



National Association for
College Admission Counseling

STATE OF COLLEGE ADMISSION 2013



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Preface

The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) offers the *State of College Admission* each year to provide information for students and families; counseling and admission professionals; and school and college administrators to shed light on a process that is subject to many misperceptions because of its high-stakes nature for those to whom it matters most. The 2013 edition—which covers the Fall 2012 admission cycle—marks the eleventh anniversary of this report. The report describes the current landscape related to college admission, as well as important trends in the transition from high school to college using data collected directly from secondary school counseling offices, college admission offices and students.

For the past few years, the theme that has emerged from the *State of College Admission* report is uncertainty in the admission process, for both institutions and students, and that continued to be true for the Fall 2012 admission cycle. Although four-year colleges and universities still accepted nearly two-thirds of applicants, on average, the national acceptance rate has been declining slowly but steadily over the past 10 years. For the most part, this decline can be attributed to growth in the number of applications that each student submits. Although national-level acceptance rates provide important information about the admission process, they can be misleading to students and families, and the very low acceptance rates among the most competitive colleges can be downright scary. The reality that college opportunities are available for the vast majority of students who have prepared adequately is often obscured by the national statistics and the limited focus of national media coverage. That said, the perception of increased competition is not entirely imagined. Most colleges are getting more applications every year, and therefore, have more students to choose from, and some colleges are becoming less selective, whether by design or not.

The trend with acceptance rates is accompanied by an even more pronounced decline in institutional yield rates, which represent the percentage of admitted students who accept the offer of admission and agree to attend. Having to accept many more students than will actually attend complicates the work of admission offices, and makes it nearly impossible to tell a simple story of college admission in the US. In the 10-year period from 2002 to 2009, the average yield rate declined by 12 percentage points from 49 percent to 37 percent. Some colleges use strategies like Early Decision, Early Action, wait lists, and factoring demonstrated interest into the admission decision as ways to maximize their chances of bringing in the desired freshmen class, in number and quality. Colleges also have been affected differently by the recent decline in the number of high school graduates, which has varied widely across regions of the US. The uncertainty that declining yield, and, in some cases, declining high school graduates, creates for colleges also may lead them to seek out more applications, which may exacerbate rather than alleviate the uncertainty problem. Each admission officer was responsible for reading 620 applications in the Fall 2012 admission cycle, on average, and twice as many at certain types of institutions. Understandably, this leaves students wondering how their

applications are evaluated and how they can make themselves stand out among the crowds, and of course, the answer varies depending on the institution evaluating the application.

To some extent, all of this complexity is the price of choice in the system, both for students and for colleges. There is a wonderful variety of postsecondary options available to students, but with that comes the challenge to ensure that all students have the opportunity to attend a college that is a good fit for their educational and personal needs. Navigating the process of preparing for postsecondary education, applying to colleges, and choosing an appropriate institution to attend is daunting and requires guidance that, unfortunately, many students have difficulty accessing. In public schools in the US, the average counselor has a caseload of nearly 500 students, and in some states, as many as 800 to 1,000 students. In addition, public school counselors are able to spend only about a quarter of their time on college counseling, along with the other responsibilities their jobs require.



In good news, there are some indicators that there may be an end in sight to the application scramble among students and colleges. For the first time in 20 years, the percentage of Fall 2012 freshmen who had submitted seven or more applications declined, though only by one percentage point, from 29 to 28 percent. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that some colleges are curbing efforts to bring in as many applications as possible, in favor of more focused targeting of 'good-fit' students who would be likely to attend. And, the dearth of recent high school graduates in some parts of the country—along with an increased national focus on the role of community colleges and transfer as a pathway to the baccalaureate—has led many colleges to reassess their recruitment efforts with transfer students, which has positive implications for colleges and for the college access/completion movement at large. Perhaps most promising is an increased recognition among the education community and policymakers of the importance of college counselors in secondary schools, who are critical to the successful transition from high school to college for so many students.

For now, NACAC hopes that the *2013 State of College Admission* report will shed some light on the complex, but ultimately, rewarding process of college admission.

Introduction

NACAC's *State of College Admission 2013* report provides current and trend data on a number of factors related to college counseling in secondary schools, the activity of postsecondary admission offices and other issues of relevance to the transition from high school to college. Four main sources were used to compile the data included in the report:

- NACAC's annual Counseling Trends Survey for 2012
- NACAC's annual Admission Trends Survey for 2012
- The College Board Annual Survey of Colleges 2013®
- Publicly available data collected by the federal government, including data from the US Department of Education and the US Census Bureau.

NACAC's Counseling Trends Survey

The purpose of this survey is to collect information from secondary school counselors and counseling departments about their priorities and work responsibilities, particularly in relation to their roles in helping students transition to college; their students' academic options and experiences; and their practices in communicating with students, parents and colleges.

In April 2012, NACAC distributed its annual Counseling Trends Survey to a total of 10,000 secondary schools in the United States—2,120 public and private schools that are members of NACAC and a random sample of 7,880 public high schools. The list of public high schools was identified using the US Department of Education's Common Core of Data. Each counseling department received a paper survey form that also included a link to an online survey, providing respondents with two options for completing the survey. Responses were collected through the end of June, 2012.

NACAC received a total of 996 responses—a 10 percent response rate. Table 1 provides a comparison of the characteristics of NACAC Counseling Trends Survey respondents to those of all public and private secondary schools in the US. NACAC survey respondents were 68 percent public, 20 percent private, non-parochial and 12 percent private, parochial, making the sample slightly over-representative of both private, non-parochial and private, parochial schools and under-representative of public schools. Table 1 also shows that NACAC respondents were representative of all public secondary schools in the percentage of students who were eligible for free or reduced price lunch programs. However, NACAC respondent schools reported substantially larger enrollments.



NACAC's Admission Trends Survey

The purpose of this survey is to collect information from college admission offices about application volume; the use of various enrollment management strategies, including wait lists, Early Decision and Early Action; the importance of various factors in the admission decision; and admission office functions, staff, budget and operations.

NACAC administered its 2012 Admission Trends Survey to the 1,366 four-year postsecondary institutions who were members of NACAC, which represented 69 percent of all four-year, not-for-profit, baccalaureate degree-granting, Title-IV institutions in the United States. The survey was initially administered online from mid-November to late December 2012. An invitation to participate, containing a unique web link, was emailed to a representative at each institution. From February to mid-March 2013, the survey was re-issued to those from the original sample who had not yet responded in order to improve the response rate.

NACAC received a total of 446 responses to the survey (a 33 percent response rate), which represented 23 percent of all four-year, not-for-profit, baccalaureate degree-granting, Title-IV institutions in the United States. As shown in Table 2, NACAC Admission Trends Survey respondents were fairly representative of all colleges with respect to control (71 percent private survey respondents compared to 74 percent nationally), as well as geographic region. However, survey respondents tended to be larger, on average, and to have slightly lower yield rates. Private NACAC survey respondents also reported lower selectivity rates.

Table 1. NACAC 2012 Secondary School Counseling Trends Survey respondent characteristics compared to national school characteristics

	NACAC respondents	All schools	NACAC public respondents	All public schools	NACAC private, non-parochial respondents	All private, non-parochial schools	NACAC private, parochial respondents	All private, parochial schools
Total percent of schools	100%	100%	68.1%	89.5%	20.4%	3.3%	11.5%	6.9%
Enrollment								
Mean enrollment	885	582	982	605	658	102	738	369
Free and reduced price lunch¹								
Mean percent eligible	27.8	38.0	39.3	38.0	2.5	--	4.2	--

-- = not available for secondary schools only.

¹ Survey respondents were asked to indicate participation in both federal and state-sponsored programs; national data is available for the federal program only.

NOTE: All NACAC respondent data are from 2012-13. National percentages by type of school and national public school percentage eligible for free and reduced price lunch are from 2009-10. National mean enrollment data are from 2010-11 for public schools and 2009-10 for private schools and all schools combined.

SOURCES: Common Core of Data (2012). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. (Table 4: http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/ipedsdatatools/tables/2000_schoollunch_04.asp).

Digest of Education Statistics. (2012). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. (Tables 5, 37 and 70).

NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2012.

Table 2. NACAC 2012 Admission Trends Survey respondent characteristics compared to national college/university characteristics

	NACAC respondents	All colleges	NACAC public respondents	All public colleges	NACAC private respondents	All private colleges
Total	100%	100%	28.9%	25.7%	71.1%	74.3%
Enrollment						
Mean enrollment	5,361	4,285	12,779	10,403	2,332	2,169
Region						
New England	11.9%	10.4%	6.6%	9.7%	14.0%	10.6%
Middle States	22.8	18.5	15.7	15.0	25.6	19.7
South	20.7	24.0	23.1	27.9	19.8	22.7
Midwest	25.3	29.8	28.9	27.9	24.0	30.5
Southwest	4.0	7.1	5.0	12.5	3.6	5.2
West	15.3	10.2	20.7	6.9	13.0	11.3
Selectivity and Yield						
Mean Selectivity	66.3%	63.9%	66.4%	67.1%	66.2%	62.8%
Mean Yield	32.7	36.9	36.7	41.3	31.2	35.4

New England: Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island

Middle States: Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania

South: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia

Midwest: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota

Southwest: Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas

West: Alaska, California, Hawaii, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Utah, Wyoming

NOTE: Data for all colleges are for 2012-13. The list of colleges was drawn from the 2012-13 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Institutions were selected using the following criteria: US location, four-year, not-for-profit, baccalaureate degree-granting, and Title IV-participating. Of the 1,979 total institutions, 1,241 (63 percent) provided selectivity and yield data for Fall 2012.

SOURCES: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2012.

Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) online Data Center. (2012-13). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

Executive Summary

Highlights from the 2013 *State of College Admission* report include the following findings pertaining to the transition from high school to postsecondary education in the United States.

High School Graduation and College Enrollment

For more than a decade, a population wave had fueled record numbers of high school graduates. That growth has now peaked and for the first time since the 1990's enrollment in postsecondary education declined slightly in 2011. Throughout these changes, racial/ethnic minorities continue to be underrepresented among both high school graduates and college students.

- **Number of High School Graduates Has Peaked after Decade of Growth:** The number of high school graduates in the US reached a peak of 3.43 million in 2009-10 after more than a decade of steady growth. An estimated 3.38 million students graduated in 2012-13. The number of graduates will continue to decline through 2014-15, but will rebound to 3.4 million by 2017-18 and remain near that level through 2021-22. There are wide variations by state and region, and some states are experiencing substantial declines in high school graduates.
- **College Enrollment Rates Level:** As of 2011, approximately 21 million students were enrolled in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, down slightly from 2010, representing the first decline since the early 1990's. However, the decline was not experienced across all sectors of postsecondary education. Enrollment at both public four-year and private, not-for-profit, four-year institutions actually increased slightly from Fall 2010 to Fall 2011, while enrollment at two-year publics and for-profit colleges decreased. Despite this one-year decline in postsecondary enrollment, longer-term projections from the US Department of Education indicate that the total number of college students is expected to gradually increase through 2021 to 24 million.
- **Racial/Ethnic Minorities and Low-Income Students Underrepresented in College:** High school completion and college enrollment rates vary substantially by both race/ethnicity and income. Only 54 percent of high school completers from the lowest income quintile transitioned to college in 2011, compared to 82 percent from the highest income quintile. In 2011, black and Hispanic persons constituted approximately 35 percent of the traditional college-aged population, but they represented only about 29 percent of students enrolled in postsecondary education. Hispanics were particularly underrepresented among private and four-year institutions.

Applications to College

The recent growth in applications to four-year colleges has continued, with a majority of colleges reporting an increase in application volume. On average, four-year institutions nationwide accepted approximately 64 percent of all students who applied for admission.

- **Application Growth Continues for Most Colleges:** Sixty-four percent of colleges continued to experience increases in the number of applications they received in 2012. However, a substantial minority of colleges (27 percent) reported experiencing decreases, which is similar to the figures reported for 2011. The number of applications that individual students submit remained high. Twenty-eight percent of Fall 2012 freshman had submitted seven or more applications for admission, down slightly from 29 percent in Fall 2011.
- **Online Applications Increase:** For the Fall 2012 admission cycle, four-year colleges and universities received an average of 89 percent of their applications online, up from 85 percent in both Fall 2010 and Fall 2011.
- **Colleges Accept Nearly Two-Thirds of Applicants, on Average:** The average selectivity rate—percentage of applicants who are offered admission—at four-year colleges and universities in the US was 63.9 percent for Fall 2012, nearly identical to Fall 2011 figures, yet continuing the trend of decreasing acceptance rates since 2002. The average institutional yield rate—percentage of admitted students who enroll—was 36.9 percent, again continuing the downward trend in yield since 2007.

Admission Strategies: Early Decision, Early Action and Wait Lists

Though employed by a minority of institutions in the US, admission strategies like Early Decision, Early Action and wait lists are fixtures of the college admission landscape, likely due to the presence of such policies at America's most selective colleges and universities.

- **Early Decision (ED) Activity Holds Steady; Early Action (EA) Activity Continues to Increase:** Half of the colleges surveyed reported increases in the number of Early Decision applications in 2012, down slightly from 2011 when 55 percent of colleges reported increases. Forty-seven percent of colleges reported increases in ED admission for Fall 2012, up from 39 percent for Fall 2011 and 36 percent for Fall 2010. A large majority (69 percent) of colleges reported an increase in Early Action applications and a similar proportion (68 percent) reported increases in the number of students who were admitted through Early Action.

- **At Colleges with Early Decision (ED) Policies, the Gap in Acceptance Rates Edges Up:** For the Fall 2012 admission cycle, colleges with Early Decision policies reported a higher acceptance rate for their ED applicants as compared to all applicants (62 percent versus 52 percent). Although this 10-percentage point gap is slightly higher than the past two years (8 percentage points for Fall 2010 and 6 percentage points for Fall 2011), it is still substantially lower than the 14- to 15-percentage point gaps that were observed in 2008 and 2009.
- **Fewer Colleges Use Wait Lists; Chances of Wait List Acceptance Drop:** The percentage of institutions that used wait lists for the Fall 2012 admission cycle was 43 percent, down from 45 percent in 2011 and 48 percent in 2010. Institutions accepted an average of 25 percent of all students who chose to remain on wait lists, down from 31 percent in Fall 2011.

Factors in the Admission Decision

The factors that admission officers use to evaluate applications have remained largely consistent over the past 20 years. Students' academic achievements—which include grades, strength of curriculum and admission test scores—constitute the most important factors in the admission decision.

- **Admission Offices Identify Grades, High School Curriculum and Test Scores as Top Factors:** The top factors in the admission decision were (in order): grades in college preparatory courses, strength of curriculum, standardized admission test scores, and overall high school grade point average. Among the next most important factors were the essay, student's demonstrated interest, counselor and teacher recommendations, class rank, and extracurricular activities.
- **Student Background Information:** About one quarter of colleges rated race/ethnicity, first-generation status and high school attended as at least moderately important as factors that influence how the main factors in admission decisions are evaluated.

School Counselors and College Counseling

Access to college information and counseling in school is a significant benefit to students in the college application process. For many students, particularly those in public schools, college counseling is limited at best. Counselors are few in number, often have large student caseloads and are limited in the amount of time they are able to dedicate to college counseling.

- **Student-to-Counselor Ratio:** According to data from the US Department of Education, in 2010-11, the national public school student-to-counselor ratio was 473:1, including K-12 schools. NACAC survey data indicated an average secondary school student-to-counselor ratio, including part-time staff, of 278:1.
- **Time Spent Counseling for College:** On average, public school counselors spent 23 percent of their time on postsecondary counseling in 2012, while their private school counterparts spent 53 percent of their time on college counseling.
- **College Counseling Staff:** In 2012, 31 percent of public schools reported employing at least one counselor (full- or part-time) whose exclusive responsibility was to provide college counseling, compared to 76 percent of private schools.

The College Admission Office

College admission offices are comprised of individuals who have varied academic and professional backgrounds. Admission office requirements, expenditures and procedures vary based on the type of institution.

- **Ratio of Applicants to Admission Officers:** On average, the ratio of applications to admission officers at colleges and universities in the US was 620:1 in 2012, down from 662:1 in 2011. The average ratio at public institutions was 1,214:1, compared to 403:1 at private institutions.
- **Skills to Lead the Admission Office:** Previous admission experience was rated as the most important qualification for Chief Enrollment Officers. The second most important qualification was statistics/data analysis followed closely by marketing/public relations and personnel/resource management experience.
- **Cost to Recruit:** On average, colleges and universities spent about \$451 to recruit each applicant for Fall 2012 admission, \$677 to recruit each admitted student and \$2,432 to recruit each enrolled student (when admission staff salaries and benefits were included in the admission office budget).

