

Raymond Matthew Glover earned a lot of money - and a lot of bad grades - in his last semester of high school. After Mr. Glover, an honors student, was accepted by his first choice college, the University of Virginia, he began working 35 hours a week in a drugstore to pay his tuition. He often skipped his last class of the day to get to work on time, and he slept through some of his morning classes. In August, admissions officials at Virginia looked at his D, two C's, and two failing grades, and told him to find a new college. Mr. Glover's letter offering admission explicitly said that the offer was conditional upon completing course work with distinguished grades. Most colleges offer admission on the same condition, but seldom revoke their offers. The Virginia admissions office received Mr. Glover's grades in late June, but didn't revoke its offer until August. "By the time they told me, it was too late to get into another university," Mr. Glover says. When he was admitted to the University of Virginia, Mr. Glover passed up a scholarship to West Virginia University. The admissions office at Virginia blames the delay in notifying Mr. Glover of its decision on bad winter weather which extended the school year in the east for many high schools, with the result that when late transcripts arrived the admissions office became swamped.

Was the University's decision to revoke its offer of admission to Mr. Glover fair or unfair. In either case, why?

MODERATOR'S ANSWER: In general, it is fair for a college or university to make a college admission offer conditional upon continued satisfactory academic work through the last semester of high school. In this case, however, the University of Virginia's revocation of its admissions offer, coming in August, created an extreme hardship for Matthew. At the least, the admissions committee should have personally contacted him, have had a committee representative talk to Matthew, and then have reviewed his case in light of all the circumstances. A university ought to do this in any case of revocation, but the University of Virginia had a special obligation to do so given the lateness of its notification to Matthew.

Case from the 1995 Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl. Copyright Robert Ladenson, Illinois Institute of Technology, 1995.