you're going to get into Harvard, but the list is your only hope." He adds that there are some strong tell-tale signs that a student was on the list.

"When students take a gap year in between their high school years and college, it's a good indication that they may have been admitted to the Z list," Taylor explained.

A spokesperson for Harvard did not return a request for comment.

Although Harvard is the only school with a so-called "Z-List," Taylor said other elite schools exploit similar loopholes to get students with inconvenient stats in the door.

The most common way is exploiting the transfer process. Because US News and World Report doesn't count transfer students' statistics in their ranking calculations, some schools funnel in lower-performing students that way.

According to Taylor, Cornell exploits a "guaranteed transfer" system in which applicants with sub-par test scores or GPAs are told to do their freshman year of college elsewhere then re-apply.

If they maintain a certain grade point average during their freshman year — typically a B-average — they're guaranteed admission to Cornell as a second-year transfer student.

"I don't think it's right that Cornell does that. It's not fair to their peer institutions," Taylor said.

"These students go somewhere else and are not investing in that first year of college because they know if they just get A's and B's that they will be going to Cornell the next year."

A representative for Cornell declined to comment.

But it's not always ultra-privileged students getting backdoor admissions as data ghosts. According to Taylor, some schools do use this loophole to let deserving students in — especially veterans.

Two schools he says are well-known for doing this are Princeton, which recently began accepting transfer students, and Columbia University, where the School of General Studies was established to accept veterans as transfers.

"I applaud them for using the transfer process to admit more veterans," Taylor said. "They may have a 3.0 GPA, but these young men and women are mature, they've served their country. They've often earned good grades at community colleges.

"This gives men and women in uniform a shot at these elite schools."