Chapter I

High School Graduation and College Enrollment

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- High School Completion
- The Transition from High School to College
- College Enrollment

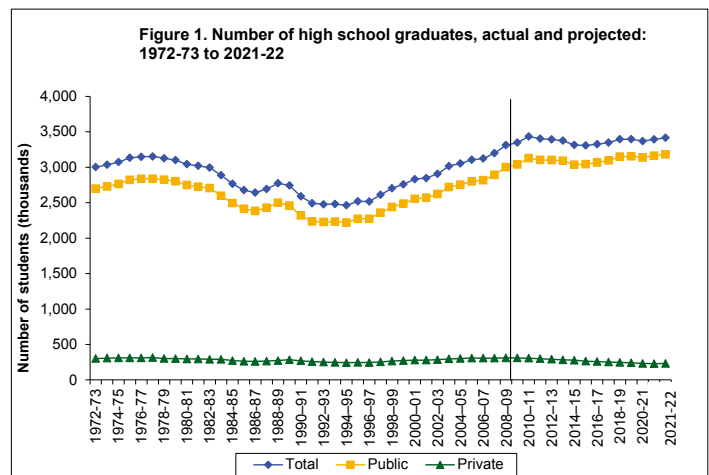
Assisting students with the transition from high school graduation to college enrollment is at the core of NACAC’s mission. Students’ participation in postsecondary education is becoming increasingly important for both individual success and for the economic future of the nation. In 2011, full-time, full-year earners age 25-34 with a high school diploma reported mean annual earnings of only \$29,950, compared to \$44,970 for those with a bachelor’s degree and \$59,230 for those with a master’s degree or higher.¹ Over the course of a 40-year working life, researchers have estimated that the typical bachelor’s degree recipient will earn 74 percent more than a high school graduate.² As a group, college graduates also enjoy higher job satisfaction and are more likely to receive employer-sponsored pensions and health insurance. Other factors associated with increased levels of education include: lower levels of unemployment and poverty; decreased reliance on public assistance programs; healthier lifestyles; and higher levels of civic engagement, including volunteerism and voting.³ In 2012, only 31 percent of all adults age 25 and older had obtained at least a bachelor’s degree.⁴

High School Completion

INCREASE IN HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

According to projections published by the US Department of Education, the number of high school graduates in the US reached a peak of 3.43 million in 2009-10 after more than a decade of steady growth. An estimated 3.38 million students graduated in 2012-13. The number of graduates will continue to decline through 2014-15, but will rebound to 3.4 million by 2017-18 and remain near that number through 2021-22.⁵ This pattern of change in the

number of high school graduates—illustrated in Figure 1—largely reflects overall changes in the high-school-aged population, rather than increases in the percentage of students completing high school. High school completion rates have increased only slightly since the mid-1990s.⁶



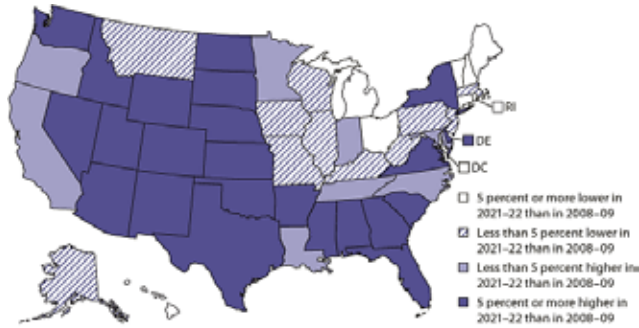
SOURCE: Digest of Education Statistics. (2012). US Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. (Table 122).

The pattern of change in high school graduates varies widely by state and region. At the national level, the number of public high school graduates is expected to have increased by five percent between 2008-09 and 2021-22. However, some states will experience high rates of increase in public school graduates, including

¹ US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2013). *The Condition of Education 2013* (NCES 2013-037), Annual Earnings of Young Adults.
² Carnevale, A., Rose, S., and Cheah, B. (2011). *The College Payoff: Education, Occupations, Lifetime Earnings*. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce: Washington, DC.
³ Baum, S., Ma, J., and Payea, K. (2010). *Education Pays 2010: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society*. College Board: Washington, DC.
⁴ US Census Bureau. (2012). "Educational Attainment in the United States: 2012 Table 2."
⁵ *Digest of Education Statistics*. (2012). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. (Table 122).
⁶ Chapman, C., Laird, J., Ifill, N., and KewalRamani, A. (2011). *High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 1972-2009*. US Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

Nevada (33 percent), Utah (31 percent), Texas (28 percent), and Colorado (25 percent); and others will experience substantial decreases, including the District of Columbia (28 percent), Vermont (21 percent) and Ohio (18 percent). Overall, increases will be seen in the South (11 percent) and West (8 percent), and decreases will be seen in the Midwest (5 percent). The number of public high school graduates in the Northeast will remain relatively the same.⁷ Figure 2 illustrates the relative magnitude of changes in the number of public high school graduates by state for this time period.

Figure 2. Projected percentage change in public high school graduates by state: School years 2008-09 to 2021-22



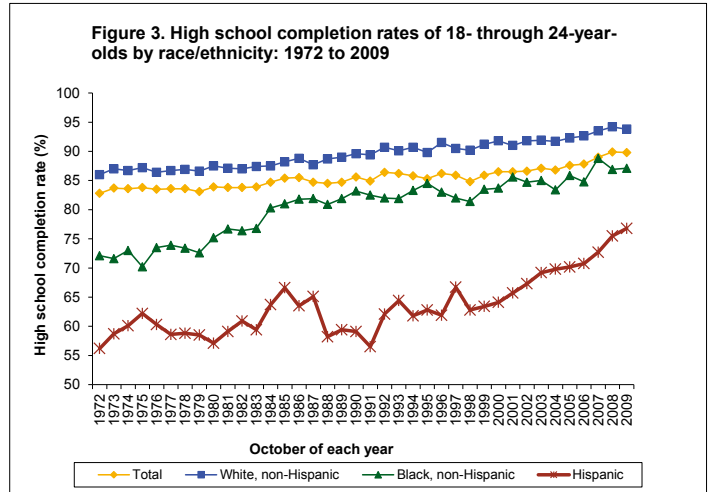
SOURCE: *Projections of Education Statistics to 2021*. (2013). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. (Figure 8).

HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION RATES⁸ BY RACE/ETHNICITY, INCOME AND GENDER

High school completion rates vary substantially among different groups of students. For example, in 2009, 94 percent of white 18- through 24-year olds completed high school, compared to 87 percent of black and 77 percent of Hispanic youth. As shown in Figure 3, the gap between black and white students narrowed considerably between the early 1970s and mid-1980s, but has remained between 5 and 8 percentage points since that time. The gap between white and Hispanic students has decreased slightly in the last decade, but remains near 20 percentage points.⁹

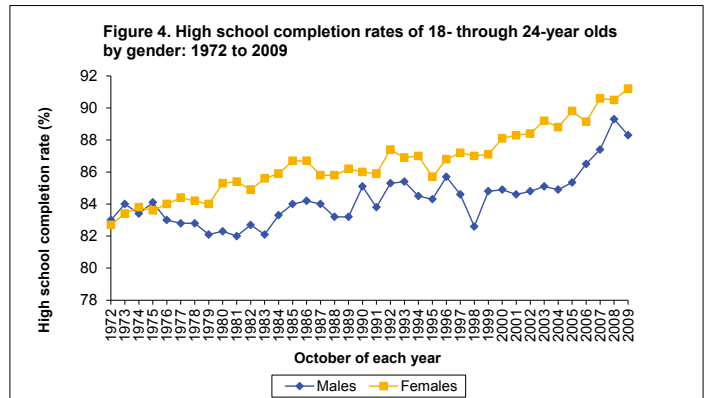
Important differences also exist among students from different income backgrounds. In 2011, the average high school graduation rate among the top income quartile of dependent 18- through 24-year olds was 91 percent. Students in the third quartile fared nearly as well at 88 percent, followed by 83 percent for the second income quartile. The average graduation rate for students in the bottom quartile was only 72 percent—19 percentage points below that of students with the highest family incomes.¹⁰

In every year since 1976, women have completed high school at a higher rate than men. In 2009—the most recent year for which data are available—the gap was three percentage points (see Figure 4).¹¹



NOTE: Status completion rates measure the percentage of 18- through 24-year-olds who have left high school and who also holds a high school credential, including regular diplomas and alternative credentials such as GEDs. Beginning in 2003, respondents were able to identify as “more than one race.” The 2003 through 2008 white, non-Hispanic and black, non-Hispanic categories consist of individuals who considered themselves to be one race and who did not identify themselves as Hispanic. The Hispanic category includes Hispanics of all races and racial combinations. Because of small sample size, American Indians/Alaska Natives and Asian/Pacific Islanders are included in the totals but not shown separately. The “more than one race” category is also included in the total in 2003 through 2008 but not shown separately due to small sample size.

SOURCE: Chapman, C., Laird, J., Ifill, N., and KewalRamani, A. (2011). *Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 1972-2009*. National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC. (Table 11).



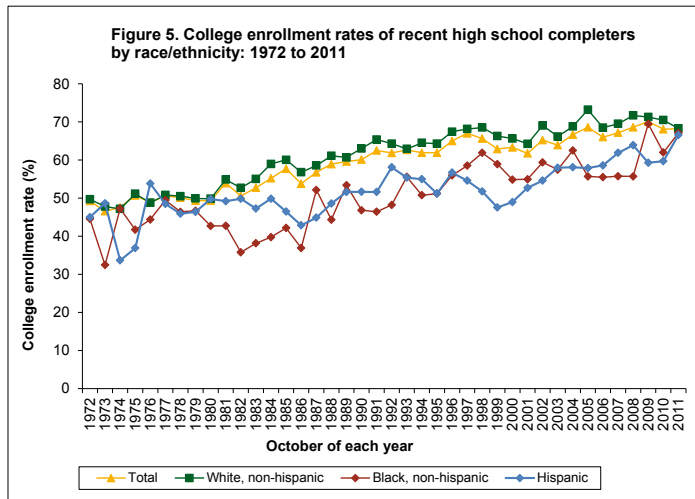
SOURCE: Chapman, C., Laird, J., Ifill, N., and KewalRamani, A. (2011). *Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 1972-2009*. National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC. (Table 11).

The Transition from High School to College

COLLEGE ENROLLMENT RATES OF HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETERS

From the early 1970s through 2011, the percentage of high school completers who go on to college fluctuated but also showed an overall pattern of increase, peaking at 70 percent in 2009. The percentage has mostly hovered in the high-60 percent range since 2004 (see Figure 5).

⁷ *Projections of Education Statistics to 2021*. (2012). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.
⁸ High school completers include both diploma and GED recipients.
⁹ Chapman, C., Laird, J., Ifill, N., and KewalRamani, A. (2011). *Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 1972-2009*. National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC.
¹⁰ Mortenson, T. (2012). “Family Income and Unequal Educational Opportunity, 1970 to 2011.” *Postsecondary Education Opportunity*, Number 245, November.
¹¹ Chapman, C., Laird, J., Ifill, N., and KewalRamani, A. (2011). *Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 1972-2009*. National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC.



NOTE: Enrollment in college as of October each year for individuals ages 16 through 24 who completed high school during the preceding 12 months. High school completers include both diploma and GED recipients. Data for Hispanics for all years except 1972 and 2011 are three-year moving averages to compensate for relatively large sampling errors caused by small sample sizes. Beginning in 2003, data for white, non-Hispanic exclude persons identifying as two or more races.

SOURCE: *Digest of Education Statistics*. (2012). U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. (Table 235).

COLLEGE ENROLLMENT RATES BY RACE/ETHNICITY, INCOME, GENDER, AND HIGH SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

As with high school completion, there are persistent gaps in rates of transition from high school to postsecondary enrollment among different groups of students. As shown in Figure 5, both black and Hispanic students who complete high school are less likely than white students to enroll in college, yet the gap has decreased to about one percentage point between white and black students and two percentage points between white and Hispanic students.

Even more dramatic differences are seen among high school completers of different income backgrounds. High school completers age 16 through 24 who are from the highest family income quintile transitioned to postsecondary education at a rate of 82 percent in 2011. Students from the middle 60 percent of family incomes continued to college at a rate of 66 percent. Only 54 percent of high school completers from the lowest income quintile enrolled in a two- or four-year college the fall following high school graduation in 2011.¹²

Results of NACAC’s Counseling Trends Survey 2012 provide further evidence of this pattern. Counselors at schools with the highest proportion of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch (FRPL)—a proxy for family income—reported lower total college enrollment rates for their graduates and much lower four-year college enrollment rates. Counselors at schools with more students in the FRPL program reported that their schools’ graduates had higher enrollment rates at two-year colleges.¹³ In addition, students who graduated from private high schools were much more likely to enroll in postsecondary education immediately after high school

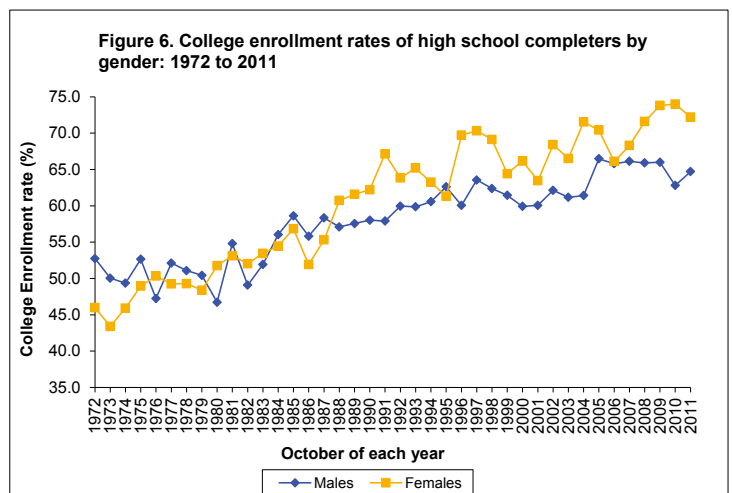
than students from public high schools, and they were nearly twice as likely to enroll in four-year colleges. However, they were much less likely to enroll in two-year colleges (see Table 3).¹⁴

Table 3. Mean college enrollment rates of high school graduates at Counseling Trends Survey respondent schools by school characteristics: 2012

	Four-year institutions	Two-year institutions	Total college enrollment rate
Total	63.5%	21.6%	85.1%
Control			
Public	49.3	30.0	79.2
Private	93.6	4.2	97.8
Private non-parochial	95.2	3.2	98.3
Private parochial	90.7	6.2	96.9
Enrollment			
Fewer than 500 students	60.4	22.5	82.8
500 to 999	66.5	19.2	85.7
1,000 to 1,499	68.0	20.6	88.6
1,500 to 1,999	61.1	24.6	85.7
2,000 or more	58.3	26.6	84.9
Free and reduced price lunch			
0 to 25% of students eligible	69.2	20.0	88.9
26 to 50%	44.9	32.7	77.6
51 to 75%	39.7	34.2	73.8
76 to 100%	36.9	34.6	71.5
Student-to-counselor ratio			
100:1 or fewer	69.1	17.9	86.9
101:1 to 200:1	71.8	16.7	88.5
201:1 to 300:1	61.4	23.0	84.4
301:1 to 400:1	56.4	26.6	83.0
401:1 to 500:1	58.0	25.2	83.2
More than 500:1	59.6	24.3	83.9

SOURCE: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2012.

Gender differences in transition rates also have emerged since the late 1980s. Since this time, women have enrolled in college at a higher rate than men in almost every year. The gender gap in college enrollment reached a peak of 11 percentage points in 2010, but has fluctuated in recent years. In 2011, the gender gap was about 8 percentage points (see Figure 6).



SOURCE: *Digest of Education Statistics*. (2012). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. (Table 234).

¹² *Digest of Education Statistics*. (2012). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. (Table 236).

