
New Sickness Infects High School Students Nationwide: College Admission Essay Sample

ELLICOTT CITY, MD--- It is 12 AM and parents everywhere believe their teenagers are snug in bed. However, instead of sleeping, their kids are wide awake, studying every ounce of information they could be tested on in a matter of hours. Believing that their children are hardworking individuals, parents are oblivious to the serious malady that is afflicting their offspring. That affliction is often ignored, but no less tragic - a sickness called Numberitis.

Symptoms of Numberitis can be subtle but can include acute anxiousness over acronyms such as GPA and SAT/ACT, obsessive-compulsive focus on miniscule assignments yielding less than 5 points on one's grade, inability to deal with criticism relating to the depth of academic rigor, and a sheer feeling of worthlessness, especially in comparing class ranking. It can start as early as freshman year and generally lasts until second semester senior year, when it is replaced by a new illness (see Senioritis, page E4).

While the cause is unknown, scientists speculate that in this competitive day and age, millions of prospective college applicants stress over mere numbers in order to prove to colleges that they are intelligent. While most pupils deal with this stress through hard work and determination, others more susceptible to Numberitis exhibit unethical behaviors toward their school work.

There have been recent cases of Numberitis reported in Howard County high schools, with the most significant outbreak at Mount Hebron High School. Ms. Ann Miles, a guidance counselor at Mount Hebron, notes, "I have students come in my office everyday, thinking to bribe me into writing exaggerated recommendations to prospective colleges. Some have even tried hacking into my computer to change their GPA and class ranking. It's a real problem."

Anecdotally, Mount Hebron students have reported mild to severe cases of the affliction. Before a recent math test, Mount Hebron students claimed that the most severe cases frantically asked their classmates who had previously taken the test about specific questions asked on the exam, even scavenging through their teacher's private folders to find the answer key. "I've been literally attacked by students with Numberitis after every test in Ms. Sherow's Algebra II class," says a Mount Hebron student, "but I refused to give them the answers. I don't want someone earning a better grade than me; it's just not fair."

Granted, those with Numberitis are not as conniving as others may perceive them to be. Some Number-addicts are only trying to mirror what they perceive as the extreme academic

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competitiveness of the very schools they wish to apply. An anonymous Numberitis victim says, “I need to make my resume look better than the thousands of other applicants. If that means I have to get an ‘edge’ on my AP Calculus test, so be it.”

With all the controversy behind this epidemic, it seems almost impossible for college admissions to conclude who truly earned their grades without any academic ‘advantage’. To decipher who truly excels in multiple Advanced Placement courses or had the non-traditional ‘help’ along their way through their entire curriculum simply cannot be determined without an FBI agent on duty. “We understand that there are some students who have not been completely honest during their high school career,” says an anonymous Dean of Admissions, “however, we must use the numbers to determine if they can excel in our college. We make certain that we consider the applicant’s essay, recommendations, and their academic rigor. That can reveal a lot about a student that numbers cannot.”

The constant pressure to have perfect SAT/ACT scores and GPA have plummeted kids into this morass, having them believe they must do whatever it takes to earn the highest number possible. Even those who were honest throughout their high school career are being punished through the actions of their peers with Numberitis, as the bar is set too high, to super-human heights. Too many students have compromised their integrity, as well as their sanity, simply to appease the pressure of being the perfect college applicant.

There has yet to be a cure for this ongoing epidemic. However, there are ways to alleviate the harmful side effects: spend time with family and friends, join a club or participate in a sport for the pure joy of it, or run for a position on the SGA—not to note the title, but just be involved in high school. As one recovering Numberitis sufferer admits, “Twenty years from now, I know I won’t remember what I got on that one math test, but I will remember my experiences with my friends during high school.” Words of wisdom for prospective college applicants everywhere.

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