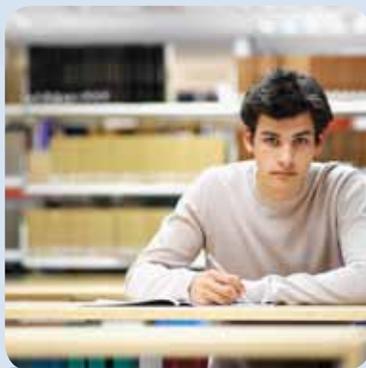
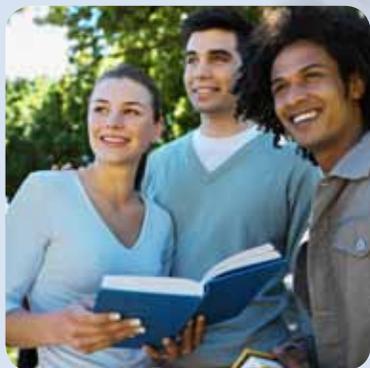


NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR COLLEGE ADMISSION COUNSELING



# 2010 STATE OF COLLEGE ADMISSION

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR COLLEGE ADMISSION COUNSELING (NACAC)  
WISHES TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE FOLLOWING KEY INDIVIDUALS  
AND GROUPS FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THIS REPORT.

Most importantly, NACAC would like to thank the secondary school counselors and admission officers who gave of their valuable time to participate in the annual Admission and Counseling Trends surveys. The report would not be possible without the data collected from these surveys.

The association also appreciates the US Department of Education and the College Board for sharing the education data they collect for inclusion in this report.

Finally, the authors of the report wish to thank the following members of the NACAC staff for their assistance with survey development and administration, and with reviewing, editing, designing, and promoting the final report: Joyce Smith, Chief Executive Officer; Anita Bollt, Deputy Executive Director; Shanda Ivory, Director of Communications, Publications and Technology; Kristen Garman, Assistant Director of Communications, Publications and Technology; Sarah S. Cox, Editorial and Creative Services Manager; Daisy Kinard, Publications Coordinator; Mohamoud Gudaal, Senior Computer Systems Administrator; Michelle Lucas, Associate Director of Information Technology; and James Dodd, Office and Facilities Manager.

The authors also wish to thank Sean Nyhan, Public Policy and Research Coordinator, for his assistance in compiling this report.

## PREFACE

The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) offers the *State of College Admission* each fall to describe key trends in the transition from high school to college. The 2010 edition—which covers the Fall 2009 admission cycle—marks the eighth anniversary of this report.

### Introduction

The common threads linking admission cycles in recent years seem to be uncertainty about outcomes of the process and the real or perceived threat of scarcity of resources. The past decade has seen the number of high school graduates increase steadily to a peak of 3.33 million in 2008-09. In addition, individual students are submitting a greater number of applications—in response to real and perceived increases in competition and the increased ease of applying online—resulting in increased application volume at postsecondary institutions. Although institutional selectivity has increased somewhat, particularly at the most competitive colleges, colleges also have seen their yield rates steadily decline, as the process of predicting which students will enroll has become more complex. The national increase in the number of high school graduates masks wide variations by state and region, and some areas have actually experienced sharp declines, creating competition among colleges for students. In addition, the sharp economic downturn that began in the late summer/early fall of 2008 reduced resources for many students, secondary schools and colleges.

### Effects of the Economy

The 2009 *State of College Admission* report included a special section on the results of a series of NACAC member surveys on the effects of the economic recession on the admission process for students and families, secondary schools and counselors, and higher education institutions and admission offices. These surveys offered a sneak peak at the Fall 2009 admission cycle, with a focus on issues that might be expected to change as a result of the economic recession.

Although the effects on the admission process were not as pronounced as many feared, important changes were documented. Results of those surveys indicated that many students and families were reevaluating college application plans and enrollment decisions with more weight placed on financial concerns. Secondary school counselors reported seeing an increase in the number of students planning to attend public versus private colleges, two-year versus four-year institutions, or to delay pursuit of postsecondary education. Reports from colleges also indicated a dramatic increase in demand for student financial aid, reflecting many families' changed economic circumstances.

At the same time, most secondary schools reported either frozen or decreased budgets and staff sizes, resulting in increased student-to-counselor ratios, particularly at public schools. Many college admission offices also reported frozen or decreased budget and staff numbers. Because of expected changes in students' financial situations, many colleges also worried about meeting enrollment goals and implemented strategies to guard against increased uncertainty in the Fall 2009 admission cycle. (See NACAC's 2009 *State of College Admission* report for complete results of the Effects of the Economy on the Admission Process, 2008-09.)

### Application Volume and Acceptance and Yield Rates

Last year's *State of College Admission* report also included an analysis of recent trends in selectivity in admission using US Department of Education data which showed that average acceptance rates had decreased slightly from 71 percent in 2001 to 67 percent in 2007. This change occurred against a backdrop of steady growth in the number of high school graduates and in the number of applications submitted per student (see Chapter 1). The number of high school graduates is estimated to have peaked with the 2009 graduating class, and more recent data indicates no further decline in acceptance rates. As shown in Chapter 2, the average acceptance rate across all four-year colleges with competitive admission was 66.5 percent for the Fall 2009 admission cycle. Growth in the number of applications per student continues to increase steadily, with nearly one-quarter of Fall 2009 freshmen having submitted seven or more applications.

From 2005 through 2008, approximately three-quarters of colleges reported that applications had increased from the previous year. For 2009, a smaller majority of colleges (65 percent) reported increases, and the largest proportion (29 percent) since 1996 reported decreases. Although the number of high school graduates nationally was at an all-time high, growth in the number of colleges reporting decreases in application volume may be the result of changes in student enrollment choices that was documented in NACAC's 2009 member survey on effects of the economy.

Although the recent decline in acceptance rates has leveled off in the past two admission cycles, the average institutional yield rate has continued to decline. The trend analysis presented in the 2009 *State of College Admission* report showed a decline from 49 percent in 2001 to 45 percent in 2007. The average yield rate for the Fall 2009 admission cycle was down to 43 percent, meaning that institutions, on average, are enrolling increasingly smaller proportions of their accepted student pools.

### Enrollment Management Strategies

NACAC's 2009 Effects of the Economy survey also showed that colleges were using or planning various strategies to ensure meeting enrollment goals during a time of changed economic circumstances for prospective students and shifting application patterns. About one-quarter (26 percent) of colleges reported accepting a greater number of Early Decision (ED) and/or Early Action (EA) applicants, and a little more than 20 percent reporting compiling a longer wait list and accepting more students from the wait list. Seven percent planned to initiate a wait list for the first time.

Data collected on the 2009 Admission Trends Survey supports the increased use of these strategies. As shown in Chapter 3, nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of colleges with Early Decision policies reported increases in the number of ED applicants accepted.