¹³ Correlation between percent eligible for FRPL and: total college attendance rate (-.490), four-year college attendance rate (-.672), two-year college attendance rate (.567), $p < .01$

¹⁴ Correlation between private school status and: total college attendance rate (.479), four-year college attendance rate (.713), two-year college attendance rate (-.644), $p < .01$

College Enrollment

In Fall 2011—the most recent year for which data are available—20.99 million students were enrolled in degree-granting postsecondary institutions. Of that total, 15.1 million (72 percent) were enrolled in public institutions and 13.5 million (64 percent) were enrolled in four-year institutions.¹⁵ The Fall 2011 total is down slightly from 21.02 million in 2010, representing the first decline since the early 1990s; however, the decline was not experienced across all sectors of postsecondary education. Enrollment at both public four-year and private, not-for-profit, four-year institutions actually increased slightly from Fall 2010 to Fall 2011, while enrollment at two-year publics and for-profit colleges decreased. Despite this one-year decline in postsecondary enrollment, longer-term projections from the US Department of Education indicate that the total number of college students is expected to gradually increase through 2021. Total enrollment increased 46 percent from 1996 to 2010 and is projected to increase an additional 15 percent, to 24 million, between 2010 and 2021.¹⁶

COLLEGE ENROLLMENT BY RACE/ETHNICITY, INCOME AND GENDER

Underrepresentation of certain groups in postsecondary education is a direct consequence of the different rates of high school completion and transition to college discussed earlier in the chapter. Although minority enrollment in postsecondary education has become slightly more reflective of the national population, some minority groups are still underrepresented, especially at four-year institutions. In 2011, black and Hispanic persons constituted approximately 35 percent of the traditional college-aged population, but they represented only about 29 percent of students enrolled in postsecondary education. Hispanics were particularly underrepresented among private and four-year institutions. Asian/Pacific Islanders were somewhat over-represented in all sectors of higher education, with the exception of private, two-year institutions, compared to their population share (see Table 4). However, a study conducted by the US Government Accountability Office highlighted important differences among subgroups of this population.¹⁷ In addition, more women than men have been enrolled in college for the past 30 years, and Department of Education projections indicate that this gender gap will continue to widen until at least 2021.¹⁸

Table 4. Share of enrollment in postsecondary education by race/ethnicity in comparison with age 18 through 24 population share: 2011

	White, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific Islander	American Indian/Alaska Native
Percent of population age 18 through 24	56.7%	14.7%	20.3%	5.2%	0.9%
Percent of all students enrolled in postsecondary education¹					
Total	61.2	15.1	14.3	6.3	0.9
Control					
Public	61.0	13.8	15.5	6.6	1.0
Four-year	65.6	12.2	12.3	6.9	0.9
Two-year	56.1	15.5	19.1	6.1	0.6
Private	68.6	13.4	8.6	6.7	0.6
Four-year	68.8	13.2	8.6	6.7	0.6
Two-year	49.2	30.2	12.4	4.3	2.5
Type					
Four-year or higher	64.6	14.6	11.3	6.5	0.8
Two-year	55.2	16.2	19.4	6.0	1.1

¹ Includes not-for-profit institutions only.

SOURCES: *Digest of Education Statistics*. (2012). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. (Table 268, 264).

Annual Estimates of the Population by Sex, Age, Race, and Hispanic Origin for the United States: July 1, 2011. (2012). US Census Bureau, Washington DC: Population Division.

¹⁵ *Digest of Education Statistics*. (2012). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. (Table 223).

¹⁶ *Projections of Education Statistics to 2021*. (2012). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. (Table 20).

¹⁷ *Information Sharing Could Help Institutions Identify and Address Challenges Some Asian Americans and Pacific Islander Students Face*. (2007). US Government Accountability Office: Washington, DC.

¹⁸ *Projections of Education Statistics to 2021*. (2012). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics (Table 20).

Chapter 2

Applications to College

CONTENTS

- Application Change Over Time
- Selectivity and Yield
- The Admission “Interface”
- Cost of Applying to College
- Gender Trends in College Applications

Application Change Over Time

Results of NACAC's 2012 Admission Trends Survey indicate that nearly two-thirds of colleges (64 percent) reported an increase from the previous year in the number of applications they received. Over the past 15 years, the proportion of colleges reporting increases has ranged from about two-thirds to about three-quarters of those surveyed (see Figure 7).

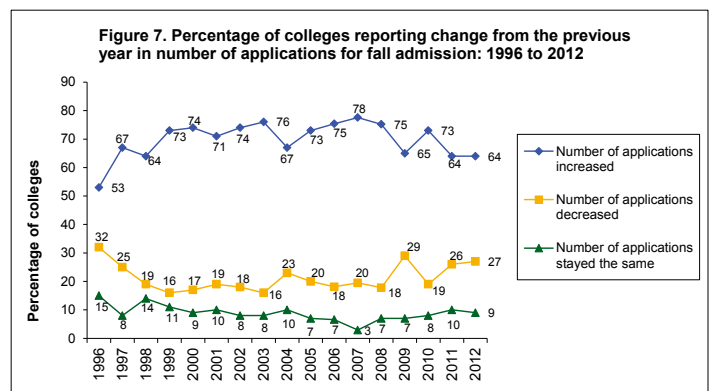
The application increases documented in recent years are due in part to the increased number of high school graduates—which peaked with the 2010 graduating class—but also to an increase in the number of applications each student submits (see Chapter 1). From 1990 to 2011, the proportion of freshman who had submitted three or more applications increased from 61 percent to 79 percent. For Fall 2012 freshmen, that proportion decreased slightly to 77 percent. Similarly, the percentage of students who submitted seven or more applications grew from nine percent to 29 percent from 1990 to 2011, before declining slightly to 28 percent in Fall 2012 (see Figure 8).

Selectivity and Yield

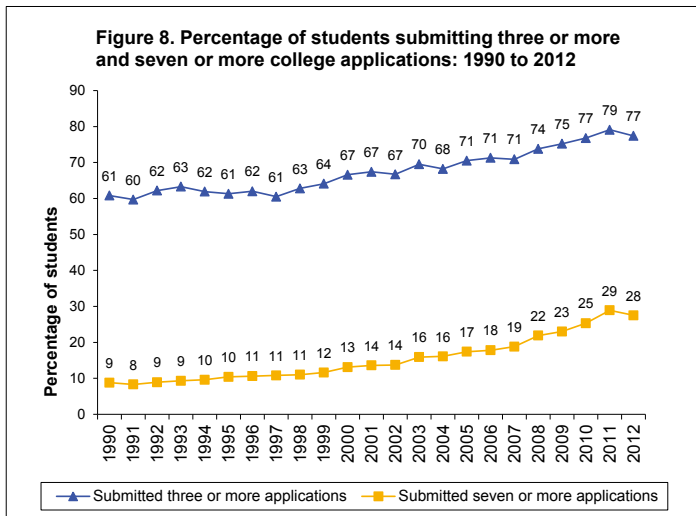
SELECTIVITY

Selectivity is defined simply as the proportion of applicants who are offered admission, and is usually expressed as a percentage—(number

of acceptances/number of applications) x 100. Higher selectivity is equated with lower acceptance rates (i.e., a relatively small number of applicants are admitted). The selectivity rates of US postsecondary institutions range from acceptance of fewer than 10 percent to more than 90 percent of applicants. Although the mainstream media tends to focus on the most selective colleges, the average acceptance rate across all four-year institutions in the US is nearly two-thirds (63.9 percent), according to most recent data (Fall 2012). This acceptance rate has been decreasing over the last 10 years—from 69.6 percent in 2003. In addition, for Fall 2012, private institutions reported lower acceptance rates than public institutions (see Table 5).



SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2012.



SOURCES: Pryor, J.H., Eagan, K., Blake, L.P., Hurtado, S., Berdan, J., Case, M.H. (2013). *The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2012*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

Pryor, J.H., DeAngelo, L., Blake, L.P., Hurtado, S., Tran, S. (2008-2012). *The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 2007-2011*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

Pryor, J.H., Hurtado, S., Saena, V.B., Santos, J.L., Korn, W.S. (2007). *The American Freshman: Forty Year Trends*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

Institutions that accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants are generally considered to be the most selective. On average, this group of colleges and universities receives many more applications per institution when compared to their less selective counterparts (see Table 6). These institutions also are much more likely to offer the Early Decision application option and to maintain a wait list, in part to manage the increased application volume (see Chapter 3).

However, as Table 6 also shows, the most selective colleges as a group received 33 percent of all applications for Fall 2012 admission, and they represented only 21 percent of all full-time, first-year undergraduate students enrolled in four-year colleges and universities. Most students (71 percent) were enrolled in institutions with selectivity rates between 50 and 85 percent.

YIELD

An institution's yield rate is defined as the percentage of admitted students who decide to enroll—(number of enrollments/number of admitted students) x 100. From an institutional perspective, yield is a very important statistic. Admission offices conduct sophisticated analyses to predict yield rates in order to ensure they will fill their freshman classes with students who are a good fit for their institutions. Admission officers also engage in a variety of outreach efforts to enhance the likelihood that students will attend their institutions.

Table 5. Mean selectivity and yield rates by institutional characteristics: Fall 2012

	Selectivity	Yield
Total	63.9%	36.9%
Control		
Public	67.1	41.3
Private	62.8	35.4
Enrollment		
Fewer than 3,000 students	63.9	36.9
3,000 to 9,999	62.8	36.4
10,000 or more	66.2	37.6
Selectivity		
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	36.1	40.3
50 to 70 percent	61.3	33.9
71 to 85 percent	77.4	33.9
More than 85 percent	92.7	48.3
Yield		
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	64.3	21.8
30 to 45 percent	62.9	36.6
46 to 60 percent	66.6	51.7
More than 60 percent	63.5	76.8

NOTE: The list of colleges was drawn from the 2012–13 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) using the online IPEDS Data Center. Institutions were selected using the following criteria: US location, four-year, not-for-profit, baccalaureate degree-granting, and Title IV-participating. Of the 1,979 total institutions, 1,241 (63 percent) provided selectivity and yield data for Fall 2012.

SOURCE: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) online Data Center. (2012-13). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

For the Fall 2012 freshman class, the average yield rate among four-year colleges and universities was 36.9 percent, meaning only slightly more than one-third of students admitted to a given institution accepted those offers of admission (see Table 5). The average yield rate has declined steadily in recent years from 42.9 percent in Fall 2009 to 39.5 percent in Fall 2010 and 38.0 percent in Fall 2011. As shown in Figure 8, students on average are applying to an increasing number of institutions. Consequently, the admission office's task of predicting yield rates and obtaining target enrollment numbers is more complex.

Table 6. Applications and enrollment by selectivity: Fall 2012

Selectivity	National share of institutions	Average number of applications per institution	National share of applications	National share of full-time, first-year students enrolled
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	20.7%	7,427	33.2%	20.5%
50 to 70 percent	41.7	4,490	40.1	42.7
71 to 85 percent	25.9	3,977	22.1	28.7
More than 85 percent	11.6	1,838	4.6	8.1

NOTE: The list of colleges was drawn from the 2012-13 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) using the online IPEDS Data Center. Institutions were selected using the following criteria: US location, four-year, not-for-profit, baccalaureate degree-granting, and Title IV-participating. Of the 1,979 total institutions, 1,241 (63 percent) provided selectivity data for Fall 2012.

SOURCE: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) online Data Center. (2012-13). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

The Admission “Interface”

Although the admission process continues to rely heavily on personal contact and paper, technology is being used in specific ways to make the process more manageable. For example, students use technology to research college options, to contact colleges with admission inquiries and, in most cases, to submit applications. Institutions rely on technology to market to prospective students and to more easily and effectively disseminate information about their institutions and their admission procedures.

ONLINE APPLICATIONS

For the Fall 2012 admission cycle, four-year colleges and universities received an average of 89 percent of their applications online, up from 85 percent in both Fall 2010 and Fall 2011. Enrollment size was directly related to the proportion of applications received online. Larger institutions were more likely to receive applications online. Institutions with lower yield rates also received higher percentages of online applications compared to their counterparts (see Table 7).¹ The association with yield rates suggests the ease of applying online may translate into more applications that are not likely to result in enrollments.

Table 7. Mean percentage of applications received online by institutional characteristics: 2012

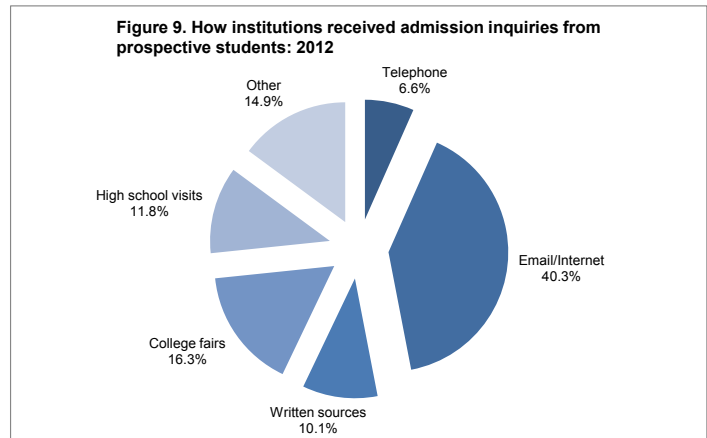
	Mean percentage of online applications
Total	88.8%
Control	
Public	90.6
Private	88.1
Enrollment	
Fewer than 3,000 students	87.0
3,000 to 9,999	88.7
10,000 or more	93.7
Selectivity	
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	93.3
50 to 70 percent	87.2
71 to 85 percent	88.9
More than 85 percent	89.0
Yield	
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	91.3
30 to 45 percent	90.1
46 to 60 percent	83.1
More than 60 percent	71.6

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2012.

HOW STUDENTS APPROACH COLLEGES

Students use a variety of media to contact colleges about admission; however, email/Internet is the most popular. For the Fall 2012 admission cycle, colleges reported 40 percent of all admission inquiries were received via email/Internet. College fairs were the second most prevalent at 16 percent, followed by high school

visits and written sources (12 and 10 percent, respectively) (see Figure 9). Phone calls were the least utilized means of contacting colleges. In the “other” category, colleges reported hearing from students through drop-in visits to the campus; open houses and other on-campus events; referrals; and submission of application components, including test scores and transcripts.



SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2012.

In comparison to private institutions, public colleges and universities reported receiving more student inquiries through both high school visits (16 percent versus 11 percent) and telephone calls (10 percent versus 8 percent). Private institutions received more inquiries through written sources (11 percent versus 7 percent). Yield rate was positively associated with inquiries through phone calls and college fairs. Institutions with larger undergraduate enrollment were more likely to receive inquiries through telephone calls and less likely to receive written inquiries.²

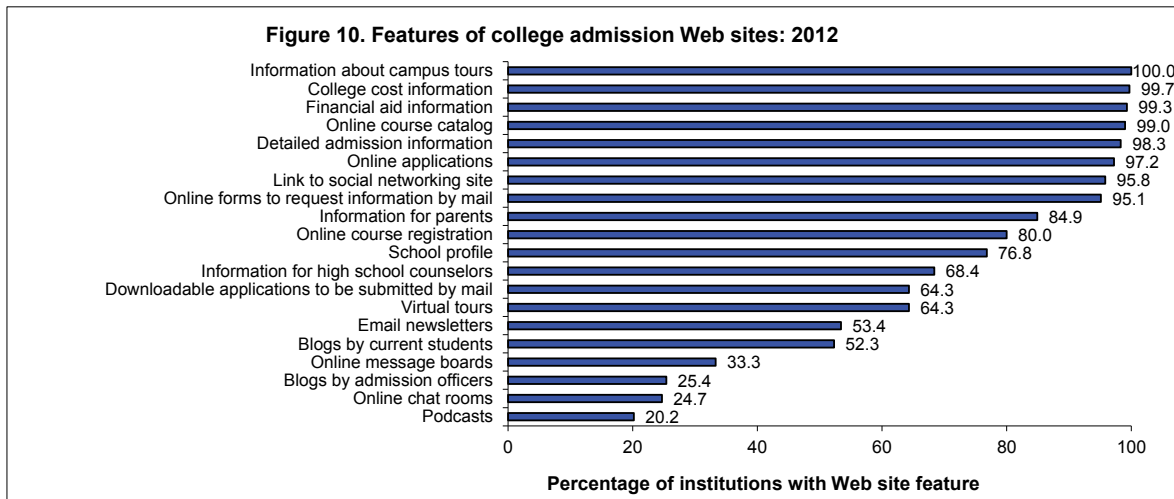
COLLEGE ADMISSION WEBSITES

Many institutions post admission-related information and services on their websites, making it easier for students to learn about and apply to their institutions. All or nearly all institutions have certain features, including information about campus tours, college cost information, financial aid information, online course catalogs, detailed admission information, online applications, and online forms to request information by mail (see Figure 10). In 2012, 85 percent of colleges and universities reported offering information on their websites tailored to parents of prospective students. A majority (68 percent) reported that they offer information intended for high school counselors.

Results of recent Admission Trends Surveys indicate colleges’ integration of social media tools continues to grow rapidly. In 2012, 96 percent of respondents reported they provide links to their colleges’ social networking sites (up from 39 percent in 2008), and 52 percent reported offering blogs by current students (up from

¹ Correlation between percent of online applications and: enrollment (.185), and yield (-.276), p < .01

² Correlation between public college status and: inquiries from written sources (-.169), p < .01; phone calls (.142), high school visits (.143) p < .05; Correlation between yield rate and: inquiries from telephone (.199), college fairs (.168), p < .01; Correlation between undergraduate enrollment and: written sources (-.198), telephone calls (.294), p < .01



SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2012.

42 percent in 2007). Some colleges and universities also have blogs by admission officers (25 percent), podcasts (20 percent) and online message boards (33 percent) (see Figure 10).

HOW COLLEGES NOTIFY STUDENTS OF THE ADMISSION DECISION

Mailing letters is the standard practice for colleges and universities to notify students of admission decisions. Nearly all institutions that responded to NACAC’s 2012 Admission Trends Survey reported mailing letters (98 percent). However, colleges do use other means, in addition to letters, to contact students about admission decisions. For the Fall 2012 admission cycle, 51 percent allowed applicants to check their admission status on the college’s website, and 49 percent contacted students by email. Nearly half (49 percent) notified students by phone. Though not specified on the survey, it is likely most of these institutions notify a sub-set of accepted students by phone rather than the entire group. Only six percent of colleges reported notifying students by text message.

