

REJECTION IS REDIRECTION?

McLean seniors learn to embrace rejection from their dream schools

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The day had finally come for Mehr Kumar, the one she and seniors everywhere had nervously awaited for months: college decision day, when a select few bask in the glory of their acceptances, and countless more cope with the crushing disappointment of rejection.

Four years of hard work and sacrifice had led up to this moment, but for Kumar, who had set her sights on Northwestern University, the weight of the day was even greater.

“[As it got] closer to the decision day, I was starting to get kind of excited,” Kumar said. “I was looking into all their stats, and I was really giving myself more hope than I had when I first applied.”

As she sat in her car and readied herself to open her admissions portal, Kumar couldn't help but imagine herself a year into the future, decked out in Northwestern purple and battling the cold Illinois weather.

Thank you for your interest in Northwestern University. After careful consideration, the Admissions Committee regrets to inform you that we are unable to offer you a place in the Class of 2026. This year's applicant pool was incredibly competitive...

It took several rereads for Kumar to finally process what had just happened. She was soon met with an overwhelming wave of disappointment.

“When I opened that decision letter and saw that it was a rejection after building myself up, it did really hurt,” Kumar said. “I cried, obviously.”

Kumar was not alone. At McLean, where the competition is fierce and the pressure is debilitating, students often feel obligated to set their sights on extremely selective schools.

“Students tend to focus more on name-brand recognition than finding their best fit college where they will be truly happy,” College and Career Specialist Laura Venos said. “We are trying very hard to help shift the culture here through our programming and counseling.”

In spite of these efforts, the culture at McLean has been slow to evolve. Dealing with rejection can be extremely difficult, especially when expectations are high and it feels as though everyone else is receiving good news from universities.

“If you are applying to competitive colleges, you have to put your best application out there and then honestly just be okay with whatever happens,” Venos said.

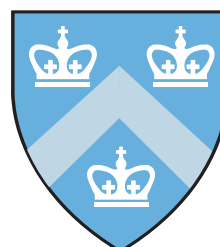
In an effort to turn the tide on rejections, two seniors created a new Instagram account, @mcleanrejections2022. It parodies the official @mcleancommitments2022 page, where seniors share the school they have decided to attend in the fall.

“People often view rejection as a poor reflection of themselves,” said Zora Rodgers, one of the account's founders. “But the account proves that rejection is perfectly normal, so there is no need to feel ashamed.”

Featuring witty captions and photos of students in post-rejection shambles, the account has turned rejection into something to be laughed at and celebrated.

“Congratulations Mehr Kaur [sic] on getting rejected from Northwestern! She planned on studying psychology, but judging by the picture she sent us, she doesn't look strong enough to live 30 minutes away from the South Side of Chicago,” Rodgers wrote in the caption on Kumar's rejection post. “Hopefully you will go somewhere with a lot of sun to get your serotonin levels up.”

REJECTION RATES OF PRESTIGIOUS UNIVERSITIES



93%

Columbia University



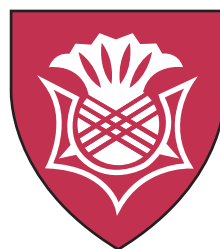
80%

Northeastern University



91%

Northwestern University



83%

Carnegie Mellon University



93%

University of Chicago

The account has quickly risen in popularity, inspiring seniors from Langley High School and other schools in the area to create their own versions.

“We started [McLean Rejections] as a lighthearted joke, but it turned into something a lot bigger,” Rodgers said. “The vast majority of people fully support it, and other schools have even started their own rejections accounts.”

Kaitlyn Conly, one of the seniors featured on @mcleanrejections2022, was rejected from Columbia University. Initially devastated, Conly struggled to accept the circumstances. Not long after the news, however, she found out that she had been accepted to Northeastern University.

“I wouldn’t have changed a thing about applying to Columbia. I’m so grateful that things turned out the way they did,” Conly said. “And even though the rejection wasn’t in my favor, nothing bad came out of it from my end, ultimately.”

Through the Instagram account—and especially its comment section—students have found a way to bond over rejection and support one another through their setbacks.

“ MAKING IT PUBLIC GAVE ME A WAY TO [LET] EVERYONE KNOW THAT IT’S NOT A TOUCHY SUBJECT. IT DOESN’T HURT THAT BAD. IT’S OK.”