Nearly three-quarters of colleges with Early Action policies reported increases in both EA applications and EA admits. The increasing number of students accepted through Early Decision policies has led to a growing gap between the acceptance rate of ED applicants and the overall applicant pool at ED colleges. The gap rose to 15 percentage points (70 percent compared to 55 percent) for the Fall 2009 admission cycle from 8 percentage points (61 percent compared to 53 percent) in Fall 2006.

The increased gap in the acceptance rates between Early Decision and Regular Decision applicants may rekindle debates about the effects of Early Decision admission, particularly as it relates to access for underrepresented populations. The increased use of these strategies by colleges also makes the job of secondary school counselors more difficult as they try to advise students about their chances of admission based on "rules of thumb" that may no longer apply.

### Technology in the Admission Process

Results of NACAC's annual Admission Trends Surveys show that technology has become an increasingly intrinsic part of the college admission process. As shown in Chapter 2, colleges are rapidly incorporating Internet and social media tools into the recruitment process. In 2009, 61 percent of colleges reported having blogs by current students, up from 51 percent in 2008 and 42 percent in 2007. The proportion of colleges that have links from their college admission Web sites to their social networking sites has increased even more dramatically, from 39 percent in 2008 and 73 percent in 2009. About 30 to 35 percent of colleges also have blogs by admission officers, online chat rooms, online message boards, and podcasts available for prospective students, but the use of these tools is increasing more slowly.

As of 2009, nearly all colleges had online applications available on their Web sites. In fact, a larger proportion (98 percent) had online applications than had downloadable applications to be submitted via mail (83 percent). Over the past several years, colleges have received a steadily increasing proportion of their applications online—80 percent in 2009, up from 72 percent in 2008, 68 percent in 2007, and 58 percent in 2006. Email/Internet also continues to be the most popular method by which colleges receive prospective student inquiries. About one-third of colleges use email and their Web sites (in addition to letters) to notify applicants of their admission status.

Technology makes it easier for students to apply to multiple colleges, complicating the job of both secondary school counselors and admission officers. The ease of applying to multiple colleges creates disincentives for students to spend time evaluating the "fit" of their college options. And the increased application volume that results makes it more difficult for institutions to predict yield. As shown in Chapter 4, results of NACAC's Admission Trends Survey show that more than 20 percent of colleges now place considerable importance on a student's demonstrated interest in attending as a factor in the admission decision.

Navigating the growing field of college information available via technology and the increased demand from colleges to submit application materials online also increases the amount of knowledge and skills that secondary school counselors must have, despite demands on their time that already strain them. As shown in Chapter 5, the typical secondary school counselor is only able to spend about one-quarter (26 percent) of their time on college counseling.

### Looking Ahead

Against the backdrop of an economic situation that has yet to rebound, continued uncertainty and the threat of increased scarcity of resources could make it more difficult for both college transition professionals and students/families to adhere to ethical practices in the admission process. As the admission landscape continues to change, NACAC will persist in its mission to maintain ethical professional practice and protect the rights of students, while providing professionals with the tools and training they need to effectively shepherd students through the college transition process.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Highlights from the *2010 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

A population wave has fueled record numbers of high school graduates and students enrolled in postsecondary education. However, the proportion of high school graduates that directly enroll in college has not changed substantially in the last decade. 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 3.33 million in 2008-09 after more than a decade of steady growth. An estimated 3.29 million students graduated in 2009-10. The number of graduates will continue to decline through 2014-15, but will rebound to 3.4 million by 2018-19. There are wide variations by state and region, and some states are experiencing substantial declines in high school graduates.
- **College Enrollment Continues at All-Time High:** As of 2008, approximately 19.1 million students were enrolled in degree-granting postsecondary institutions. Total college enrollment is expected to continue increasing until at least 2018.
- **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 58 percent of high school completers from the lowest income quartile transitioned to college in 2008, compared to 87 percent from the highest income quartile. In 2008, black and Hispanic persons constituted approximately 33 percent of the traditional college-aged population, but they represented only about 25 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 slowed somewhat, with more colleges than in previous years reporting decreases in application volume. Four-year institutions nationwide accepted an average of about two-thirds of all students who applied for admission.

- **Application Growth Slows:** Most colleges continued to experience increases in the number of applications they received, although the proportion was somewhat smaller than in recent years. In addition, a sizable minority of colleges (29 percent) reported experiencing decreases, which is the largest proportion reporting a decrease since 1996. The number of applications that individual students submit continued to increase. Twenty-three percent of Fall 2009 freshman had submitted seven or more applications for admission, up from 22 percent in Fall 2008 and 19 percent in Fall 2007.
- **Online Applications Increase:** For the Fall 2009 admission cycle, four-year colleges and universities received an average of 80 percent of their applications online, up from 72 percent in Fall 2008, 68 percent in Fall 2007 and 58 percent in Fall 2006.
- **Colleges Accept 67 Percent of Applicants:** The average selectivity rate—percentage of applicants who are offered admission—at four-year colleges and universities in the United States was 67 percent for Fall 2009. The average institutional yield rate—percentage of admitted students who enroll—was 43 percent.

### 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.

- **Students Admitted Through Early Decision and Early Action Increases:** For the third year in a row, about half (47 percent) of colleges reported increases in the number of Early Decision applications. There was a more dramatic rise, however, in the percentage of colleges reporting increases in the number of students admitted through Early Decision. Sixty-five percent reported increases, compared to 43 percent in 2008 and 36 percent in 2007. Nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of colleges reported an increase in Early Action applications and a similar proportion (73 percent) reported increases in the number of students who were admitted through Early Action.
- **At Colleges with Early Decision Policies, Gap In Acceptance Rates Between ED and Regular Decision Applicants Increases:** For the Fall 2009 admission cycle, colleges with Early Decision policies reported a higher acceptance rate for their ED applicants as compared to all applicants (70 percent versus 55 percent), and the gap between the acceptance rates has grown in recent years. For the Fall 2006 admission cycle, the gap was only 8 percentage points (61 percent compared to 53 percent).

- **Chances of Acceptance from a Wait List Slightly Higher:** The percentage of institutions that used wait lists for the Fall 2009 admission cycle was 39 percent, which is somewhat higher than most recent years, with the exception of Fall 2007 when it reached a high of 41 percent. A student's likelihood of being admitted from the wait list remained at approximately 1 in 3. Institutions accepted an average of 34 percent of all students who chose to remain on wait lists, up from 30 percent in Fall 2008 and Fall 2007, and 29 percent in 2006.
- **More than Half of Colleges Create Priority Groups for Wait List:** Of those colleges that use wait lists, 56 percent stratify the wait list by academic credentials, 45 percent by students' interest in attending the institution, 33 percent by a commitment to attend if admitted, and 27 percent by ability to pay.

#### Factors in the Admission Decision

The factors that admission officers use to evaluate applications have remained largely consistent over the past 16 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, teacher and counselor recommendations, extracurricular activities, class rank, and student's demonstrated interest.