Public colleges were much more likely than private colleges to allow prospective students to check their admission status on the website (77 percent versus 41 percent), and private institutions were more likely to notify students by phone (56 percent versus 29 percent). Larger colleges also were more likely to use the website for admission notification, while smaller colleges were more likely to use phone calls.³

Cost of Applying to College

According to results of the College Board’s Annual Survey of Colleges 2013⁶, 86 percent of four-year, not-for-profit colleges had an application fee, which averaged \$42. Larger institutions and more selective colleges tended to have higher fees (see Table 8).⁴ Of those institutions charging application fees, 85 percent waived them for

students with financial need.⁵ Private colleges were somewhat more likely than public colleges to waive fees (88 versus 80 percent), as were more selective institutions and those with lower yield.⁶

Gender Trends in College Applications

According to US Department of Education data, females, on average, comprised 58 percent of applicants to four-year colleges for Fall 2012 admission. They comprised 58 percent of accepted students and 56 percent of enrolled students. The average acceptance rate for male applicants was slightly lower than that of female applicants (63.1 percent versus 64.4 percent, respectively).⁷

Table 8. Percentage of institutions with application fees and fee waivers and mean application fee amounts by institutional characteristics: 2012

	Percentage of institutions with application fee	For those institutions that have application fees:	
		Mean application fee amount	Percentage of institutions allowing fee waiver for financial need
Total	86.2%	\$ 42.23	85.1%
Control			
Public	89.8	41.60	79.5
Private	84.2	42.60	88.4
Enrollment			
Fewer than 3,000 students	83.2	39.43	92.0
3,000 to 9,999	90.3	44.04	87.6
10,000 or more	95.6	48.64	83.6
Selectivity			
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	88.2	50.75	92.1
50 to 70 percent	85.7	39.88	93.7
71 to 85 percent	86.1	39.99	89.1
More than 85 percent	89.7	36.64	73.0
Yield			
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	85.8	43.03	96.3
30 to 45 percent	88.8	41.57	91.2
46 to 60 percent	88.4	38.61	70.5
More than 60 percent	81.7	41.64	75.3

SOURCE: College Board Annual Survey of Colleges 2013.⁶ Data presented here include four-year, not-for-profit, bachelor’s degree granting institutions in the US only.

³ Correlation between using website for admission notification and: public control (.372), p < .01; enrollment (.151), p < .05; Correlation between using phone for admission notification and: private control (.259), enrollment (-.252), p < .01

⁴ Correlation between application fee amount and: enrollment (.171), selectivity (.320), p < .01

⁵ NACAC recommends that institutions of higher education consider waiving application fees for low-income students. The fee waiver guidelines are available on the NACAC website: www.nacacnet.org/studentinfo/feewaiver.

⁶ Correlation between waiving application fee and private status (.121), selectivity (.164), yield (-.253), p < .01

⁷ Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) online Data Center. (2012-13). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Only colleges meeting the following criteria were included: US location, four-year, not-for-profit, baccalaureate degree-granting, Title IV-participating.

Chapter 3

Admission Strategies

CONTENTS

- Definitions of Early Decision and Early Action
- Prevalence of Early Decision, Early Action and Wait Lists
- Early Decision in Depth
- Early Action in Depth
- Wait Lists in Depth
- Recruitment Strategies

Definitions of Early Decision and Early Action

In 2005, NACAC adopted a set of provisions aimed at clarifying the admission options available to students. The association approved the use of the terms “restrictive” and “non-restrictive” to describe the effect of each type of policy on the choices students may make in applying to and selecting a college. A summary of NACAC’s revised definitions is here.

The use of multiple admission plans by colleges and universities often results in confusion among students, parents and college admission counseling professionals. NACAC believes institutions must clearly state policies, and counselors are advised to assist students with their understanding of the various admission decision options. The following outlines agreed-upon definitions and conditions.

Non-Restrictive Application Plans: These plans allow students to wait until May 1 to confirm enrollment.

- **Regular Decision** is the application process in which a student submits an application to an institution by a specified date and receives a decision within a reasonable and clearly stated period of time. A student may apply to other institutions without restriction.
- **Rolling Admission** is the application process in which an institution reviews applications as they are completed and renders admission decisions to students throughout the admission cycle. A student may apply to other institutions without restriction.

- **Early Action (EA)** is the application process in which students apply to an institution of preference and receive a decision well in advance of the institution’s regular response date. Students admitted under EA are not obligated to accept the institution’s offer of admission or to submit a deposit prior to May 1. Under non-restrictive EA, a student may apply to other colleges.

Restrictive Application Plans: These plans allow institutions to limit students from applying to other early plans.

- **Early Decision (ED)** is the application process in which students make a commitment to a first choice institution where, if admitted, they definitely will enroll. While pursuing admission under an ED plan, students may apply to other institutions, but may have only one ED application pending at any time. Should a student who applies for financial aid not be offered an award that makes attendance possible, the student may decline the offer of admission and be released from the ED commitment. The institution must notify the applicant of the decision within a reasonable and clearly stated period of time after the ED deadline.

Usually, a nonrefundable deposit must be made well in advance of May 1. The institution will respond to an application for financial aid at or near the time of an offer of admission. Institutions with ED plans may restrict students from applying to other early plans. Institutions will clearly articulate their specific policies in their ED agreement.

- **Restrictive Early Action (REA)** is the application process in which students apply to an institution of preference and receive a decision well in advance of the institution’s regular response date. Institutions with REA plans place restrictions on student applications to other early plans. Institutions will clearly articulate these restrictions in their EA policies and agreements with students. Students who are admitted under REA are not obligated to accept the institution’s offer of admission or to submit a deposit prior to May 1.¹

For purposes of this report, we continue to categorize early application policies using the ED and EA terms, as variances on these two main forms of early application policies are too few for national data collection purposes. ED is defined briefly as the application process in which students make a commitment to a first-choice institution where, if admitted, they definitely will enroll. EA is the application process in which students make application to an institution of preference and receive a decision well in advance of the institution’s regular response date.

Prevalence of Early Decision, Early Action and Wait Lists

Twenty percent of respondents to NACAC’s 2012 Admission Trends Survey offered ED; 32 percent offered EA. Private colleges were much more likely than publics to offer ED policies. More selective colleges were more likely to offer ED, and colleges with lower yield rates were more likely to offer Early Action (see Table 9).² For the Fall 2012 admission cycle, 43 percent of institutions reported using a wait list. Both institutions with higher selectivity and those with lower yield rates were more likely to have maintained a wait list (see Table 9).³

Table 9. Percentage of institutions with Early Decision, Early Action and wait lists by institutional characteristics: 2012

	Early Decision	Early Action	Wait list
Total	20.2%	31.5%	42.9%
Control			
Public	8.3	32.9	44.2
Private	24.7	30.9	42.3
Enrollment			
Fewer than 3,000 students	20.3	29.1	34.1
3,000 to 9,999	28.8	38.3	60.7
10,000 or more	9.8	31.4	52.9
Selectivity			
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	48.1	32.7	75.0
50 to 70 percent	15.9	32.1	45.7
71 to 85 percent	15.8	35.1	40.3
More than 85 percent	2.2	23.4	12.5
Yield			
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	23.4	37.9	54.8
30 to 45 percent	17.2	26.9	37.9
46 to 60 percent	9.7	22.6	19.4
More than 60 percent	20.0	20.0	33.3

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2012.

Early Decision in Depth

For Fall 2012, about 50 percent of colleges reported increases in the number of ED applications, and 31 percent reported decreases. Similarly, nearly half of colleges surveyed (47 percent) reported an increase in the number of students admitted through ED, while only 22 percent reported decreases in ED admits (see Table 10).⁴

Early Decision applicants represent only a small portion of the total applicant pool at colleges that have ED policies. Twelve percent of all applications for Fall 2012 admission to ED colleges were received through ED, up from nine percent in 2011. As expected,

Table 10. Percentage of colleges reporting change from the previous year in the number of Early Decision applications and the number of students admitted Early Decision: Fall 2002 to Fall 2012

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Percentage of colleges reporting change in ED applications											
Increased	53%	43%	37%	58%	63%	49%	49%	47%	38%	55%	50%
Stayed the same	28	33	18	24	12	19	18	26	25	21	19
Decreased	17	24	45	18	25	31	33	28	38	23	31
Percentage of colleges reporting change in students admitted ED											
Increased	42	30	29	48	47	36	43	65	36	39	47
Stayed the same	41	44	22	31	16	32	26	30	38	35	31
Decreased	18	26	49	21	38	32	32	5	26	26	22

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Surveys, 2002 through 2012.

¹ NACAC’s Statement of Principles of Good Practice (SPGP). Available online at: <http://www.nacacnet.org/about/Governance/Policies/Pages/default.aspx>.
² Correlation between offering Early Decision and: selectivity (.348), private control (.181), p < .01; Correlation between offering Early Action and: yield (-.150), p < .05
³ Correlation between maintaining a wait list and: selectivity (.384), yield (-.202), p < .01
⁴ Results of the survey do not indicate the magnitude of these changes.

colleges with ED policies reported a higher acceptance rate for their ED applicants as compared to all applicants (62 percent versus 52 percent). Although this 10-percentage point gap is slightly higher than the past two years (eight percentage points for Fall 2010 and six percentage points for Fall 2011), it is still substantially lower than the 14- to 15-percentage point gaps that were observed in 2008 and 2009. Given the binding nature of ED policies, the average yield rate for ED admits was 82 percent, substantially higher than the average yield rate for all students admitted to ED colleges (31 percent) (see Table 11).

Table 11. Key statistics for Early Decision colleges: Fall 2012

	Mean
Mean percentage of all applications received at ED colleges through Early Decision	12.0%
Mean percentage of Early Decision applications accepted (ED selectivity rate)	62.1
Mean overall selectivity rate for institutions with Early Decision	52.2
Mean percentage of admitted ED students who enrolled (ED yield rate)	81.6
Mean overall yield rate at ED colleges	31.1

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2012.

Early Action in Depth

Results of the 2012 Admission Trends Survey indicate continued growth in EA activity. A majority (69 percent) of colleges reported an increase in EA applications and a similar proportion (68 percent) reported increases in the number of students who were admitted through EA (see Table 12). Only 14 percent of colleges reported decreases in EA applications, and only 10 percent reported decreases in EA admits.⁵

Forty-two percent of applications to colleges that had EA admission policies were received through EA. These colleges reported a higher

acceptance rate for EA applicants in comparison to the overall applicant pool (71 percent versus 63 percent). This is the first time the acceptance rate of EA applicants was more than six percentage points higher than the total applicant acceptance rate since data collection began in 2004. Unlike Early Decision, Early Action did not provide a significant benefit to institutions in terms of yield rates. For the Fall 2012 admission cycle, EA colleges reported a similar yield rate for EA applicants compared to the overall applicant pool (30 percent versus 28 percent) (see Table 13).

Table 13. Key statistics for Early Action colleges: Fall 2012

	Mean
Mean percentage of all applications received at EA colleges through Early Action	42.4%
Mean percentage of Early Action applications accepted (EA selectivity rate)	70.6
Mean overall selectivity rate for institutions with Early Action	63.1
Mean percentage of admitted EA students who enrolled (EA yield rate)	29.7
Mean overall yield rate at EA colleges	27.5

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2012.

Wait Lists in Depth

According to results of NACAC's annual Admission Trends Surveys, the percentage of institutions that used wait lists for the Fall 2012 admission cycle was 43 percent, down slightly from 45 percent for the Fall 2011 admission cycle and 48 percent for Fall 2010. Forty-one percent of colleges and universities reported increases from Fall 2011 to Fall 2012 in the number of students who were placed on wait lists (see Table 14).⁶

Table 12. Percentage of colleges reporting change from the previous year in the number of Early Action applications and the number of students admitted Early Action: Fall 2002 to Fall 2012

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Percentage of colleges reporting change in EA applications											
Increased	72%	68%	56%	80%	70%	81%	65%	74%	72%	62%	69%
Stayed the Same	21	22	7	6	18	7	16	7	12	18	18
Decreased	7	10	37	14	12	13	19	19	15	20	14
Percentage of colleges reporting change in students admitted EA											
Increased	53	53	48	73	57	72	60	73	68	64	68
Stayed the Same	35	36	15	7	24	13	24	15	21	23	22
Decreased	9	11	37	20	20	15	16	13	11	13	10

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Surveys, 2002 through 2012

⁵ Results of the survey do not indicate the magnitude of these changes.

⁶ Results of the survey do not indicate the magnitude of these changes.

Table 14. Percentage of institutions reporting change from the previous year in the number of students placed on the wait list: Fall 2000 to Fall 2012

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Increased	48%	40%	48%	52%	--	49%	47%	56%	50%	47%	42%	38%	41%
Stayed the same	29	34	32	34	--	25	26	23	25	17	30	37	26
Decreased	23	21	16	14	--	26	27	21	25	37	28	26	33

-- Data are not available.

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Surveys, 2000 through 2012.

Table 15. Mean percentage of students admitted off the wait list: Fall 2012

	Mean percentage admitted
Total	25.4%
Control	
Public	23.7
Private	26.1
Enrollment	
Fewer than 3,000 students	22.9
3,000 to 9,999	32.4
10,000 or more	22.3
Selectivity	
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	20.1
50 to 70 percent	24.1
71 to 85 percent	38.3
More than 85 percent	22.3
Yield	
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	27.7
30 to 45 percent	17.5
46 to 60 percent	34.7
More than 60 percent	45.4

NOTE: Figures in italics should be interpreted with caution due to low sample size (fewer than 15 institutions per cell).

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2012.

Institutions reported placing an average of nine percent of all applicants on the wait list for the Fall 2012 admission cycle, and an average of 50 percent of wait-listed students opted to remain on the wait list. Institutions admitted an average of 25 percent of all students who chose to remain on wait lists, down from 31 percent in Fall 2011 (see Table 15).

Recruitment Strategies

Respondents to NACAC's 2012 Admission Trends Survey reported that hosting high school students on campus, the institution's website and emails to prospective students were the three most important aspects of their institution's new student recruitment strategy. A majority of colleges and universities also rated direct mail to prospective students, contacts with secondary school counselors and admission officer visits to high schools as considerably important to recruitment. Having contact with Community Based Organizations (CBOs), using alumni recruiters and using third-party agents were most often rated as having limited or no importance to student recruitment (see Table 16).

More selective institutions were more likely to find contacts with CBOs and alumni recruiters important to their overall recruitment strategy while they were less likely to rate third-party agents as important.⁷ About 20 percent of colleges and universities predict admission officer visits to high schools will become more important to their recruitment strategy in the next three years and 18 percent reported it will become less important.

Table 16. Percentage of colleges attributing different levels of importance to various student recruitment strategies: 2012

	Considerable Importance	Moderate Importance	Limited Importance	No Importance
Hosting high school students on campus	90.5%	7.0%	2.1%	0.4%
Website	87.0	12.3	0.7	0.0
Email	76.8	22.8	0.4	0.0
Direct mail	68.1	23.2	7.4	1.4
Contacts with secondary school counselors	58.6	34.4	6.0	1.1
Admission officer visits to high school	54.4	37.9	6.7	1.1
College fairs	48.4	42.5	7.7	1.4
Social media	36.8	47.4	14.7	1.1
Contacts with CBOs	16.7	39.1	40.2	3.9
Alumni recruiters	7.0	28.2	53.2	11.6
Third party agents	5.7	12.1	25.5	56.7

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2012.

⁷ Correlation between selectivity and considerable importance of: alumni recruiters (.163), contacts with CBOs (.246), p < .01; third party agents (-.126), p < .05

Chapter 4

Factors in the Admission Decision

CONTENTS

- Factors in the Admission Decision: 2012 Summary
- Factors in the Admission Decision: Change Over Time
- Factors in the Admission Decision by Institutional Characteristics
- Top Factors in Depth
 - Grades and Strength of Curriculum
 - Standardized Admission Test Scores
- Student Characteristics as Contextual Factors

Factors in the Admission Decision: 2012 Summary

- Grades in college preparatory courses and strength of curriculum were considered by colleges to be the top factors in the admission decision, followed closely by admission test scores and grades in all courses. About 82 percent of all colleges and universities rated grades in college prep courses as “considerably important,” followed by 65 percent for strength of curriculum, 56 percent for admission test scores, and 50 percent for grades in all courses.
- A second set of factors—essay or writing sample, student’s demonstrated interest, counselor and teacher recommendations, class rank, and extracurricular activities—were most often rated as moderately important. No more than about half of colleges rated these factors in the low to no importance range. For many colleges, these factors provide additional information about students’ academic performance and interests, as well as their personal qualities.
- Student interviews, subject test scores (AP, IB) and work experience can add further depth to the admission application. Admission officers consider these factors as supplemental to the main academic factors, and as such, rated them with low to moderate importance. In addition, about 39 percent of colleges indicated they do not consider interviews, 30 percent

do not consider subject test scores, and 34 percent do not consider work experience. They are used by some colleges to provide information for comparing candidates with similar academic qualifications.

