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College-bound? Take a lesson from Harvard case

June 13, 2017 By Beth Whitehouse beth.whitehouse@newsday.com



College admissions offices can rescind a student's acceptance if that student exhibits behavior that would reflect poorly on the institution. (Credit: Getty Images / iStockphoto / Matej Kastelic)

Time for parents of new high school grads to remind them that admission isn't necessarily certain until they are seated in the classroom of the college that accepted them — as evidenced by Harvard University's recent decision to rescind offers to 10 students who posted offensive memes in a private Facebook group.

While the Harvard case was particularly egregious, with the Harvard Crimson student newspaper reporting that the memes included racist remarks and seemed to condone sexual assault, other actions by accepted students can also cause a university to unroll the welcome mat.

"There's always a caveat," says Sunil Samuel, assistant vice president of admissions at Hofstra University. "Until you are enrolled, sitting in that classroom, you are still working with the office of admission. We hand the incoming class over to the vice president of student affairs during welcome week."

Several issues can cause an offer to be rescinded. For instance, a student must actually graduate high school, Samuel says, and must finish the school year acceptably. "We review final high school transcripts," Samuel says. "We want to see how students end the year."

If a student is caught having lied on the college application, that can also cause a decision reversal, Samuel says.

And social media behavior over the summer can also become an issue. "Every parent needs to have a discussion with their kids about their social media accounts and their public image," Samuel says.

"We don't go trolling, looking for things," Samuel continues. But, in general, if a university is alerted to a situation, the institution will likely investigate it, he says. In the Harvard case, for instance, the Facebook group was created by students accepted to the class of 2021 and included Harvard's name in the group title.

Students need to be aware of the potential impact of their words and online contributions, Samuel says. "Institutions do want to protect the image of their institution," Samuel says. "Every student is a representation of the institution."