- **Students' Demonstrated Interest in Attending:** For the past seven years, NACAC's Admission Trends Survey has documented colleges' attention to applicants' interest in attending their institutions as a factor in admission decisions. From 2003 to 2006, the percentage of colleges rating demonstrated interest as a considerably important factor increased from 7 percent to 21 percent. Since that time, the percentage has held steady at just over 20 percent. In 2009, 76 percent of colleges assigned some level of importance to a student's interest in attending the institution (21 percent considerable, 27 percent moderate, and 28 percent limited).
- **Student Background Information:** Between 25 and 30 percent 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 2008–09, the national public school student-to-counselor ratio was 463:1, including K–12 schools. NACAC survey data indicated an average secondary school student-to-counselor ratio, including part-time staff, of 261:1.
- **Time Spent Counseling for College:** On average, public school counselors spent 22 percent of their time on postsecondary counseling in 2009, while their private school counterparts spent 54 percent of their time on college counseling.
- **College Counseling Staff:** In 2009, 34 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 514:1 in 2009. The average ratio at public institutions was 949:1, compared to 368:1 at private institutions.
- **Skills to Lead the Admission Office:** Previous admission experience was rated as the most important qualification. The second most important qualification was statistics/data analysis followed closely by higher education administration, and marketing/public relations.
- **Cost to Recruit:** On average, colleges and universities spent about \$524 to recruit each applicant for Fall 2009 admission, \$843 to recruit each admitted student and \$2,553 to recruit each enrolled student (when admission staff salaries and benefits were included in the admission office budget).

## INTRODUCTION

This 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. Data included in the report come from four main sources:

- NACAC's annual Counseling Trends Survey for 2009
- NACAC's annual Admission Trends Survey for 2009
- The College Board Annual Survey of Colleges 2009®
- 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 get into college; their students' academic options and experiences; and their practices in communicating with students, parents and colleges. Past surveys also have included special sections on a variety of topics, including financial aid, parent involvement, activities related to test preparation, and students' post-high school planning activities.

In April 2009, NACAC distributed its annual Counseling Trends Survey to all 15,671 regular public high schools in the United States and to the 928 private high schools that are members of NACAC. The list of public high schools was identified using the US Department of Education's Common Core of Data. The complete list of 16,599 survey recipients was randomly divided in half and distributed in two ways. One group was mailed a paper survey form that also included a link to an online survey, providing respondents with an option of how to complete the survey. The other group was mailed a postcard with an invitation to complete the survey online only. Responses were collected through the end of June, 2009.

NACAC received a total of 2,043 responses—a 12 percent response rate. The paper survey mailing resulted in 1,784 responses, or a 22 percent response rate, which is similar to the response rate achieved in recent years. The postcard mailing, or online only option, yielded

only 259 responses—a 3 percent response rate. Although the overall response rate is lower than in past years, the total number of respondents is similar due to the increased number of schools that were surveyed.

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 88 percent public, 8 percent private, non-parochial and 4 percent private, parochial, making the sample slightly over-representative of private, non-parochial schools and under-representative of private, parochial schools. Table 1 also shows that public school 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, particularly at private schools.

### 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 annual Admission Trends Survey from August to November 2009 to the 1,312 four-year postsecondary institutions who were members of NACAC, which represents 67 percent of all four-year, not-for-profit, baccalaureate degree-granting, Title-IV participating institutions. A paper survey

form was mailed to each admission office, and a web link was provided for the option of completing the survey online. NACAC received 312 responses to the survey, which represents a response rate of 24 percent to the survey and 16 percent of all four-year, not-for-profit colleges.

As shown in Table 2, NACAC Admission Trends Survey respondents were slightly over-representative of private colleges—with 74 percent private respondents compared to 67 percent nationally—and also tended to be larger, on average. Respondents were fairly representative of all colleges based on geographical region and average selectivity, but tended to have lower yield rates.

**Table 1. NACAC 2009 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
<b>Total percent of schools</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>88.4%</b>	<b>89.3%</b>	<b>8.0%</b>	<b>3.7%</b>	<b>3.7%</b>	<b>7.1%</b>
<b>Enrollment</b>								
Mean enrollment	901	582	936	618	588	104	745	375
<b>Free and reduced price lunch<sup>1</sup></b>								
Mean percent eligible	35.5	--	36.2	35.0	16.5	--	7.0	--

-- Not available for secondary schools only.

<sup>1</sup> 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 2009–10. National comparison data are from 2007–08.

SOURCES: Keigher, A. (2009). *Characteristics of Public, Private, and Bureau of Indian Education Elementary and Secondary Schools in the United States: Results from the 2007-08 Schools and Staffing Survey*. US Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. (Table 1).

*Digest of Education Statistics*. (2009). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. (Tables 5, 37 and 58).

NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2009.

**Table 2. NACAC 2009 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
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>25.8%</b>	<b>33.4%</b>	<b>74.2%</b>	<b>66.6%</b>
<b>Enrollment</b>						
Mean enrollment	5,054	3,588	13,241	7,492	2,209	1,630
<b>Region</b>						
New England	10.6%	8.6%	7.5%	6.5%	11.7%	9.7%
Middle States	21.6	20.2	21.3	17.4	21.7	21.7
South	18.7	23.2	26.3	25.2	16.1	22.2
Midwest	31.6	27.6	22.5	24.3	34.8	29.3
Southwest	4.2	7.2	6.3	11.1	3.5	5.2
West	13.2	13.1	16.3	15.5	12.2	11.9
<b>Selectivity and Yield</b>						
Mean Selectivity	67.7%	66.5%	66.6%	67.9%	68.0%	66.1%
Mean Yield	34.9	42.9	40.8	44.9	32.9	42.2

<sup>1</sup> New England: Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island

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

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

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

Southwest: Arizona, Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico

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

NOTE: Data for all colleges are for 2009–10. The list of colleges was drawn from the 2009–10 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 1,947 total institutions, 1,262 (65 percent) provided selectivity and yield data for Fall 2009.

SOURCES: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2009.

Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) online Data Center. (2009-10). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

# CHAPTER I. HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION AND COLLEGE ENROLLMENT

## CONTENTS

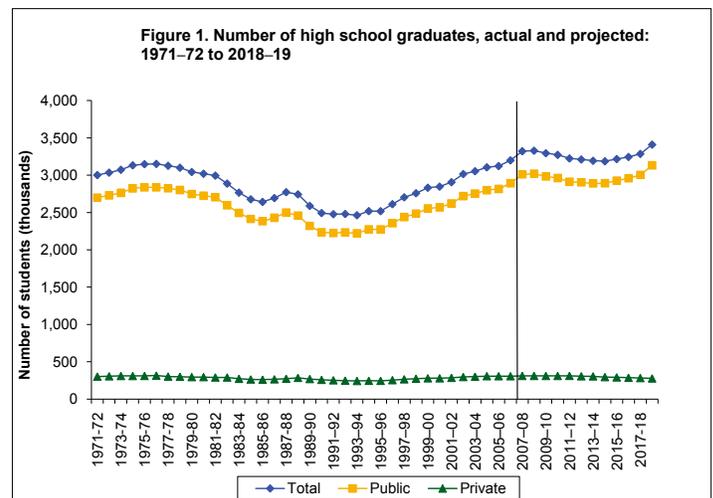
- High School Completion
- The Transition from High School to College
- College Enrollment

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 2008, workers with a high school diploma earned an average of only \$31,283, compared to \$58,613 for those with a bachelor's degree and \$83,144 for those with a master's, professional or doctoral degree.<sup>1</sup> Over the course of a 40-year working life, researchers have estimated that the typical bachelor's degree recipient will earn 66 percent more than a high school graduate. As a group, college graduates also enjoy higher job satisfaction and are more likely to receive employer-sponsored pensions and health insurance. Other factors that are 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.<sup>2</sup> In 2009, only 30 percent of all adults age 25 and older had obtained at least a bachelor's degree.<sup>3</sup>

## 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 3.33 million in 2008-09 after more than a decade of steady growth. An estimated 3.29 million students graduated in 2009-10. The number of graduates will continue to decline through 2014-15, but will rebound to 3.4 million by 2018-19.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>



SOURCES: *Digest of Education Statistics*. (2009). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. (Table 103).

<sup>1</sup> US Census Bureau. (2010). "Educational Attainment in the United States: 2009."

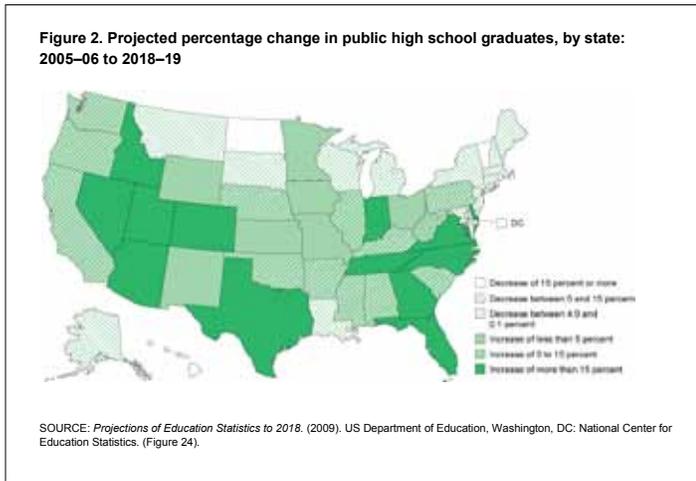
<sup>2</sup> Baum, S., Ma, J., and Payea, K. (2010). *Education Pays 2010: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society*. College Board: Washington, DC.

<sup>3</sup> US Census Bureau. (2010). "Educational Attainment in the United States: 2009."

<sup>4</sup> *Digest of Education Statistics*. (2009). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

<sup>5</sup> Cataldi, E.F., Laird, J., and KewalRamani. (2009). *High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 2007*. US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

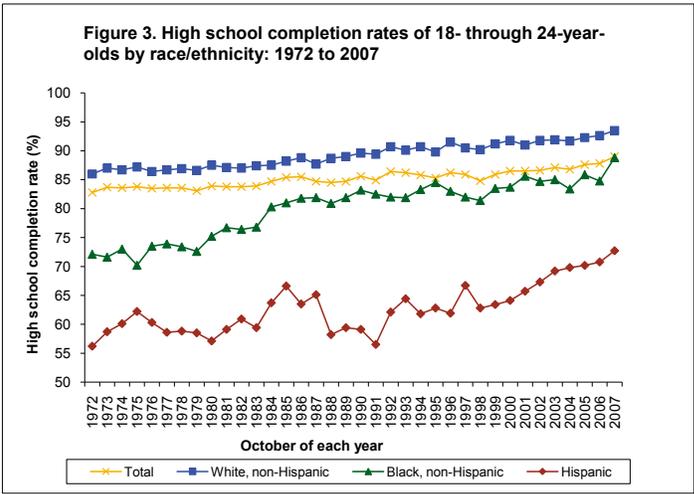
The pattern of change in high school graduates varies widely by state and region. At the national level, the number of high school graduates is expected to increase by 11 percent between 2005–06 and 2018–19. However, some states will experience much higher rates of increase, including Nevada (59 percent), Utah (53 percent), Georgia (41 percent), and Texas (40 percent); and others will experience substantial decreases, including Rhode Island (21 percent), North Dakota (20 percent) and the District of Columbia (19 percent). Overall, increases will be seen in the South (23 percent), West (16 percent), and Midwest (2 percent), and decreases will be seen in the Northeast (3 percent).<sup>6</sup> Figure 2 illustrates the relative magnitude of changes in the number of high school graduates by state for this time period.



*High School Completion Rates<sup>7</sup> by Race/Ethnicity, Income and Gender*

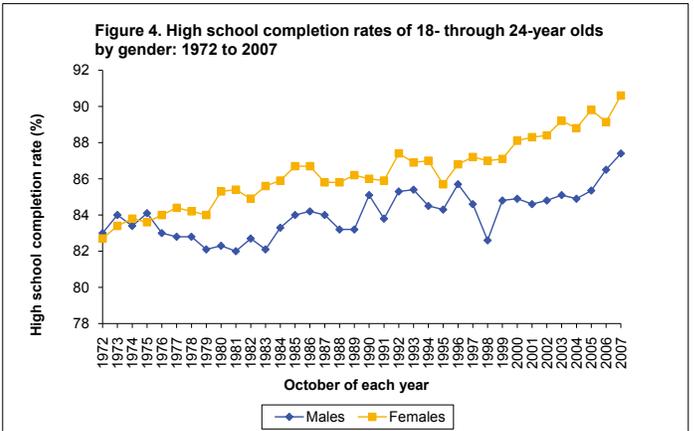
High school completion rates vary substantially among different groups of students. For example, in 2007, 94 percent of white 18-through 24-year olds completed high school, compared to 89 percent of black and 73 percent of Hispanic youth. As shown in Figure 3, the gap between black and white students 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 more than 20 percentage points.<sup>8</sup>

Important differences also exist among students from different income backgrounds. In 2008, the average high school completion rate among the top quartile of dependent 18- through 24-year olds was 92 percent. Students in the third quartile fared nearly as well at



NOTE: Status completion rates measure the percentage of 18- through 24-year-olds who have left high school and who also hold 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 2007 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 2007 but not shown separately due to small sample size.

SOURCE: Cataldi, E.F., Laird, J., and KewalRamani, A. (2009). *High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 2007*. US Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. (Table 11).



NOTE: Status completion rates measure the percentage of 18- through 24-year-olds who have left high school and who also hold a high school credential, including regular diplomas and alternative credentials such as GEDs.

SOURCE: Cataldi, E.F., Laird, J., and KewalRamani, A. (2009). *High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 2007*. US Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. (Table 11).