- SAT II scores, state graduation exam scores and portfolios were among the lowest rated factors in admission decisions for 2012. A large majority of institutions rated these factors with limited or no importance. SAT II scores are primarily used in highly selective admission, and they are often used for placement rather than admission decisions.

Table 17 shows a complete overview of the relative importance of factors in the admission decision in 2012.

Factors in Admission: Change Over Time

Table 18 illustrates how the percentage of colleges rating factors in the admission decision as considerably important has changed over time, from 1993 to 2012. Academic performance in college prep courses has been consistently rated as the top factor in admission decisions over this 20-year time frame, with about 80 percent of colleges rating it as considerably important. The importance of other factors, such as teacher and counselor recommendations, extracurricular activities and interview, also has remained relatively unchanged.

Table 17. Percentage of colleges attributing different levels of importance to factors in the admission decision: 2012

Factor	Considerable importance	Moderate importance	Limited importance	No importance
Grades in college prep courses	82.3%	11.6%	4.4%	1.7%
Strength of curriculum	65.0	25.2	6.8	3.1
Admission test scores (SAT, ACT)	56.1	31.3	9.2	3.4
Grades in all courses	49.8	37.5	11.6	1.0
Essay or writing sample	19.7	38.1	25.2	17.0
Student's demonstrated interest	17.8	31.2	25.7	25.3
Counselor recommendation	15.6	42.9	27.9	13.6
Teacher recommendation	15.4	41.6	29.4	13.7
Class rank	13.3	36.2	35.8	14.7
Extracurricular activities	6.8	39.1	38.4	15.6
Interview	6.5	25.3	29.7	38.6
Portfolio	5.2	10.7	33.3	50.9
Subject test scores (AP, IB)	4.8	32.0	33.0	30.3
SAT II scores	3.8	12.0	26.4	57.9
State graduation exam scores	2.1	13.7	27.7	56.5
Work	1.0	16.5	48.5	34.0

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2012.

Table 18. Percentage of colleges attributing *considerable importance* to factors in the admission decision: 1993 to 2012

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Grades in college prep/ strength of curriculum ¹	82%	83%	80%	78%	81%	79%	84%	78%	80%	76%	78%	80%	74%	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Grades in college prep	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	76%	80%	75%	87%	83%	84%	82%
Strength of curriculum	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	62	64	62	71	66	68	65
Admission test scores	46	43	47	48	50	51	54	58	52	57	61	60	59	60	59	54	58	59	59	56
Grades in all courses	39	37	41	38	41	44	42	43	45	50	54	57	54	51	52	52	46	46	52	50
Essay	14	17	21	20	18	19	19	20	20	19	23	25	23	28	26	27	26	27	25	20
Class rank	42	40	39	36	34	32	32	34	31	35	33	28	31	23	23	19	16	22	19	13
Counselor recommendation	22	20	19	17	20	16	18	16	17	16	17	18	17	21	21	20	17	19	19	16
Demonstrated interest	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	7	7	15	21	22	21	21	23	21	18
Teacher recommendation	21	19	18	19	19	16	14	14	16	14	18	18	17	20	21	21	17	19	17	15
Interview	12	12	15	13	11	11	9	11	11	10	9	9	9	10	11	11	7	9	6	7
Extracurricular activities/work ²	6	6	7	6	6	4	5	7	6	7	7	8	8	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Extracurricular activities	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	8	7	7	9	7	5	7
Work	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	3	2	2	2	2	2	1
Subject tests (AP, IB)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	6	7	5	7	8	7	8	7	10	7	5
State exams	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	6	7	6	7	6	4	4	3	4	4	2
SAT II scores	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	5	6	7	5	5	5	4
Portfolio	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	7	8	6	7	5

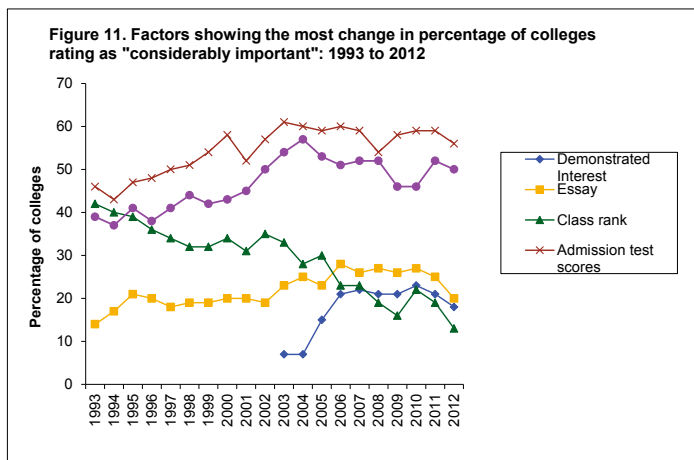
-- Data are not available.

¹Beginning with the 2006 survey, grades in college prep courses and strength of curriculum were listed as two separate factors. In previous years, one factor was listed as grades in college prep courses/strength of curriculum.

²Beginning with the 2006 survey, extracurricular activities and work were listed as two separate factors. In previous years, one factor was listed as work/extracurricular activities.

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Surveys, 1993 through 2012.

Those factors that have shown the most change are illustrated in Figure 11. The importance of admission test scores showed an overall increase through 2003. Since 2003, the proportion of colleges rating it as considerably important has leveled off to around 55-60 percent. Similarly, grades in all courses increased in importance from 1993 to 2004, but declined slightly in more recent years. The proportion of colleges rating demonstrated interest as considerably important increased dramatically between 2003 (when it was first measured) and 2010, but has decreased slightly in the past two years. The factor showing the largest decline in importance is class rank. For Fall 2012, only 13 percent of colleges rated it as considerably important, which represents a new low and is down from 42 percent in 1993.



SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Surveys, 1993 through 2012.

Factors in Admission by Institutional Characteristics

The following section highlights differences among various types of institutions. Nearly all institutions attributed some level of importance to each of the factors discussed below, and the relative importance of factors did not differ widely. With few exceptions, colleges viewed four factors—grades in college prep courses, strength of curriculum, admission test scores, and overall grade point average—as the top four factors in the admission decision. However, the institutional characteristics determined, to some extent, the way each factor in the admission process was rated. For a complete comparison of institutions by selected characteristics, see Table 19.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS

Differences between public and private institutions reveal that in many ways, private college admission is more “holistic” than public college admission. Private colleges considered a broader range of factors in the admission decision, which is likely due, in large part, to differences in application volume. Admission officers at public institutions were responsible for reading an average of about three times more applications for Fall 2012 admission than their counterparts at private institutions (see Chapter 6).

- Private colleges assigned greater importance than public colleges to many factors other than the top four, including the essay/writing sample, the interview, counselor and teacher recommendations, extracurricular activities, the portfolio, and demonstrated interest.
- Public colleges were more likely than privates to consider admission test scores to be considerably important, while private colleges rated it more often as moderately important.¹

Table 19. Percentage of colleges attributing considerable importance to factors in the admission decision by institutional characteristics: 2012 (continued on next page)

	Grades in college prep courses	Strength of curriculum	Admission test scores	Grades in all courses	Essay/writing sample	Demonstrated interest	Counselor rec.	Teacher rec.
Total	82.3%	65.0%	56.1%	49.8%	19.7%	17.8%	15.6%	15.4%
Control								
Public	84.0	65.4	67.9	48.1	7.4	12.5	7.4	6.3
Private	81.7	64.8	51.6	50.5	24.4	19.8	18.8	18.8
Enrollment								
Fewer than 3,000 students	80.6	62.9	53.5	52.1	22.9	22.5	19.4	20.6
3,000 to 9,999	84.2	68.4	64.9	52.6	12.3	8.8	8.8	7.0
10,000 or more	85.7	67.3	59.2	44.9	12.2	10.4	8.2	6.3
Selectivity								
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	84.9	79.2	62.3	47.2	35.8	23.1	26.4	28.3
50 to 70 percent	85.7	65.7	59	47.1	19.0	19.0	10.5	9.5
71 to 85 percent	81.8	72.7	46.8	48.1	13.0	11.7	10.4	11.7
More than 85 percent	76.1	41.3	58.7	60.9	10.9	17.8	17.4	15.6
Yield								
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	88.2	75.7	50.7	49.0	20.8	13.9	16.7	14.6
30 to 45 percent	83.9	65.6	64.5	49.5	18.3	11.8	9.7	12.0
46 to 60 percent	73.3	36.7	43.3	43.3	3.3	31.0	10.0	10.0
More than 60 percent	46.7	33.3	80.0	73.3	46.7	64.3	40.0	46.7

¹ Correlations between private college status and attribution of importance in admission: essay/writing sample (.348), interview (.505), counselor recommendation (.336), teacher recommendation (.329), extracurricular activities (.240), demonstrated interest (.242), portfolio (.217), p < .01; Correlation between public college status and importance in admission of admission test scores (.139), p < .05

Table 19 (continued from previous page). Percentage of colleges attributing considerable importance to factors in the admission decision by institutional characteristics: 2012

	Class rank	Extracurricular activities	Interview	Portfolio	Subject test scores (AP, IB)	SAT II scores	State graduation exam scores	Work
Total	13.3%	6.8%	6.5%	5.2%	4.8%	3.8%	2.1%	1.0%
Control								
Public	16.0	2.5	0.0	2.5	6.2	1.3	1.2	0.0
Private	12.3	8.5	9.0	6.2	4.2	4.7	2.4	1.4
Enrollment								
Fewer than 3,000 students	13.6	7.1	10.7	6.5	5.3	4.7	3.0	0.6
3,000 to 9,999	12.3	7.0	0.0	0.0	3.5	5.3	0.0	1.8
10,000 or more	12.2	4.1	0.0	6.3	6.1	0.0	2.0	2.0
Selectivity								
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	15.1	11.3	9.4	3.9	7.5	5.8	1.9	1.9
50 to 70 percent	12.5	5.7	6.7	3.8	5.7	2.9	4.9	1.0
71 to 85 percent	13.0	5.2	1.3	7.8	3.9	2.6	0.0	0.0
More than 85 percent	8.7	8.7	8.7	4.3	2.2	6.5	0.0	2.2
Yield								
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	11.8	8.3	5.6	3.5	3.5	4.2	0.7	0.7
30 to 45 percent	13.0	5.4	3.3	7.8	6.5	2.2	1.1	1.1
46 to 60 percent	10.0	3.3	10.0	3.3	6.7	3.3	10.0	0.0
More than 60 percent	20.0	13.3	20.0	13.3	6.7	13.3	6.7	6.7

NOTE: Figures in italics should be interpreted with caution due to low sample size (fewer than 15 institutions per cell).

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2012.

INSTITUTIONAL ENROLLMENT

Some of the same differences existed between small and large institutions as existed between public and private institutions. Larger institutions also had to process a higher volume of applications in relation to the size of their staffs, in many cases necessitating a more methodical process (see Chapter 6).

- Smaller colleges attributed more importance than larger colleges to the interview, counselor and teacher recommendations, demonstrated interest, essay/writing sample, grades in all subjects, and SATII scores.²

INSTITUTIONAL SELECTIVITY LEVEL

More selective institutions tended to place greater emphasis on many of the factors. Because applicants to the most selective institutions often have similarly high grades and test scores, these colleges need more information with which to evaluate each applicant. As a result, their admission process is more “holistic,” like that of private and smaller colleges. However, they still reviewed far more applications for the Fall 2012 admission cycle relative to their staff size in comparison to less selective institutions (see Chapter 6).

- More selective colleges attributed greater importance to strength of curriculum in comparison to their less selective counterparts.
- Institutions that accepted fewer applicants also placed more emphasis on many factors outside of the top four. These fac-

tors included the essay, teacher and counselor recommendations, extracurricular activities, and work.

- The more selective institutions also placed more emphasis on subject test scores (AP and IB), state graduation exams scores and SAT II scores.³

INSTITUTIONAL YIELD RATE

Institutions with high yield rates are those that enroll most of the students they accept. Although this is an important statistic from an institutional perspective, it is very difficult to generalize about institutions on the basis of yield rates. Very different types of colleges have similar yield rates. For instance, highly selective schools, such as those in the Ivy League, share similar yield rates with large, open-enrollment public colleges.

- Institutions with higher yield rates attributed less importance to grades in college prep courses and strength of curriculum compared to institutions with lower yield rates. The most likely cause of this finding is the behavior of high-yield, non-selective colleges, which accept almost all of the students who apply and enroll large numbers as a result.
- Institutions with higher yield rates also attributed lower importance to some of the other factors, including the essay/writing sample, extracurricular activities, and teacher and counselor recommendations.
- Institutions with high yield rates attributed more importance to admission test scores (SAT, ACT).⁴

² Correlations between enrollment and attribution of importance in admission: interview (-.427), teacher recommendation (-.266), counselor recommendation (-.260), demonstrated interest (-.257), p < .01; essay (-.142), SATII scores (-.121), grades in all subjects (-.134), p < .05

³ Correlations between selectivity and attribution of importance in admission: extracurricular activities (.237), essay (.275), strength of curriculum (.182), work (.268), SAT II scores (.223), counselor recommendation (.184), subject test scores (.271), state graduation exams (.181), p < .01; teacher recommendation (.152), p < .05

⁴ Correlations between yield and attribution of importance in admission: strength of curriculum (-.290), grades in college prep courses (-.242), extracurricular activities (-.223), counselor recommendation (-.171), p < .01; admission test (SAT/ACT) score (.131), essay/writing sample (-.151), teacher recommendation (-.126), p < .05

Top Factors In-Depth

GRADES AND STRENGTH OF CURRICULUM

As previously discussed, grades in college prep courses, strength of curriculum and grades in all courses—in that order—are among the top factors colleges consider in making admission decisions (along with admission test scores, which rank third). Although overall GPA serves as an indicator of a student’s academic success in high school, strength of curriculum—and particularly grades in college prep courses—are better indicators of a student’s likelihood of succeeding in college.⁵ College prep courses—which include Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), dual enrollment, and other advanced/college-level coursework—are designed to approximate college-level work. Therefore, participation in a college prep curriculum and performance in the courses can indicate to college admission officers both motivation and ability to succeed in postsecondary education. In fact, results of two major research studies show students who complete a rigorous high school curriculum are much more likely to complete a bachelor’s degree than those who complete less rigorous curricula.⁶

A study of the transcripts of high school graduates in 2009 conducted by the US Department of Education indicated students took

more credits, completed more challenging curricula and earned higher GPAs in high school than previous cohorts. Compared to the class of 1990, graduates in 2009 earned more than three additional credits (about 420 instruction hours) during their high school careers, and the proportion of graduates failing to complete a standard high school curriculum⁷ fell from 41 percent in 1990 to 25 percent in 2009. The study also showed students with a more rigorous curriculum scored higher on the math and science National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exams. This finding confirms the connection between strength of curriculum and academic performance. Although all students showed gains in credits earned, rigor of curriculum, GPA, and NAEP scores, the study found consistent gaps between different racial/ethnic groups. Black and Hispanic students consistently scored lower on NAEP exams than Asian/Pacific Islander and white students who completed a similarly challenging curriculum.⁸

One reason for the gap observed in the High School Transcript study may be that students across the nation do not have equal access to college preparatory curricula. According to results of NACAC’s 2012 Counseling Trends Survey, there were important differences among types of schools in both college prep offerings and average enrollments in those curricula (see Table 20). For

Table 20. Percentage of schools that offer college preparatory curricula and mean percentage of 11th and 12th graders enrolled by school characteristics: 2012

	Advanced Placement (AP)		International Baccalaureate (IB)		Enriched curriculum		Dual enrollment	
	% of schools that offer	Mean % enrolled	% of schools that offer	Mean % enrolled	% of schools that offer	Mean % enrolled	% of schools that offer	Mean % enrolled
Total	84.9%	28.0%	4.8%	1.6%	82.1%	35.5%	69.4%	9.9%
Control								
Public	83.0	20.4	5.1	1.4	78.5	27.2	86.9	13.0
Private	89.5	44.3	4.2	2.0	89.8	53.3	32.6	3.5
<i>Private non-parochial</i>	87.3	48.0	4.1	2.2	89.2	57.9	25.5	2.3
<i>Private parochial</i>	93.6	37.6	4.5	1.6	90.8	45.1	45.4	5.7
Enrollment								
Fewer than 500 students	69.3	24.3	1.5	0.8	71.9	31.5	65.5	13.3
500 to 999	88.8	29.2	3.8	1.7	85.8	39.1	67.9	7.5
1,000 to 1,499	97.4	31.8	5.8	1.0	94.5	40.6	71.6	8.2
1,500 to 1,999	98.8	29.4	14.8	5.8	82.9	30.8	78.0	10.5
2,000 or more	98.5	31.2	11.8	1.3	89.9	33.3	79.4	7.8
Free and reduced price lunch								
0 to 25% of students eligible	93.5	29.8	5.8	1.8	84.2	36.4	77.6	10.6
26 to 50%	81.6	16.4	5.5	1.3	74.7	23.0	91.3	13.2
51 to 75%	70.2	14.4	5.8	1.4	78.6	24.0	86.9	13.7
76 to 100%	72.6	18.2	2.4	1.3	73.5	25.5	78.8	12.9
Students per counselor								
100 or fewer	73.4	32.0	2.5	0.7	75.6	36.9	55.0	7.5
101 to 200	81.9	29.7	3.8	2.2	83.3	41.1	60.8	10.5
201 to 300	87.5	26.0	4.6	1.1	85.3	33.1	74.8	8.1
301 to 400	89.6	26.0	7.1	1.7	82.8	32.4	77.2	11.4
401 to 500	89.2	30.8	10.6	1.6	78.5	33.0	76.9	11.4
More than 500	89.5	30.9	1.8	1.7	71.9	33.7	69.6	10.7

SOURCE: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2012.

