Repeat Applications in College Admissions

Yeon-Koo Che[*]   Jinwoo Kim[†]   Youngwoo Koh[‡]

Abstract

We study the application decision of college applicants and its implications when they are allowed to reapply after failing to get admitted in the original application. High-ability students shoot for a better college with the possibility of rejection, while low-ability students settle at a worse college without taking risk of rejection. The repeat applications entail a novel trade-off: it gives high-ability students with bad luck a chance to redraw their scores and get admitted to the colleges that are well-matched to their abilities; meanwhile, it intensifies the competition for good schools and tends to make more students repeat apply and incur the corresponding costs. We show that there is an excessive reapplication and this is amplified by the chain reaction of repeat applications through students in the subsequent cohorts. Consequently, the market becomes more congested and the students' welfare for later cohorts diminishes. A centralized matching via Gale and Shapley's deferred acceptance algorithm entails the same welfare loss, while reducing the pool of reapplicants or the quality gap among colleges improves the welfare.

---

[*]Department of Economics, Columbia University, New York, USA, Email: yeonkooche@gmail.com

[†]Department of Economics, Seoul National University, Seoul, South Korea, Email: jikim72@gmail.com

[‡]College of Economics and Finance, Hanyang University, Seoul, South Korea, Email: youngwoo.koh@gmail.com