90 percent, followed by 85 percent for the second quartile. However, the average graduation rate for students in the bottom quartile was only 72 percent—20 percentage points below that of students with the highest family incomes.<sup>9</sup>

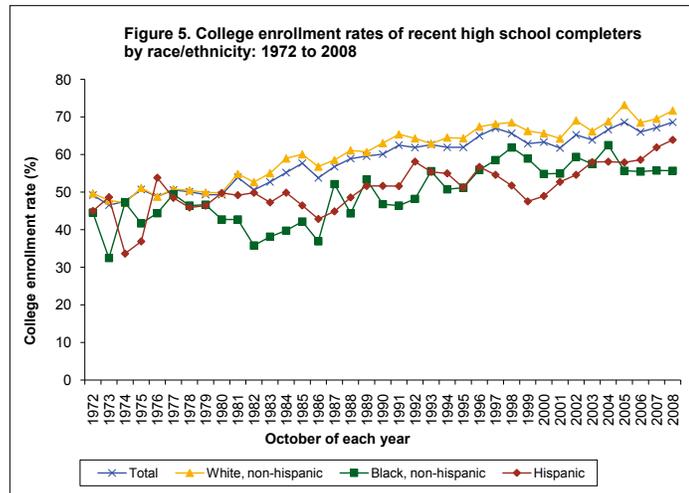
In every year since 1976, women have completed high school at a higher rate than men. In 2007—the most recent year for which data are available—the gap was 3 percentage points (see Figure 4).

<sup>6</sup> *Projections of Education Statistics to 2018*. (2009). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.  
<sup>7</sup> High school completers include both diploma and GED recipients.  
<sup>8</sup> Cataldi, E.F., Laird, J., and KewalRamani, A. (2009). *High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 2007*. US Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.  
<sup>9</sup> Mortenson, T. (2009). “Family Income and Educational Attainment, 1970 to 2008.” *Postsecondary Education Opportunity*, Number 209, November.

**The Transition from High School to College**

*College Enrollment Rates of High School Completers*

From the early 1970s to late 1990s, the percentage of high school completers who went on to college fluctuated but also showed an overall pattern of increase, peaking at 67 percent in 1997. For the last decade, the percentage has hovered in the mid-60 percent range—decreasing slightly to a low of 62 percent in 2001, and reaching a peak of 69 percent in 2005 and again in 2008 (see Figure 5).



NOTE: Enrollment in college as of October of 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 2008 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 and black, non-Hispanic exclude persons identifying as two or more races.

SOURCE: *Digest of Education Statistics*. (2009). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. (Table 201).

*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.

Even more dramatic differences are seen among high school completers of different income backgrounds. High school completers age 18 through 24 who are from the highest family income quartile transitioned to postsecondary education at a rate of 87 percent in 2008. Students from the third and second income quartiles

continued to college at rates of 79 percent and 69 percent, respectively. Only 58 percent of high school completers from the lowest income quartile transitioned to college in 2008.<sup>10</sup>

Results of NACAC’s Counseling Trends Survey 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 much lower four-year college enrollment rates and total college enrollment rates for their graduates. Counselors at schools with more students in the FRPL program had slightly higher enrollment rates at two-year colleges.<sup>11</sup> 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 more than twice as likely to enroll in four-year colleges. However, they were less likely to enroll in two-year colleges (see Table 3).<sup>12</sup>

**Table 3. Mean college enrollment rates of high school graduates at Counseling Trends Survey respondent schools: 2009**

	Four-year institutions	Two-year institutions	Total college enrollment rate
<b>Total</b>	<b>50.5</b>	<b>27.4</b>	<b>77.7</b>
<b>Control</b>			
Public	44.6	30.4	74.9
Private	92.5	5.6	97.9
Private non-parochial	93.8	4.0	97.8
Private parochial	89.5	8.9	98.2
<b>Enrollment</b>			
Fewer than 500 students	48.3	27.7	75.6
500 to 999	51.7	27.2	78.6
1,000 to 1,499	54.2	25.0	79.1
1,500 to 1,999	52.7	27.5	80.2
2,000 or more	48.2	32.0	80.2
<b>Free and reduced price lunch</b>			
0 to 25% of students eligible	56.1	26.7	82.7
26 to 50%	40.9	32.1	73.0
51 to 75%	33.7	33.1	66.5
76 to 100%	29.6	30.9	60.0
<b>Students per counselor</b>			
100 or fewer	52.9	26.3	78.0
101 to 200	55.6	25.8	81.3
201 to 300	50.2	27.4	77.4
301 to 400	47.4	28.5	75.7
401 to 500	45.1	30.1	75.1
More than 500	45.7	30.0	75.7

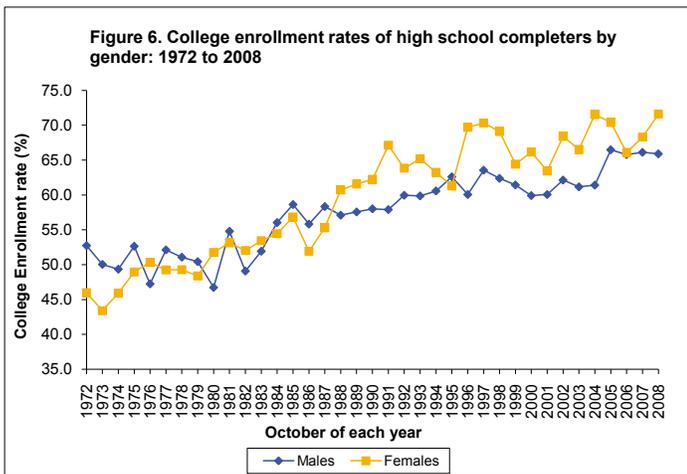
SOURCE: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2009.

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 10 percentage points in 2004, but has decreased in the past few years for which data are available. In 2008, the gender gap was 6 percentage points (see Figure 6).

<sup>10</sup> Mortenson, T. (2009). “Family Income and Educational Attainment, 1970 to 2008.” *Postsecondary Education Opportunity*, Number 209, November.

<sup>11</sup> Correlation between percent eligible for FRPL and: total college attendance rate (-.412), four-year college attendance rate (-.470), two-year college attendance rate (.151),  $p < .01$

<sup>12</sup> Correlation between private school status and: total college attendance rate (.380), four-year college attendance rate (.611), two-year college attendance rate (-.463),  $p < .01$



NOTE: Enrollment in college as of October of 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.

SOURCE: *Digest of Education Statistics*. (2009). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. (Table 200).