⁵ Seventy-two percent of respondents to NACAC’s 2012 Counseling Trends Survey reported that they weight students’ high school GPAs to account for course difficulty.
⁶ US General Accounting Office. (2003). *College Completion: Additional Efforts Could Help Education with Its Completion Goals* (GAO 03-568). Washington, DC.; Adelman, C. (2006). *The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to Degree Completion From High School Through College*. Washington, D.C.: US Department of Education.
⁷ A standard high school curriculum includes at least four credits of English and three credits each of social studies, mathematics and science.
⁸ National Center for Education Statistics. (2013). *A First Look: 2013 Mathematics and Reading: National Assessment of Educational Progress at Grades 4 and 8*. Washington, DC: US Department of Education.

example, private high schools were more likely than public high schools to have offered AP and enriched curricula. Private high schools also reported higher enrollments, on average, in these curricula as well as in IB courses. Public high schools were much more likely to offer dual enrollment, and reported higher participation in dual enrollment programs.⁹ In addition, larger schools were more likely than smaller schools to offer all four types of college prep curricula (see Table 20).¹⁰

Schools with higher percentages of students eligible for free and reduced price lunch programs (FRPL) were less likely to offer AP and enriched curricula, yet more likely to offer dual enrollment courses. The average enrollment in AP and enriched curricula courses was also lower for schools with more students eligible for free or reduced lunch, while average participation in dual enrollment at these schools was higher (see Table 20).¹¹

Results of the College Board’s Annual Survey of Colleges 2013[®] show the average number of high school course units (years of study) colleges required and recommended for students interested in attending their institutions. On average, colleges required the most years of study in English (4.0), academic electives (3.3) and math (3.0). There were some small differences between the required and recommended number of course units based on institutional characteristics. For example, public colleges, on average, had a higher number of required course units for English, math,

social studies, science, and total academic units in comparison to private colleges who required more history and academic elective units (see Table 21).¹²

Institutions with higher selectivity levels required more foreign language units. They also recommended a greater number of foreign language, history, math, and science course units than their less selective counterparts (see Table 21).¹³ These data do not indicate the level of coursework colleges required or recommended, which also are likely to differ by institution type.

STANDARDIZED ADMISSION TEST SCORES

As reported earlier in this chapter, standardized admission test scores ranked as the third most important factor in admission decisions. About 87 percent of colleges placed considerable or moderate importance on this factor (see Table 17). According to the College Board’s Annual Survey of Colleges 2013[®], an average of 56 percent of enrolled students submitted SAT scores for Fall 2012 admission, and 53 percent submitted ACT scores. Students enrolled in more selective institutions were more likely to have submitted SAT scores and less likely to have submitted ACT scores in comparison to those enrolled in less selective institutions.¹⁴ More freshmen submitted ACT scores and fewer submitted SAT scores at institutions with higher yield rates (see Table 22).¹⁵

Table 21. Mean number of high school course units required and recommended by colleges: 2012 (continued on next page)

	Total academic units		History		English		Foreign language	
	Req.	Rec.	Req.	Rec.	Req.	Rec.	Req.	Rec.
Total	16.3	18.5	1.6	2.2	4.0	4.0	2.0	2.4
Control								
Public	16.8	19.0	1.5	1.9	4.0	4.0	2.0	2.4
Private	15.9	18.4	1.7	2.2	3.9	4.0	2.1	2.4
Enrollment								
Fewer than 3,000 students	16.0	18.4	1.7	2.2	4.0	4.0	2.0	2.4
3,000 to 9,999	16.7	19.3	1.6	2.4	4.0	4.0	2.0	2.6
10,000 or more	16.7	19.2	1.4	2.1	4.0	4.0	2.0	2.6
Selectivity								
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	16.5	19.0	1.7	2.4	4.0	4.0	2.2	2.9
50 to 70 percent	16.4	18.8	1.6	2.2	4.0	4.0	2.0	2.4
71 to 85 percent	16.1	18.3	1.7	2.2	4.0	4.0	2.0	2.4
More than 85 percent	16.4	19.2	1.6	2.1	4.0	4.0	1.9	2.2
Yield								
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	16.2	19.1	1.6	2.3	4.0	4.0	2.0	2.6
30 to 45 percent	16.6	18.8	1.6	2.1	4.0	4.0	2.0	2.5
46 to 60 percent	16.3	17.1	1.5	2.2	4.0	3.9	2.0	2.3
More than 60 percent	16.2	17.9	1.9	2.0	4.0	3.9	2.0	2.2

⁹ Correlation between private high school status and mean percentage of students enrolled in college prep curricula: AP (.402), enriched curriculum (.364), dual enrollment (-.276), p < .01

¹⁰ Correlation between enrollment and offering college prep curricula: AP (.292), IB (.174), enriched curriculum (.165), dual enrollment (.103), p < .01

¹¹ Correlation between percent eligible for FRPL and offering college prep curricula: AP (-.237), enriched curriculum (-.137), dual enrollment (.334), p < .01; Correlation between percent eligible for FRPL and mean percentage of students enrolled in college prep curricula: AP (-.369), enriched curriculum (-.295), dual enrollment (.188), p < .01

¹² Correlation between public college status and required units in: math (.337), total academic (.153), English (.110), social studies (.123), science (.280), history (-.170), academic elective (-.125), p < .01

¹³ Correlation between selectivity and course units required: foreign language (.190), p < .01; Correlation between selectivity and course units recommended: foreign language (.276), math (.115), science (.143), p < .01; history (.128), p < .05

¹⁴ Correlation between institutional selectivity and percentage of enrolled students who submitted test scores: SAT (.159), ACT (-.110), p < .01

¹⁵ Correlation between institutional yield and percentage of enrolled freshmen who submitted test scores: SAT (-.259), ACT (.236), p < .01

Table 21 (continued from previous page). Mean number of high school course units required and recommended by colleges: 2012

	Math		Academic elective		Social studies		Science	
	Req.	Rec.	Req.	Rec.	Req.	Rec.	Req.	Rec.
Total	3.0	3.4	3.3	3.4	2.4	2.8	2.6	3.1
Control								
Public	3.2	3.7	3.0	3.4	2.5	3.0	2.8	3.3
Private	2.9	3.3	3.5	3.4	2.3	2.7	2.4	3.0
Enrollment								
Fewer than 3,000 students	2.9	3.4	3.5	3.4	2.3	2.7	2.5	3.0
3,000 to 9,999	3.2	3.7	3.3	3.5	2.5	3.0	2.7	3.3
10,000 or more	3.3	3.8	2.7	3.7	2.4	3.2	2.7	3.4
Selectivity								
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	3.1	3.6	3.0	3.4	2.4	2.9	2.6	3.3
50 to 70 percent	3.1	3.5	3.3	3.2	2.3	2.8	2.6	3.1
71 to 85 percent	3.0	3.5	3.4	3.0	2.5	2.8	2.6	3.1
More than 85 percent	3.0	3.4	2.9	4.1	2.4	2.9	2.6	3.0
Yield								
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	3.0	3.6	3.2	3.4	2.3	2.9	2.5	3.2
30 to 45 percent	3.2	3.5	3.2	2.9	2.5	2.8	2.7	3.2
46 to 60 percent	3.2	3.3	3.6	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.8	3.0
More than 60 percent	3.1	3.2	3.8	5.0	2.6	2.6	2.8	2.9

SOURCE: The College Board Annual Survey of Colleges 2013.® Data presented here include four-year, bachelor's degree granting, not-for-profit institutions in the US only.

Table 22. Mean percentage of first-year students who submitted standardized test scores by institutional characteristics: 2012

	SAT	ACT
Total	56.2%	52.8%
Control		
Public	56.5	55.2
Private	56.0	51.4
Enrollment		
Fewer than 3,000 students	54.5	51.4
3,000 to 9,999	61.4	50.4
10,000 or more	58.0	58.1
Selectivity		
Accept less than 50 percent of applicants	63.6	47.2
50 to 70 percent	57.0	53.1
71 to 85 percent	56.3	52.0
More than 85 percent	44.5	60.0
Yield		
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	65.2	44.6
30 to 45 percent	53.1	57.2
46 to 60 percent	43.0	61.8
More than 60 percent	42.9	62.8

SOURCE: The College Board Annual Survey of Colleges 2013.® Data presented here include four-year, bachelor degree-granting, not-for-profit institutions in the US only.

Studies conducted in 2013 by ACT and the College Board (creator of the SAT) showed an increasing proportion of high school graduates taking each of the exams, relative stability regarding student exam performance, and substantial and persistent gaps between different racial/ethnic groups. About 1.79 million (54 percent) 2013 high school graduates took the ACT and nearly 1.66 million (about 50 percent) took the SAT at least once while in high school. The number of SAT takers decreased slightly for the first time since 2007 while the number of ACT takers continues to grow.

Mean composite scores on both the ACT and SAT have remained relatively stable over the past 10 years. Mean critical reading scores on the SAT have dipped slightly in the past few years (from 508 in 2004 to 496 in 2013), which may be a result of an increase in the proportion of exam takers that are typically underrepresented in higher education (this group represented 30 percent of all SAT takers in 2013, up from 27 percent in 2009). Significant gaps in exam performance among different racial and ethnic groups have remained consistent as well. Over the last 10 years, white and Asian students consistently scored higher on both the SAT and ACT than their Hispanic, American Indian and black peers. The gap between white or Asian student scores and Hispanic or American Indian student scores was approximately 50-70 points on the critical reading and mathematics sections of the SAT and four points on the composite ACT. The gap between mean scores of white or Asian students and mean scores of black students was about 100 points on the critical reading and math section of the SAT and five composite ACT points for each of the high school graduating classes from 2007 through 2013.¹⁶

Student Characteristics as Contextual Factors

NACAC's 2012 Admission Trends Survey asked colleges to indicate how various student characteristics may influence how the main factors in admission are evaluated. These student characteristics

included race/ethnicity, gender, first-generation status, state or county of residence, high school attended, alumni relations, and ability to pay.¹⁷ As shown in Table 23, institutions attributed relatively little importance to these student characteristics, even as contextual factors. However, they did have some influence on how the main admission factors were evaluated. About one quarter of colleges rated race/ethnicity, first generation status and high school attended as at least moderately important.

There were some interesting differences in how various types of institutions rated the importance of the student characteristics as contextual factors. However, in most cases, the differences were small and were the result of attributing limited importance versus no importance.

- Private colleges were more likely to attribute some level of importance to gender, alumni relations, high school attended, and ability to pay in comparison to public colleges. Not surprisingly, public colleges rated state or county of residence more highly.¹⁸
- Larger colleges rated first-generation status and state or county of residence as having more influence, while smaller colleges rated ability to pay, alumni relations and gender more highly.¹⁹
- More selective institutions attributed more influence to almost all of the student contextual factors, including race/ethnicity, gender, first-generation status, state or county of residence, high school attended, and alumni relations.²⁰
- Institutions with lower yield rates also attributed somewhat more importance to some of the student characteristics, including race/ethnicity, first-generation status, state or county of residence, high school attended, ability to pay, and alumni relations.²¹

Table 23. Percentage of colleges attributing different levels of importance to the influence of student characteristics on the evaluation of factors in the admission decision: 2012

	Considerable importance	Moderate importance	Limited importance	No importance
First-generation status	4.8	20.9	27.7	46.6
State or county of residence	4.8	13.1	28.9	53.3
Gender	3.4	10.0	20.3	66.2
Race/ethnicity	3.1	19.9	22.3	54.6
High school attended	2.7	22.7	34.7	39.9
Ability to pay	2.1	10.1	16.0	71.9
Alumni relations	1.7	15.8	39.5	43.0

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2012.

¹⁶ ACT. (2013). *ACT Profile Report: Graduating Class 2013*, National. Iowa City, IA: ACT; College Board. (2013). *SAT Total Group Profile Report: 2013 College-Bound Seniors*. New York: The College Board.

¹⁷ In surveys prior to 2006, race/ethnicity, state or county of residence, alumni relations, and ability to pay were listed along with the other academic factors.

¹⁸ Correlation between private college status and influence in evaluation of admission decision factors: gender (.186), alumni relations (.305), ability to pay (.242), state or county of residence (-.156), p < .01; high school attended (.131), p < .05

¹⁹ Correlation between enrollment and influence in evaluation of admission decision factors: state or county of residence (.224), first-generation status (.250), alumni relations (-.221), p < .01; gender (-.136), ability to pay (-.137), p < .05

²⁰ Correlation between selectivity and influence in evaluation of admission decision factors: race/ethnicity (.335), gender (.255), first-generation status (.379), state or county of residence (.301), high school attended (.196), alumni relations (.163), p < .01

²¹ Correlation between yield and influence in evaluation of admission decision factors: race/ethnicity (-.227), first-generation status (-.229), state or county of residence (-.182), high school attended (-.305), alumni relations (-.307), ability to pay (-.182), p < .01

Chapter 5

School Counselors and College Counseling

CONTENTS

- College Counseling Defined
- Student-to-Counselor Ratios
- Counseling Department Priorities and “Time on Task”
- Professional Development and Compensation

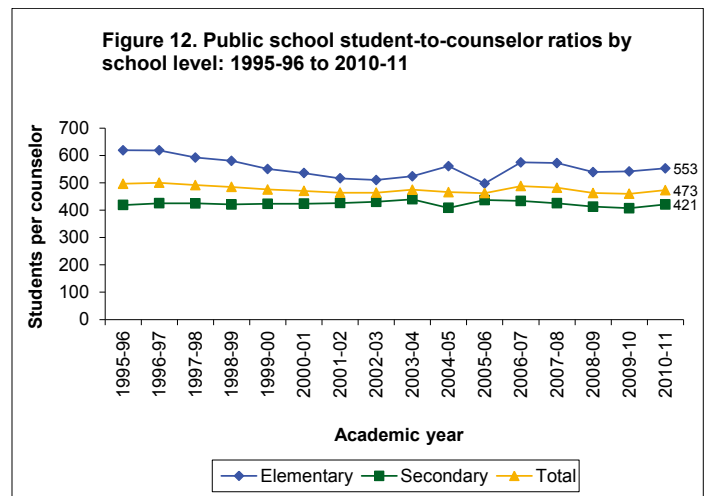
College Counseling Defined

NACAC’s “Statement on Precollege Guidance and Counseling and the Role of the School Counselor” defines precollege counseling as generally including activities that help students: 1) pursue the most challenging curriculum that results in enhanced post-secondary educational options; 2) identify and satisfy attendant requirements for college access; and 3) navigate the maze of financial aid, college choice and other processes related to college application and admission.¹ Assisting students in reaching their full potential requires the cooperative efforts of school administrators, teachers, community representatives, government officials, parents, and the students themselves, as well as a trained staff of school counselors who are able to facilitate student development and achievement. Of particular importance to student success is access to a strong precollege guidance and counseling program that begins early in the student’s education. Counselors can be significant assets in the college admission process. Students face additional challenges without strong counselors to help them, which can make the college application and admission process more difficult.

Student-to-Counselor Ratios

According to US Department of Education data, in 2010-11 each public school counselor (including elementary and secondary)

had responsibility for 473 students, on average. Counselors at secondary schools had slightly smaller caseloads, serving an average of 421 students. Moreover, these ratios have changed very little over the past 14 years (see Figure 12).²



NOTE: For the purpose of these calculations, the elementary ratios include students in grades K-5, and secondary ratios include students in grades 6-12. The total number of counselors is provided only by school level, not grade level.

SOURCE: Elementary/Secondary Information System (ELSI) tableGenerator. (1995-96 to 2010-11). US Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

¹ National Association for College Admission Counseling. (1990). “Statement on Precollege Guidance and the Role of the School Counselor.” Available at: www.nacacnet.org/about/Governance/Policies/Pages/default.aspx.

² In this case secondary is defined as grades 6 through 12.