- ERIN SHARPE
SENIOR

“Everyone knows it sucks to get rejected from your top choice, so generally people just want to make sure to lift each other up,” said senior Ryan Hooper, who submitted his rejection from Northeastern University to the Instagram.

For some, the page offers a safe space to cope with the sting of rejection. Ironically enough, publicizing the pain seems to be an effective way to move on.

“Posting [helped me] prove to myself that it didn’t hurt that much,” said senior Erin Sharpe, who was rejected from the University of Chicago. “Making it public gave me a way to let everyone know that it’s not a touchy subject. It doesn’t hurt that bad. It’s OK.”

With its generous following, the account has managed to cultivate a kindhearted community and unite students in their sadness.

“I hope that [my post] helped other people move on,” Sharpe said. “I hope that it gave some healing to someone else who also got rejected.”

In fact, it seems that most seniors end up right where they are supposed to be. Kumar saw a happy ending to her college admissions story after receiving an offer of admission from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

“I love Michigan as a school and was really hoping to get in [because] my brother also goes there,” Kumar said. “Getting into [Michigan] felt really, really good. I felt like I could finally relax.”

Looking back, Kumar is content with the way everything turned out.

“After thinking about it a little more, as good of a school as Northwestern is, I know I’ll be happy wherever I go,” she said.

While this way of thinking may be easier preached than practiced, it can help students deal with the unparalleled stress of the college admissions process. The McLean administration is taking steps to foster a culture that rejects elitism and prioritizes finding the right fit.

“[I tell students to] reframe the experience. You have so much to look forward to in your life and that one college that didn’t accept you does not define you or your future,” Venos said.

Venos encourages students to be more selective with the colleges they decide to apply to. Rather than focusing on acceptance rates and name-brand recognition, students should seek out the schools that are best for them.

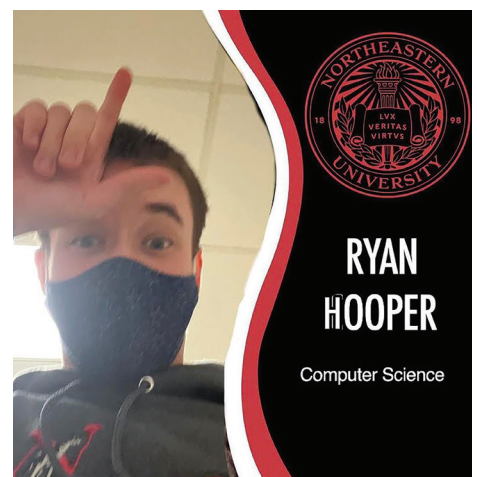
“I’ve become less focused on making sure I go to a ‘good’ school and more on making sure I go to the ‘right’ school,” Hooper said. “I want to [enjoy] college, and I think I’ll do better in another place now.”

As college decisions continue to roll in, @mcleanrejections2022 will continue to remind students that “rejection is redirection,” as sometimes not getting what they want can lead to an even more favorable outcome in the long run.

“Rejection is a part of life,” Venos said. “It happens. It makes you stronger, and getting through it will give you the skills you need to get through the next difficult situation.”



mcleanrejections2022 Congratulations Mehr Kaur on getting rejected from Northwestern! She planned on studying psychology, but judging by the picture she sent us, she doesn't look strong enough to live 30 minutes away from the South Side of Chicago! I'm sure Evanston has enough depressed psych majors already, and hopefully you will go somewhere with a lot of sun to get your serotonin levels up ❤️ everyone hype her up in the comments!



mcleanrejections2022 Congratulations to Ryan Hooper for getting our second Northeastern rejection, along with Georgia Tech and Carnegie Mellon. Rejection is redirection, and you've been redirected THREE TIMES! We wish you the best of luck in your pursuit of higher education, and remember the transfer portal is always an option ❤️ Go Ryan!



mcleanrejections2022 Congratulations to Erin Sharpe on her rejection from UChicago! While there, she planned on majoring in public policy. Guess her application wasn't sharp(ε) enough to achieve that acceptance! 🙄 It's a shame that living on a boat or whatever wasn't a good enough extracurricular... she doesn't look Hyde Park material anyways, so maybe this one is for the best. Go Erin, just not to UChicago! ❤️❤️