### College Enrollment

In 2008—the most recent year for which data are available—19.1 million students were enrolled in degree-granting postsecondary institutions. Of that total, 14.0 million (73 percent) were enrolled in public institutions and 12.1 million (63 percent) were enrolled in four-year institutions. Due to changes in both the number of high school graduates and the rate at which they enroll in college, the total number of students enrolled in postsecondary education has

increased steadily over the past 35 years. Most of that growth has been at public institutions. The total number of college students is expected to continue increasing at least through 2018. Total enrollment increased 28 percent from 1993 to 2007 and is projected to increase an additional 13 percent between 2007 and 2018.<sup>13</sup>

#### *College Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity, Income and Gender*

Under-representation 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. In 2008, black and Hispanic persons constituted approximately 33 percent of the traditional college-aged population, but they represented only about 25 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 compared to their population share (see Table 4). However, a recent study by the US Government Accountability Office highlighted important differences among subgroups of this population.<sup>14</sup> In addition, more women than men have been enrolled in college for more than 30 years, and Department of Education projections indicate that this gender gap will continue to widen until at least 2018.<sup>15</sup>

**Table 4. Share of enrollment in postsecondary education by race/ethnicity in comparison with age 18 through 24 population share: 2008**

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific Islander	American Indian/ Alaska Native
<b>Percent of population age 18 through 24</b>	<b>61.1</b>	<b>15.3</b>	<b>17.9</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>1.3</b>
<i>Percent of racial/ethnic group enrolled in postsecondary education</i>					
<b>Total</b>	63.3	13.5	11.9	6.8	1.0
<b>Control</b>					
<b>Public</b>	63.1	12.6	13.1	7.0	1.1
Four-year	66.5	11.3	9.7	7.1	1.0
Two-year	59.3	14.0	16.9	7.0	1.2
<b>Private</b>	63.8	16.1	8.6	6.2	0.8
Four-year	64.8	15.4	8.0	6.4	0.7
Two-year	49.3	26.5	17.6	4.5	1.5
<b>Type</b>					
Four-year or higher	65.8	12.9	9.0	6.8	0.9
Two-year	58.8	14.6	16.9	6.9	1.2

NOTE: Percent of population share figures do not include persons who reported more than one race.

SOURCES: *Digest of Education Statistics*. (2009). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. (Table 227).

Annual Estimates of the Resident Population by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin for the United States: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2009. (2010). US Census Bureau, Washington DC: Population Division.

<sup>13</sup> *Projections of Education Statistics to 2018*. (2009). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics; *Digest of Education Statistics*. (2009). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. (Table 190).

<sup>14</sup> *Information Sharing Could Help Institutions Identify and Address Challenges Some Asian Americans and Pacific Islander Students Face*. (2007). US Government Accountability Office: Washington, DC.

<sup>15</sup> *Projections of Education Statistics to 2018*. (2009). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics; *Digest of Education Statistics*. (2009). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. (Table 189).

## 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 2009 Admission Trends Survey indicate that most colleges continued to experience increases in the number of applications they received, although the proportion was somewhat smaller than in recent years. In addition, a sizable minority of colleges (29 percent) reported experiencing decreases, which is the largest proportion reporting a decrease since 1996 (see Figure 7).

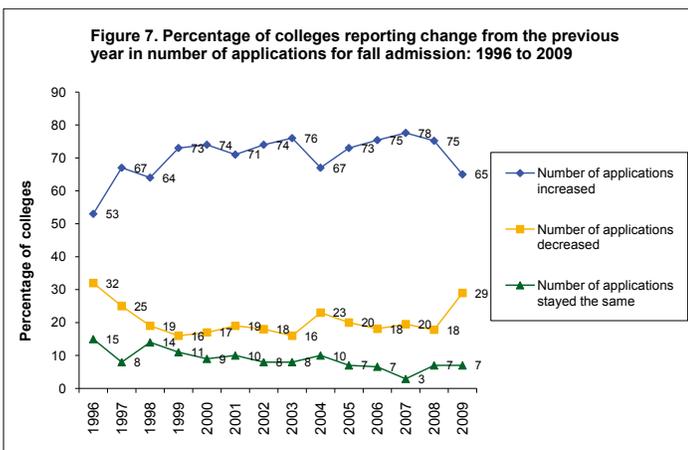
The application increases documented in recent years are due in part to the increased number of high school graduates—which peaked with the 2009 graduating class—but also to an increase in the number of applications each student submits (see Chapter 1). Seventy-five percent of Fall 2009 freshmen applied to three or more colleges, an increase of 14 percentage points over the last 19 years. The percentage of students who submitted seven or more applications reached 23 percent (see Figure 8).

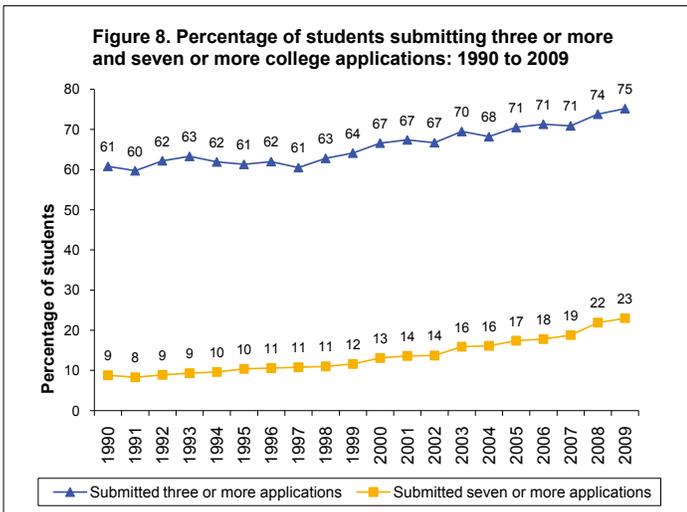
The increase in the proportion of colleges reporting application decreases may be a result of changes in student behavior in response to the economic recession. In a Spring 2009 survey of NACAC members—Effects of the Economy on the Admission Process—secondary school counselors indicated seeing an increase in the number of applications per student for the Fall 2009 admission cycle. However, counselors also reported an increase in the number of students considering two-year colleges instead of four-year colleges or public instead of private colleges due to cost considerations (see *2009 State of College Admission* report).

### 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 of US postsecondary institutions ranges from acceptance rates of fewer than 10 percent to more than 90 percent. Although the mainstream media tends to focus on the most selective colleges,





SOURCES: Pryor, J.H., Hurtado, S., Saenz, V.B., Santos, J.L., and Korn, W.S. (2007). *The American Freshman: Forty Year Trends, 1966–2006*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

Pryor, J.H., Hurtado, S., Sharkness, J., and Korn, W.S. (2007). *The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 2007*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

Pryor, J.H. et al. (2008). *The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 2008*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

Pryor, J.H., Hurtado, S., DeAngelo, L., Blake, L.P., and Tran, S. (2009). *The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 2009*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

the average acceptance rate across all four-year institutions in the US is approximately two-thirds (67 percent), according to most recent data. In addition, no statistical difference was found between acceptance rates for private and public institutions (see Table 5).

