



May 28, 2015, Amstelveen

Let's start off with a **question for the audience**:

How many of you here tonight are high school students (or family/friends of high school students) hoping to get into a good university in the U.S...?

I'd like to wish all of you **brave (and exhausted!) students** an especially warm welcome, a lot of luck, and a healthy dose of resilience in entering the 'Admissions Arms Race', as this process is now often called.

As we'll find out tonight, **getting into a top U.S. school** has never been so difficult – or felt so random and 'unfair' – as right now.

As Chairperson of the Ivy Circle, I hosted our members' meeting just a few weeks ago – with alumni representatives of 20 of the best and most prestigious universities in North America. One of the hottest topics at the table was **Admissions**. One after the other of these very smart, accomplished people around the table lamented, '*I never would have gotten in now!*' or '*What on Earth are these schools looking for? How do we even interview these applicants?*'. When does the free fall in the % of admitted students reach ZERO; i.e., the point where *nobody* is actually 'qualified' to be admitted...?

Indeed. **Who does get in** to these top US schools – and **what do we get out** of this race to the top: '**We**' = As graduates, as the paying parents of these graduates, and as a society or economy at large? Importantly, too, *how did we end up here?*

As a **contrasting benchmark**, of course, we have the **Dutch education** system, where the decision on 'who gets in' happens at the age of 12, as kids are pre-selected for high schools that will lead to university study – and from that point the universities are open (and relatively affordable) to all.

**Is one system better** than the other? It depends on your objective – and your perspective.

We are fortunate tonight to have two leading thinkers to engage with us on this topic:

**Jerome Karabel** is Professor of Sociology at the University of California at Berkeley. The recipient of many prestigious awards and grants, he is also the author of several books, most notably his book *The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton*, which he will discuss with us tonight.

An alumnus of Harvard (both Bachelors and PhD), Professor Karabel also has been associated with Princeton University's School of Sociology. Dr. Karabel is currently working on a new book called *Outlier Nation: The Roots and Consequences of American Distinctiveness*. In addition to his academic work, he writes frequently in such publications as *The New York Times*, *The Huffington Post*, *The New York Review of Books*, *The Nation*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *Le Monde Diplomatique*.

**Alexander Rinnooy Kan** is a Dutch Senator, business leader, and Professor of Economics & Business Studies at the University of Amsterdam. He taught at Columbia University last year as Adjunct Queen Wilhelmina Visiting Professor and is the former head of the Dutch Social Economic Council. In addition to joining the Senate this year, Rinnooy Kan is also co-Chair of the National Science Agenda. The Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant* named him the most influential person in the Netherlands for several years running.

Lastly, although she couldn't be here in person tonight, we also will show a videotaped message from **Harvard Dean Margot Gill**. Dean Gill is the Administrative Dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and Chair of Harvard's Committee on General Scholarships.

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One last observation to set the stage for Professor Karabel's opening talk:

Dr. Karabel **wrote this book 10 years ago**, as an eye-opening historical analysis. But his timely topic is more relevant and **more important now** than ever – as passionate debates about **equality, privilege and responsibility** are literally front page news on both sides of the Atlantic... with **education** at their core.

This past January, The Economist ran a cover story on '*America's New Aristocracy: Education and the inheritance of privilege*', citing **brains** and a **top education** the **most valuable assets** that privileged parents now pass on to their children. Yet just a few months earlier, the OECD had just published a worrying report, showing that social mobility through education is declining around the world. Many kids today cannot hope to exceed or even match the education and opportunity that their parents had – a kind of reversal of the 'American Dream'.

Where do we go from here...?

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This promises to be a provocative discussion – and there **will be time for Q&A**.

We'd especially love to hear questions from some of the students in the audience.

Hollis Kurman