Results of NACAC's 2012 Counseling Trends Survey, which includes private schools, indicated a high school student-to-counselor ratio, including part-time staff, of 278:1, on average. NACAC's Counseling Trends Survey also asked respondents to report the number of counselors at their schools based on the extent to which college counseling is part of their job responsibilities, allowing for the calculation of a student-to-college counselor ratio. For 2012, the average student-to-college counselor ratio was 348:1, including part-time counselors (see Table 24).³

Table 24. Mean student-to-counselor ratios and student-to-college counselor ratios by school characteristics: 2012

	Mean number of students per counselor	Mean number of students per college counselor
Total	278	348
Control		
Public	304	356
Private	227	331
<i>Private non-parochial</i>	241	343
<i>Private parochial</i>	202	312
Enrollment		
Fewer than 500 students	198	238
500 to 999	292	369
1,000 to 1,499	296	361
1,500 to 1,999	330	418
2,000 or more students	475	625
Free and reduced price lunch		
0 to 25 percent of students eligible	323	353
26 to 50%	306	364
51 to 75%	272	355
76 to 100%	224	317

NOTE: The student-to-college counselor ratio is based on both the total number of counselors who exclusively provide college counseling for students and the total number who provide college counseling among other services for students. As such, it overestimates the focus on college counseling.

SOURCE: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2012.

VARIATION IN STUDENT-TO-COUNSELOR RATIOS

According to NACAC's 2012 Counseling Trends Survey, public schools had higher student-to-counselor ratios than their private counterparts.⁴ Public school counselors were responsible for about 77 more students, on average (see Table 24). In addition, 76 percent of private schools reported they had at least one counselor (full- or part-time) whose sole responsibility was to provide college counseling for students, compared to only 31 percent of public schools. Larger schools also tended to have higher ratios for both total counselors and college counselors (see Table 24).⁵

US Department of Education data show that public school student-to-counselor ratios also varied widely from state to state. In 2010-11, some states had exceedingly high numbers of students per counselor, including California (1,016), Arizona (861), Minnesota (782), Utah (726) and Michigan (706). See Table 25 for the public school student-to-counselor ratios for all states.

Table 25. Public school student-to-counselor ratios by state: 2010-11

State	Students	Counselors	Students per counselor
US Total	49,484,181	105,079	471
Alabama	755,552	1,802	419
Alaska	132,104	327	404
Arizona	1,071,751	1,245	861
Arkansas	482,114	1,527	316
California	6,289,578	6,191	1,016
Colorado	843,316	2,100	402
Connecticut	560,546	1,081	518
Delaware	129,403	281	461
District of Columbia	71,284	260	275
Florida	2,643,347	5,859	451
Georgia	1,677,067	3,557	471
Hawaii	179,601	632	284
Idaho	275,859	564	489
Illinois	2,091,654	3,193	655
Indiana	1,047,232	1,688	620
Iowa	495,775	1,157	428
Kansas	483,701	1,061	456
Kentucky	673,128	1,515	444
Louisiana	696,558	1,919	363
Maine	189,077	575	329
Maryland	852,211	2,389	357
Massachusetts	955,563	2,168	441
Michigan	1,587,067	2,249	706
Minnesota	838,037	1,072	782
Mississippi	490,526	1,096	448
Missouri	918,710	2,613	352
Montana	141,693	457	310
Nebraska	298,500	811	368
Nevada	437,149	880	497
New Hampshire	194,711	824	236
New Jersey	1,402,548	3,904	359
New Mexico	338,122	815	415
New York	2,734,955	6,979	392
North Carolina	1,490,605	3,976	375
North Dakota	96,323	309	312
Ohio	1,754,191	3,655	480
Oklahoma	659,911	1,610	410
Oregon	570,720	1,032	553
Pennsylvania	1,793,284	4,763	377
Rhode Island	143,793	384	374
South Carolina	725,838	1,816	400
South Dakota	126,128	345	365
Tennessee	987,422	2,889	342
Texas	4,935,715	11,212	440
Utah	585,552	807	726
Vermont	96,858	413	234
Virginia	1,251,440	3,977	315
Washington	1,043,788	2,045	510
West Virginia	282,879	738	383
Wisconsin	872,286	1,874	465
Wyoming	89,009	444	201

SOURCE: Elementary/Secondary Information System (ELSI) tableGenerator. (2010-11). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

³ The student-to-college counselor ratio is based on both the total number of counselors who exclusively provide college counseling for students and the total number who provide college counseling among other services for students. As such, it overestimates the focus on college counseling.

⁴ Correlation between public school status and: student-to-counselor ratio (.134), p < .01

⁵ Correlation between enrollment and: student-to-counselor ratio (.275), student-to-college counselor ratio (.347), p < .01

Counseling Department Priorities and “Time on Task”

COUNSELING DEPARTMENT PRIORITIES

NACAC’s 2012 Counseling Trends Survey asked respondents to rank order the importance of four main counseling department goals. As shown in Table 26, “helping students with their academic achievement in high school” and “helping students plan and prepare for postsecondary education” were tied for the highest average ranking. “Helping students with personal growth and development” and “helping students plan and prepare for their work roles after high school” were ranked third and fourth, respectively.

High schools differed in how they ranked the priorities of their counseling departments. For example, public schools ranked “helping students with their academic achievement in high school” as the top priority while private schools ranked “helping students plan and prepare for postsecondary education” as most important. Public schools also ranked “helping students plan and prepare for their work roles after high school” more highly than their private school counterparts.⁶ Counselors at lower-income schools—as defined by the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced price lunch (FRPL)—ranked “helping students plan and prepare for their work roles after high school” and “help-

ing students with their academic achievement in high school” slightly higher than those at higher-income schools, and they gave a slightly lower rank to “helping students plan and prepare for postsecondary education” (see Table 26).⁷

TIME ON TASK

Most counselors have a variety of job responsibilities in addition to college counseling. Results of NACAC’s survey showed in 2012, high school counseling staff spent an average of 32 percent of their time on postsecondary admission counseling. Counselors in public schools reported spending only 23 percent of their time on college counseling, compared to 53 percent for private school counselors. Counselors at higher-income schools and those at schools with smaller enrollments also spent more time on postsecondary counseling compared to their counterparts at lower-income and larger schools (see Table 27).⁸

COUNSELOR ACTIVITIES RELATED TO COLLEGE COUNSELING

Counselors engage in a variety of activities to assist students with the process of applying to college. As shown in Figure 13, the most frequent activities for 2012 included individual meetings with students to discuss postsecondary admission options and hosting college representatives. Fifty-three percent of counselors

Table 26. Mean ranking of counseling department responsibilities by school characteristics: 2012 (1= most important)

	Help students plan and prepare for postsecondary education	Help students with their academic achievement in high school	Help students with personal growth and development	Help students plan and prepare for their work roles after high school
Total	1.9	1.9	2.6	3.5
Control				
Public	2.1	1.8	2.7	3.4
Private	1.5	2.2	2.6	3.8
<i>Private non-parochial</i>	1.4	2.3	2.6	3.8
<i>Private parochial</i>	1.8	2.0	2.5	3.8
Enrollment				
Fewer than 500 students	1.9	1.9	2.7	3.5
500 to 999	1.9	1.9	2.6	3.6
1,000 to 1,499	1.9	1.9	2.5	3.6
1,500 to 1,999	2.1	1.9	2.7	3.4
2,000 or more	2.3	1.6	2.6	3.5
Free and reduced price lunch				
0 to 25% of students eligible	1.9	1.8	2.7	3.6
26 to 50%	2.2	1.8	2.6	2.4
51 to 75%	2.2	1.7	2.8	3.4
76 to 100%	2.1	1.8	2.8	3.3
Student-to-counselor ratio				
100:1 or fewer	2.0	2.0	2.6	3.5
101:1 to 200:1	1.9	2.0	2.6	3.6
201:1 to 300:1	2.0	1.9	2.6	3.6
301:1 to 400:1	2.0	1.9	2.7	3.5
401:1 to 500:1	1.9	1.7	2.9	3.6
More than 500:1	2.0	1.7	2.7	3.6

SOURCE: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2012.

⁶ Correlation between public school status and ranking of: “helping students plan and prepare for postsecondary education” (-.313), “helping students with their academic achievement in high school” (.217), “helping students plan and prepare for their work roles after high school” (.171), $p < .01$

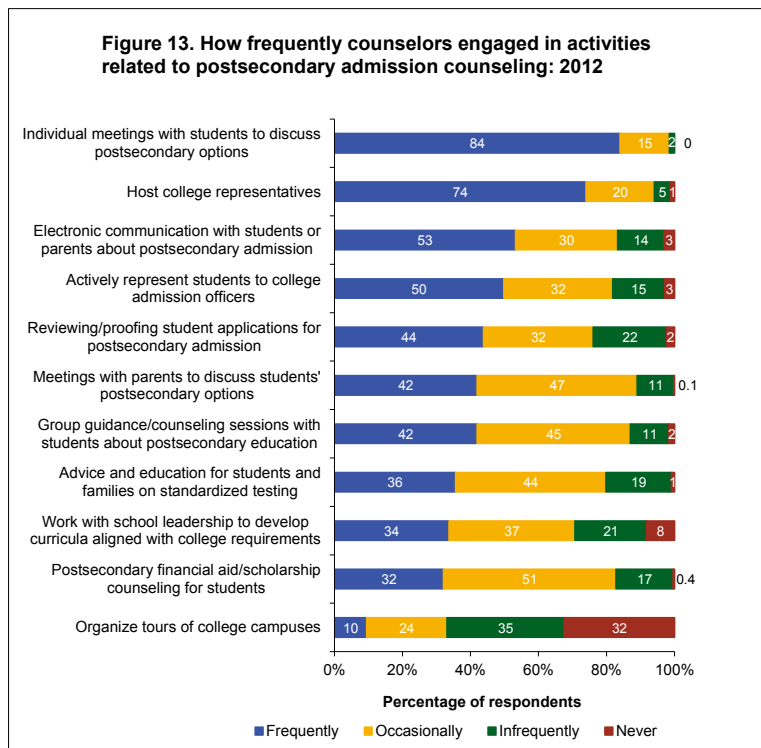
⁷ Correlation between percent eligible for FRPL and ranking of: “helping students plan and prepare for their work roles after high school” (.170), “helping students with their academic achievement in high school” (.132), “helping students plan and prepare for postsecondary education” (-.219), $p < .01$

⁸ Correlation between percent of time spent on postsecondary counseling and: private school status (.648), enrollment (-.107), percent eligible for FRPL (-.422), $p < .01$

Table 27. Mean percentage of time that counseling staff spent on various tasks by school characteristics: 2012

	Postsecondary admission counseling	Choice and scheduling of high school courses	Personal needs counseling	Academic testing	Occupational counseling and job placement	Teaching	Other non-guidance activities
Total	32.2%	20.6%	19.1%	11.6%	5.3%	4.8%	4.4%
Control							
Public	22.8	24.2	21.8	12.9	6.9	4.6	4.7
Private	52.9	12.5	13.3	8.8	2.0	5.4	3.7
<i>Private non-parochial</i>	56.1	11.5	10.4	8.8	1.4	6.6	3.9
<i>Private parochial</i>	47.0	14.3	18.5	8.6	3.0	3.3	3.2
Enrollment							
Fewer than 500 students	32.3	16.3	16.7	12.6	5.5	7.8	6.1
500 to 999	35.1	20.0	19.1	12.4	4.7	3.5	4.0
1,000 to 1,499	31.5	24.5	20.8	9.1	5.5	3.1	2.9
1,500 to 1,999	29.0	24.4	24.7	10.6	6.1	2.0	2.5
2,000 or more	23.2	30.7	21.2	11.0	6.1	3.7	3.6
Free and reduced price lunch							
0 to 25% of students eligible	29.4	22.8	21.4	10.8	5.6	4.8	3.3
26 to 50%	21.5	23.8	22.5	13.7	7.4	4.3	5.2
51 to 75%	20.8	23.0	21.0	14.9	7.2	5.2	5.6
76 to 100%	24.9	24.4	19.1	11.6	5.9	5.4	5.5
Student-to-counselor ratio							
100:1 or fewer	38.4	13.2	18.0	10.5	5.5	6.0	5.0
101:1 to 200:1	36.7	18.9	17.8	10.4	4.6	5.8	4.3
201:1 to 300:1	30.2	21.2	20.6	11.4	5.7	4.4	4.5
301:1 to 400:1	27.5	23.3	21.6	12.8	5.5	3.3	4.4
401:1 to 500:1	29.4	25.5	17.1	13.4	5.5	4.3	3.3
More than 500:1	31.4	23.8	16.6	14.0	4.6	3.8	4.3

SOURCE: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2012.



SOURCE: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2012.

also reported they frequently engaged in electronic communication with students or parents about postsecondary admission, and 50 percent reported that they frequently engage in actively representing students to college admission officers.

There are variations in the extent to which students at different types of schools benefit from these services. For example, counselors at private schools engage more frequently than those at public schools in most of these activities.⁹ Organizing campus tours of postsecondary campuses was the only activity public school counselors engaged in more frequently compared to private school colleagues. Counselors at larger schools spent more time meeting with parents and less time reviewing applications, organizing college campus tours and working with school leadership to develop college prep curricula.¹⁰ Counselors at lower-income schools engaged less frequently in individual meetings with students, meetings with parents, electronically communicating with students or parents, test advising, representing students to college admission offices, and hosting college representatives. However, counselors at lower-income schools provided counseling on financial aid options and organized tours of college campuses more frequently than those at higher-income schools.¹¹

DATA COLLECTION

Counselors are increasingly encouraged to collect and use data in their work. Tracking student information can inform practice and help counselors employ data-driven decision making to respond to student needs.¹² NACAC’s 2012 Counseling Trends Survey found that counseling departments collect and analyze a variety of student data. Nearly all schools surveyed tracked the number of students who took standardized admission tests (SAT/ACT), as well as the number of students who applied to, were accepted by and enrolled in a two- or four-year postsecondary institution. Fewer than half of the guidance departments collected information about the number of students who developed a written postsecondary plan, the number of students who completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or the postsecondary progress of former students (See Table 28). Private schools were more likely to keep data regarding students’ college applications, admission and enrollments, as well as postsecondary progress of former students. Public schools were more likely to track the number of students who completed the FAFSA.¹³ Counselors from schools with larger proportions of FRPL-eligible students were less likely to track how many students applied, were accepted and enrolled in college, yet more likely to track which students completed the FAFSA.¹⁴

Table 28. Percentage of schools that collect and analyze data regarding college-going by school characteristics: 2012

	Number of students who develop a written postsecondary plan	Number of students who take standardized admission tests	Number of students who complete an application for admission to a 2- or 4-year postsecondary institution	Number of students who are accepted to a 2- or 4-year postsecondary institution	Number of students who enroll in a 2- or 4-year postsecondary institution	Number of students who complete the FAFSA	Progress of former students through postsecondary education
Total	46.2%	94.6%	86.2%	91.4%	89.2%	40.2%	40.6%
Control							
Public	49.1	93.2	81.5	87.9	85.2	46.9	34.8
Private	39.7	97.4	96.2	98.7	97.4	25.9	52.7
<i>Private non-parochial</i>	36.7	97.0	95.0	99.0	97.5	25.8	51.0
<i>Private parochial</i>	45.1	98.2	98.2	98.2	97.3	26.1	55.8
Enrollment							
Fewer than 500 students	40.6	94.3	85.6	89.9	91.1	46.5	48.4
500 to 999	45.1	95.0	86.9	90.6	87.4	38.9	38.7
1,000 to 1,499	51.3	96.8	88.4	93.5	89.0	31.6	37.3
1,500 to 1,999	58.5	93.8	86.6	95.1	89.0	32.9	30.5
2,000 or more students	52.8	90.3	80.6	93.1	87.5	43.1	30.6
Free and reduced price lunch							
0 to 25% of students eligible	46.8	94.0	88.8	94.0	90.1	29.9	38.7
26 to 50%	49.3	93.1	74.9	86.6	85.2	43.1	28.2
51 to 75%	47.6	93.7	82.5	83.9	82.5	63.6	40.1
76 to 100%	50.6	95.4	83.9	86.2	83.9	76.5	48.8
Students per counselor							
100 or fewer	37.8	91.6	85.5	91.6	89.2	32.9	46.9
101 to 200	46.3	96.4	90.4	94.4	92.7	40.5	46.5
201 to 300	46.2	93.1	85.9	90.8	88.1	37.7	34.5
301 to 400	43.6	96.5	82.6	91.3	87.2	46.8	40.4
401 to 500	56.5	94.2	87.0	85.5	85.5	40.6	40.6
More than 500	60.0	90.9	76.4	85.5	85.5	38.2	32.7

SOURCE: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2012.

⁹ Correlation between private school status and frequency of: group meetings with students (.208), individual meetings with students (.204), meetings with parents (.282), electronic communication with students and parents (.368), testing assistance (.333), application assistance (.353), hosting college reps (.224), working with school leadership (.107), actively representing students (.294), organizing campus tours (-.113), p < .01

¹⁰ Correlation between enrollment and frequency of: meeting with parents (.144), reviewing applications (-.128), organizing college campus tours (-.189), working with school leadership to develop curricula (-.116), p < .01

¹¹ Correlation between percent eligible for FRPL and frequency of: individual meetings with students (-.230), meeting with parents (-.364), electronic communications with students and parents (-.454), hosting college reps (-.203), test advising (-.301), representing students (-.179), organizing campus tours (.332), financial aid counseling (.182), p < .01

¹² The College Board. (2011). *School Counselors Literature and Landscape Review: The State of School Counseling in America*. New York, NY: College Board Advocacy & Policy Center, The College Board National Office for School Counselor Advocacy (NOSCA).