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

**Table 5. Mean selectivity and yield rates by institutional characteristics: Fall 2009**

	Selectivity	Yield
<b>Total</b>	<b>66.5</b>	<b>42.9</b>
<b>Control</b>		
Public	67.9	44.9
Private	66.1	42.2
<b>Enrollment</b>		
Fewer than 3,000 students	67.3	44.3
3,000 to 9,999	64.3	38.7
10,000 or more	65.0	40.4
<b>Selectivity</b>		
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	36.6	43.2
50 to 70 percent	61.5	38.0
71 to 85 percent	77.2	38.8
More than 85 percent	94.1	64.4
<b>Yield</b>		
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	64.9	22.5
30 to 45 percent	65.4	36.3
46 to 60 percent	66.0	52.4
More than 60 percent	72.2	83.7

NOTE: The list of colleges was drawn from the 2009–10 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 1,947 total institutions, 1,262 (65 percent) provided selectivity and yield data for Fall 2009.

SOURCE: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) online Data Center. (2009–10). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

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 only 31 percent of all applications for Fall 2009 admission. They also represented only 19 percent of all full-time, first-year undergraduate students enrolled in four-year colleges and universities. Most students (73 percent) were enrolled in institutions with selectivity rates between 50 and 85 percent.

**Table 6. Applications and enrollment by selectivity: Fall 2009**

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	17.8%	6,715	30.9	18.6
50 to 70 percent	36.7	4,080	38.7	39.1
71 to 85 percent	31.5	3,195	26.0	33.8
More than 85 percent	13.9	1,201	4.3	8.5

NOTE: The list of colleges was drawn from the 2009–10 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 1,947 total institutions, 1,262 (65 percent) provided selectivity data for Fall 2009.

SOURCE: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) online Data Center. (2009–10). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

**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 office staffs conduct sophisticated analyses to predict yield rates in order to ensure that 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.

For the Fall 2009 freshman class, the average yield rate among four-year colleges and universities was 43 percent, meaning that fewer than half of all students admitted to a given institution accepted those offers of admission (see Table 5). As shown in Figure 8, many students apply to multiple institutions and are accepted to more than one. Consequently, the admission office’s task of predicting yield rates and filling (but not overfilling) the freshman class is quite complex.

**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 2009 admission cycle, four-year colleges and universities received an average of 80 percent of their applications online, up from 72 percent in Fall 2008 and 68 percent in Fall 2007. Enrollment size was directly related to the proportion of applications received online. More selective institutions and those with lower yield rates also received higher percentages of online applications compared to their counterparts (see Table 7).<sup>16</sup> The association with yield rate suggests that the ease of applying online may translate into more applications that are not likely to result in enrollments.

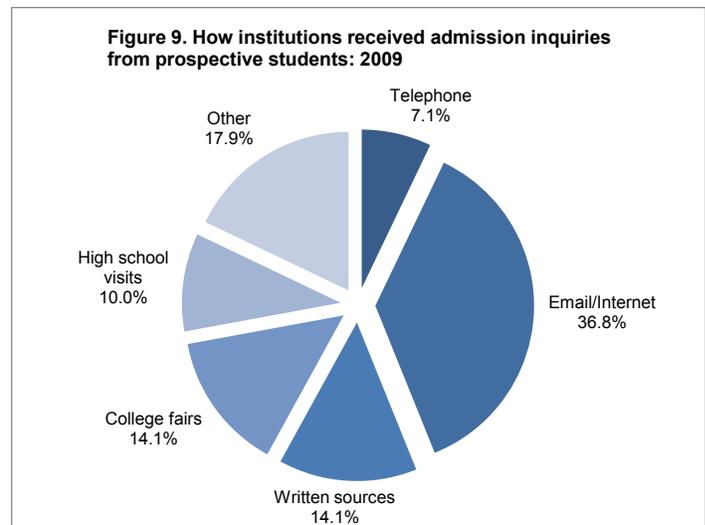
**Table 7. Mean percentage of applications received online by institutional characteristics: 2009**

	Mean percentage of online applications
<b>Total</b>	<b>80.0</b>
<b>Control</b>	
Public	79.6
Private	80.1
<b>Enrollment</b>	
Fewer than 3,000 students	76.7
3,000 to 9,999	84.3
10,000 or more	87.6
<b>Selectivity</b>	
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	88.2
50 to 70 percent	80.7
71 to 85 percent	75.2
More than 85 percent	78.8
<b>Yield</b>	
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	82.7
30 to 45 percent	78.9
46 to 60 percent	76.9
More than 60 percent	68.3

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2009.

**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 2009 admission cycle, colleges reported that 37 percent of all admission inquiries were received via email/Internet. Written sources and college fairs were the second most prevalent at 14 percent each, followed by high school visits (10 percent) (see Figure 9). Telephone 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, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Correlation between percent of online applications and: enrollment (.219), selectivity (.213), yield (-.168), p < .01

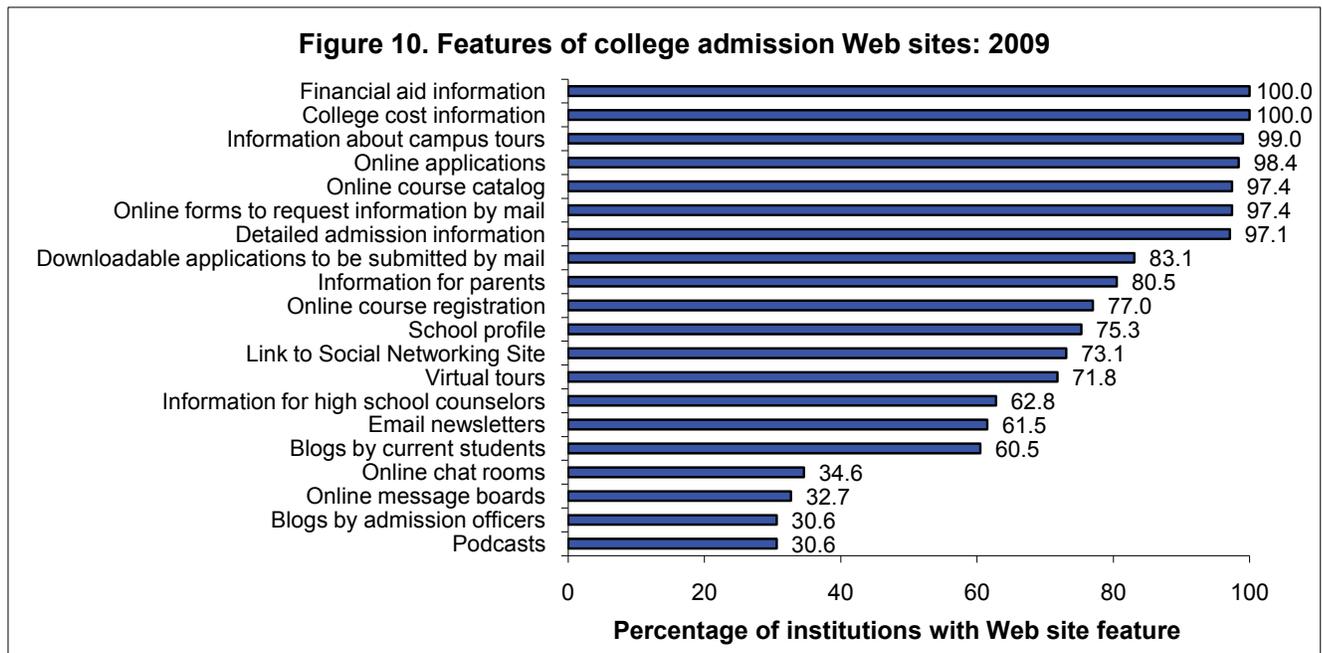
In comparison to private institutions, public colleges and universities reported receiving more student inquiries through both high school visits (14 percent versus 9 percent) and college fairs (18 percent versus 13 percent). Yield rate was associated positively with inquiries through phone calls.<sup>17</sup>

