

IEC'S RECOMMENDED LETTER NYU SEND TO THE COMMON APPLICATION  
CONDEMNING THE USE OF THE BOX

TO: The Common Application

FROM: New York University

DATE: December 4, 2015

SUBJECT: Stop forcing college applicants to disclose their criminal histories.

The purpose of this letter is to inform the Common Application that New York University condemns its use of THE BOX and demands its immediate removal from the admissions application. If this request is not met, New York University will cease its purchase and use of the Common Application. THE BOX refers to the following two questions alongside boxes requiring applicants to check "yes" or "no."

*Have you ever been found responsible for a disciplinary violation at any educational institution you have attended from the 9th grade (or the international equivalent) forward, whether related to academic misconduct or behavioral misconduct, that resulted in a disciplinary action?*

*Have you ever been adjudicated guilty or convicted of a misdemeanor, felony, or other crime?*

It is well-documented among academic, legal, and community experts that our nation's so-called criminal justice system unfairly targets and punishes Black, Brown, LGBTQ, poor, and undocumented people. Tying access to higher education to a discriminatory and oppressive punishment system sends the message that upholding white supremacy is more important than the lives of those most harmed by mass incarceration. THE BOX produces a chilling effect for applicants with criminal records — who are disproportionately Black and Brown — discouraging them from even completing their applications to avoid the perpetual punishment of surveillance and exclusion.

Furthermore, there is no empirical evidence linking the practice of screening applicants for criminal histories to campus safety. In fact, a study of nearly 300 colleges and universities found no statistically significant difference in campus safety between institutions that screen applicants for criminal records and those that do not. Not only does THE BOX not make us safer, but it is at odds with our commitment to cultivating a community of scholars that is "inclusive of divergent backgrounds and historically underrepresented groups."

Given the overwhelming empirical evidence and the inherent contradiction with our values, New York University demands that the Common Application remove THE BOX from its admissions application.

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Center for Community Alternatives. (2011). Reconsidered: The Use of Criminal History Records in College Admissions. New York, NY.