¹³ Correlation between public control and collecting data about: number of students who take admission tests (-.087), number of students who complete an application (-.198), number of students who are accepted (-.179), number of students who enroll (-.183), number of students who complete the FAFSA (.200), postsecondary progress of former students (-.170), p < .01

¹⁴ Correlation between percentage of students eligible for FRPL and collecting data about: number of students who complete an application (-.136), number of students who are accepted (-.177), number of students who enroll (-.148), number of students who complete the FAFSA (.364), p < .01

Professional Development and Compensation

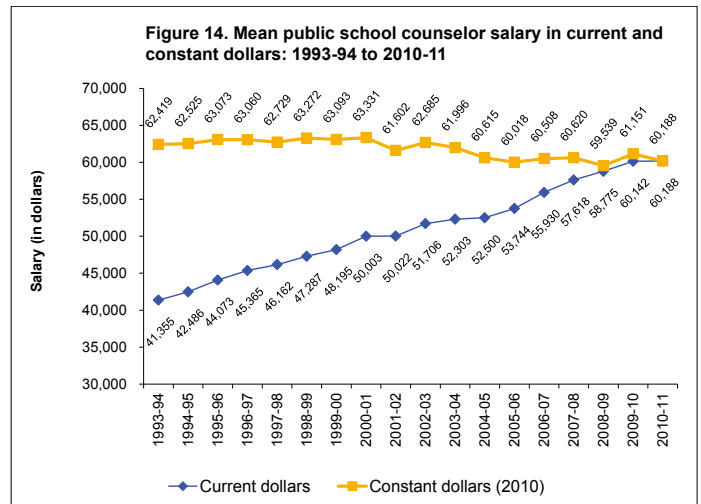
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON COLLEGE COUNSELING

In 2012, 42 percent of high schools reported counselors responsible for college counseling were required to participate in professional development related to postsecondary counseling. This is up from 25 percent in 2010 and 35 percent in 2011. As shown in Table 29, private high schools were much more likely than public schools to require professional development of counselors (61 percent versus 33 percent). Schools with fewer FRPL-eligible students were also more likely to require professional development in postsecondary counseling.¹⁵

COMPENSATION

According to the Educational Research Service, the mean public school counselor salary has increased steadily over the past two decades based on current year dollars. In the 2010-11 school year (the most recent year for which data are available) the mean salary for a public school counselor was \$60,188, up from \$41,355 in 1993-94. However, inflation-adjusted figures calculated by NACAC using the annual average Consumer Price Index provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that salaries have actually

declined slightly in 2010 constant dollars, indicating that counselor salaries have not kept pace with inflation (see Figure 14).¹⁶



NOTE: Current dollar figures from source cited below. The 2010 constant dollar figures were calculated by NACAC using the Consumer Price Index annual averages provided by the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

SOURCE: Educational Research Service. (2010). *Salaries and Wages Paid Professional and Support Personnel in Public Schools, 2010-11*. Arlington, VA. 38th edition of the National Survey of Salaries and Wages in Public Schools. Arlington, VA.

Table 29. Percentage of secondary schools that require college counselors to participate in professional development and that cover professional development costs by school characteristics: 2012

	Percentage of schools that require professional development	Percentage of schools that cover professional development costs		
		All costs	Some costs	No costs
Total	41.8%	42.6%	42.8%	14.7%
Control				
Public	32.9	29.4	51.1	19.5
Private	61.1	70.8	25.0	4.2
<i>Private non-parochial</i>	61.9	75.6	20.4	4.0
<i>Private parochial</i>	59.6	62.2	33.3	4.5
Enrollment				
Fewer than 500 students	36.1	47.7	38.3	14.0
500 to 999	47.2	44.9	42.4	12.7
1,000 to 1,499	43.9	39.4	47.1	13.5
1,500 to 1,999	39.8	30.1	54.2	15.7
2,000 or more	43.8	27.4	43.8	28.8
Free and reduced price lunch				
0 to 25 percent of students eligible	40.0	35.1	54.3	4.3
26 to 50 percent	29.5	33.8	46.9	19.3
51 to 75 percent	29.4	27.5	40.8	31.7
76 to 100 percent	44.2	26.4	54.0	19.5
Students per counselor				
100 or fewer	34.9	56.1	31.7	12.2
101 to 200	51.2	48.3	41.0	10.7
201 to 300	42.0	40.2	46.6	13.3
301 to 400	34.7	33.5	42.2	24.3
401 to 500	29.0	42.0	40.6	17.4
More than 500	32.8	36.2	50.0	13.8

SOURCE: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2012.

¹⁵ Correlation between requiring professional development related to postsecondary counseling and: private school status (.266), FRPL eligibility (-.140), $p < .01$

¹⁶ Educational Research Service. (2010). *Salaries and Wages Paid Professional and Support Personnel in Public Schools, 2010-11*. 38th edition of the National Survey of Salaries and Wages in Public Schools. Arlington, VA.

Chapter 6

The College Admission Office

CONTENTS

- Admission Office Staff
- Budget and Cost to Recruit

Admission Office Staff

The admission office staff typically includes a dean or vice president for admission or enrollment management, middle-level managers or assistant directors, admission officers, and administrative support staff.

RATIO OF APPLICATIONS TO ADMISSION OFFICERS

As shown in chapter 2, nearly two-thirds of colleges (64 percent) reported increases in the number of applications they received, resulting in high application loads for admission officers. For the Fall 2012 admission cycle, colleges reported the average admission officer was responsible for reading 620 applications, down from 662 in 2011 (see Table 30).

The burden of large application volume was particularly prevalent at certain types of institutions. For example, admission officers at public institutions were responsible for reading about three times more applications than their counterparts at private institutions. Admission officers at larger colleges and those at more selective institutions also had to contend with higher application volumes (see Table 30).¹

COMPENSATION

Table 31 shows the median salaries for various admission positions according to results of an annual salary survey conducted by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR). Salaries for all positions vary according to the institution's Carnegie classification, but they vary most widely for higher-level positions. For example, an admission counselor

Table 30. Mean number of applications per admission officer by institutional characteristics: 2012

	Applications per admission officer
Total	620
Control	
Public	1,214
Private	403
Enrollment	
Fewer than 3,000 students	301
3,000 to 9,999	829
10,000 or more	1,541
Selectivity	
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	1,025
50 to 70 percent	579
71 to 85 percent	478
More than 85 percent	479
Yield	
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	643
30 to 45 percent	599
46 to 60 percent	763
More than 60 percent	296

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2012.

earned \$35,773, on average, in 2012-13, and this salary varied only slightly by the institutional classification. The median salary for a chief admission officer was \$88,597, and this salary ranged from \$73,650 at associate's institutions to \$116,868 at doctorate-granting institutions. Chief enrollment managers earned the highest median salary in 2012-13 at \$132,349.

¹ Correlation between application-to-admission officer ratio and: public college status (.528), enrollment (.559), selectivity (.294), p < .01

Table 31. Median salary of admission staff by Carnegie classification: 2012-13

	Median salary	Median salary (in dollars) by Carnegie classification			
		Associate's	Baccalaureate	Master's	Doctorate-granting
Admission Counselor	\$35,773	\$40,392	\$33,800	\$35,368	\$37,863
Deputy Head, Admission	55,692	47,907	53,362	53,174	67,269
Chief Admission Officer	88,597	73,650	82,925	85,022	116,868
Chief Enrollment Management Officer	132,349	95,123	126,080	133,987	163,734

SOURCE: College and University Professional Association for Human Resources. (2012-13). *Professionals in Higher Education Salary Survey and Administrators in Higher Education Salary Survey*.

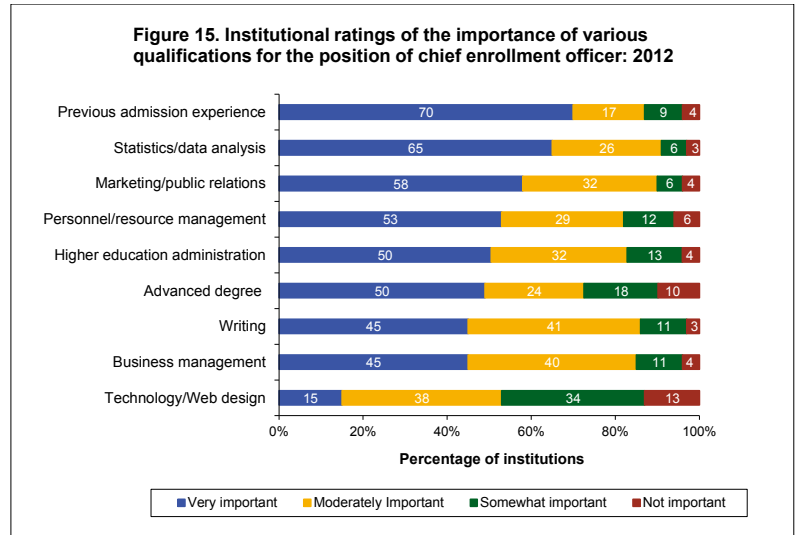
PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR CHIEF ENROLLMENT OFFICERS

The job of a college admission officer involves attracting students to apply to the institution, evaluating applications and attempting to enroll students who have received offers of admission. The admission process, though different at each school, has attained a level of standardization that enables admission officers to move between institutions and apply similar practices. Figure 15 shows how colleges rated the importance of various skills to the position of chief enrollment officer in 2012. Previous admission experience was rated as the most important qualification. The second most important skill was statistics/data analysis followed closely by marketing/public relations and personnel/resource management experience.

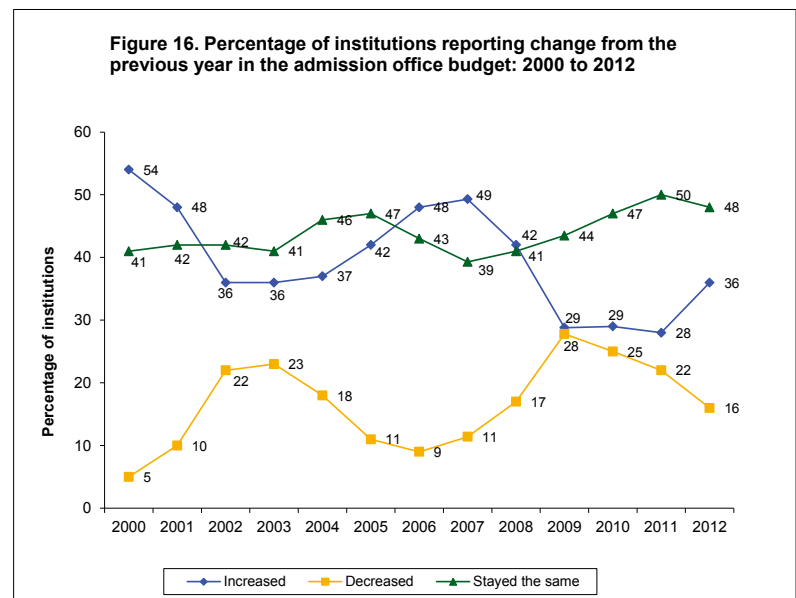
Different types of institutions rated most of the chief enrollment officer skills in very similar ways. However, there were a few interesting variations by institutional characteristics. For example, public institutions considered having an advanced degree to be more important than their private counterparts, and more selective colleges placed less value on previous admission and higher education administration experience compared to less selective institutions.²

Budget and Cost to Recruit

Admission office budgets include funds to cover expenses such as staff salaries and benefits, publications and mailings to prospective and admitted students, staff travel for recruitment and yield-related purposes, application printing and processing, website maintenance and enhancements, and other activities conducted by the admission department or third-party contractors. The proportion of colleges reporting decreases in their admission office budgets was 16 percent in 2012, continuing a pattern of decrease from the 28 percent reported in 2009. In addition, 36 percent of colleges reported a budget increase for 2012, a rebound from the 28-29 percent reported from 2009 to 2011 (see Figure 16). Forty-eight percent reported no change.



SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2012.



SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2012.

² Correlation between public college status and importance of chief enrollment officer skills: advanced degree (.229), p < .01; Correlation between college selectivity and importance of chief enrollment officer skills: previous admission experience (.155), higher education administration (.138), p < .05

COST TO RECRUIT

NACAC’s 2012 Admission Trends Survey asked institutions to report their total fiscal budget for the Fall 2012 admission cycle. The survey also asked institutions to report the total number of applicants, accepted students and enrolled students, allowing for the calculation of “cost to recruit” figures.³ In an effort to measure cost to recruit as accurately as possible, the survey also asked institutions to report what categories of expenses were included in the total admission budgets they provided. The percentage of institutions that included each of the expense categories were as follows:

- admission staff salaries (71 percent)
- admission staff benefits (51 percent)
- staff travel expenses for recruitment/yield (99 percent)
- expenses for participation in college fairs and other recruitment/yield events (98 percent)
- publication expenses (86 percent)
- payments made to third party contractors for admission or recruitment/yield services (88 percent)

Table 32 shows 2012 cost to recruit figures for two sets of respondents: 1) those who included all expense categories except for staff salaries and benefits in their total admission budgets; and 2) respondents who included all of the expense categories, *including* staff salaries and benefits in their total admission budgets.⁴

For the 2012 admission cycle, an average college admission office spent \$285 in recruitment and office costs for each student who applied, \$451 for each student who was admitted and \$1,641 for each student who enrolled. When staff salaries and benefits were included, the average cost to recruit figures were \$451 per applicant, \$677 per accepted student and \$2,432 per enrolled student (see Table 32).

As shown in Table 32, costs to recruit varied widely among different types of institutions. The following examples refer to cost to recruit figures which included staff salaries and benefits.

- Private colleges spent approximately 2.5 times as much as public colleges to recruit both applicants and admitted students, and nearly four times as much to recruit enrolled students for Fall 2012.⁵
- In comparison to the largest colleges (10,000 or more students), the smallest colleges (fewer than 3,000 students) spent between three and four times as much to recruit each applicant, admitted student and enrolled student.⁶

Table 32. Mean cost to recruit per applicant, admitted student and enrolled student: 2012

	Respondents who excluded staff salaries and benefits from the total admission budget			Respondents who included all expense categories in the total admission budget		
	Mean cost per applicant	Mean cost per admitted student	Mean cost per enrolled student	Mean cost per applicant	Mean cost per admitted student	Mean cost per enrolled student
Total	\$285.23	\$450.88	\$1,641.16	\$450.89	\$677.11	\$2,431.61
Control						
Public	<i>130.88</i>	<i>158.05</i>	<i>419.89</i>	218.80	326.36	907.91
Private	295.19	469.77	1719.95	593.13	892.09	3365.49
Enrollment						
Fewer than 3,000 students	317.57	455.72	1621.67	607.73	901.36	3141.71
3,000 to 9,999	<i>219.00</i>	<i>399.87</i>	<i>1585.76</i>	299.22	481.93	1979.80
10,000 or more	<i>47.98</i>	<i>70.02</i>	<i>186.19</i>	149.48	265.63	733.76
Selectivity						
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	<i>213.33</i>	<i>573.89</i>	<i>2220.16</i>	221.72	696.43	2189.36
50 to 70 percent	<i>293.99</i>	<i>478.51</i>	<i>1689.11</i>	485.21	590.57	1971.98
70 to 85 percent	<i>316.73</i>	<i>406.72</i>	<i>1534.44</i>	506.26	629.91	2887.83
More than 85 percent	<i>280.18</i>	<i>304.90</i>	<i>922.32</i>	486.89	900.05	2528.03
Yield Rate						
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	268.39	451.53	2060.97	463.59	622.18	2979.24
30 to 45 percent	<i>272.47</i>	<i>400.04</i>	<i>1102.05</i>	461.77	671.17	1934.73
46 to 60 percent	<i>417.04</i>	<i>497.06</i>	<i>951.79</i>	254.77	856.05	1685.14
More than 60 percent	<i>482.01</i>	<i>905.41</i>	<i>973.84</i>	--	--	--

-- Mean could not be provided, as cell included only one institution.

NOTE: Figures in italics should be interpreted with caution due to low sample size (fewer than 15 institutions per cell).

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2012.

³ Each cost to recruit figure is obtained by dividing the total admission budget by the respective pool of students (applicants, admitted students and enrolled students).
⁴ About eight percent of respondents reported data that allowed the calculation of a cost to recruit figure that included all categories *except* for staff salaries and benefits. Twelve percent of respondents reported data that allowed the calculation of a *full budget* cost to recruit figure. All cost to recruit figures were then trimmed five percent due to extreme outliers.
⁵ Correlation between private college status and cost to recruit (full budget): applicant (.469), admitted student (.455), enrolled student (.645), p < .01
⁶ Correlation between enrollment and cost to recruit (full budget): applicant (-.419), admitted student (-.381), enrolled student (-.505), p < .01