*College Admission Web Sites*

Many institutions post admission-related information and services on their Web sites, making it easier for students to learn about and apply to their institutions. All or nearly all institutions have certain features, including detailed admission information, information about campus tours, college cost and financial aid information, online course catalogs, online forms allowing prospective students to request information via mail,

downloadable applications, and online applications (see Figure 10). In 2009, 81 percent of colleges and universities reported offering information on their Web sites that is tailored to parents of prospective students. Nearly two-thirds (66 percent) reported that they offer information intended for high school counselors.

Results of recent Admission Trends Surveys indicate that colleges' integration of social media tools continues to grow. In 2009, 73 percent of respondents reported that they provide links to their colleges' social networking sites (up from 39 percent in 2008), and 61 percent reported offering blogs by current students (up from 51 percent in 2008 and 42 percent in 2007). Some colleges and universities also have blogs by admission officers (31 percent), podcasts (31 percent) and online message boards (33 percent) (see Figure 10).



Source: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Correlation between public college status and: inquiries from high school visits (.235), inquiries from college fairs (.203),  $p < .01$ ; Correlation between yield rate and: inquiries from telephone (.143),  $p < .01$

*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 2009 Admission Trends Survey reported mailing letters (99 percent). However, colleges do use other means, in addition to letters, to contact students about admission decisions. For the Fall 2009 admission cycle, 36 percent allowed applicants to check their admission status on the college’s Web site, and 33 percent contacted students by email. Nearly half (47 percent) notified students by phone. Though not specified on the survey, it is likely that most of these institutions notify a sub-set of accepted students by phone rather than the entire group. Only one 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 Web site (60 percent versus 28 percent), and private institutions were more likely to notify students by phone (54 percent versus 26 percent). Larger colleges also were more likely to use the Web site for admission notification, while both smaller and less selective colleges were more likely to use phone calls.<sup>18</sup>

**Cost of Applying to College**

According to results of the College Board’s Annual Survey of Colleges 2009®, 90 percent of colleges had an application fee, which averaged \$39. Larger institutions and more selective colleges tended to have higher fees, as did those with lower yield rates (see Table 8).<sup>19</sup> Of those institutions charging application fees, 84 percent waived them for students with financial need.<sup>20</sup> Private colleges were somewhat more likely than public colleges to waive fees (88 versus 77 percent), as were institutions with lower yield.<sup>21</sup>

**Gender Trends in College Applications**

According to US Department of Education data, females, on average, comprised 55 percent of applicants to four-year colleges for Fall 2009 admission. They comprised 56 percent of accepted students and 55 percent of enrolled students. The average acceptance rates for male and female applicants were nearly identical (65.8 percent versus 66.0 percent, respectively).<sup>22</sup>

**Table 8. Percentage of institutions with application fees and fee waivers and mean application fee amounts by institutional characteristics: 2009**

	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
<b>Total</b>	<b>90.3%</b>	<b>\$38.70</b>	<b>84.3</b>
<b>Control</b>			
Public	91.9	38.40	77.3
Private	89.5	38.85	88.0
<b>Enrollment</b>			
Fewer than 3,000 students	90.1	36.22	87.7
3,000 to 9,999	93.0	41.82	81.8
10,000 or more	98.3	45.05	86.4
<b>Selectivity</b>			
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	93.9	50.95	89.7
50 to 70 percent	92.5	37.62	89.0
71 to 85 percent	89.5	35.81	89.6
More than 85 percent	92.1	34.62	71.3
<b>Yield</b>			
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	90.8	42.79	95.8
30 to 45 percent	93.3	39.02	94.0
46 to 60 percent	94.8	35.68	74.9
More than 60 percent	84.7	35.62	56.3

SOURCE: The College Board Annual Survey of Colleges 2009®. Data presented here include four-year, not-for-profit institutions only.

<sup>18</sup> Correlation between using Web site for admission notification and: enrollment (.413), p < .01; Correlation between using phone for admission notification and: enrollment (-.237), selectivity (-.201), p < .01

<sup>19</sup> Correlation between application fee amount and: enrollment (.211), selectivity (.378), yield (-.146), p < .01

<sup>20</sup> NACAC recommends that institutions of higher education consider waiving application fees for low-income students. The fee waiver guidelines are available on the NACAC Web site: [www.nacacnet.org/studentinfo/feewaiver](http://www.nacacnet.org/studentinfo/feewaiver).

<sup>21</sup> Correlation between waiving application fee and yield (-.394), p < .01

<sup>22</sup> Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) online Data Center. (2009-10). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

## 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

### Definitions of Early Decision and Early Action

In 2005, NACAC adopted a new 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 that students may make in applying to and selecting a college. A summary of NACAC’s revised definitions is included on the next page.

For purposes of this report, we continue to categorize early application policies using the Early Decision and Early Action terms, as variances on these two main forms of early application policies are too few for national data collection purposes. Early Decision (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. Early Action (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

Eighteen percent of respondents to NACAC’s 2009 Admission Trends Survey offered Early Decision and 24 percent offered Early Action. Private colleges were much more likely than publics to offer Early Decision policies. More selective colleges were more likely to offer Early Decision, and colleges with lower yield rates were more likely to offer Early Action (see Table 9).<sup>23</sup> For the Fall 2009 admission cycle, 39 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).<sup>24</sup>

**Table 9. Percentage of institutions with Early Decision, Early Action and wait lists by institutional characteristics: 2009**

	Early Decision	Early Action	Wait list
<b>Total</b>	<b>17.6%</b>	<b>23.8%</b>	<b>38.5%</b>
<b>Control</b>			
Public	9.0	21.5	39.2
Private	20.6	24.3	38.0
<b>Enrollment</b>			
Fewer than 3,000 students	19.6	19.3	30.5
3,000 to 9,999	18.2	36.4	59.1
10,000 or more	7.1	25.0	44.2
<b>Selectivity</b>			
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	47.1	18.4	66.7
50 to 70 percent	15.6	32.0	42.9
71 to 85 percent	9.0	26.8	30.0
More than 85 percent	7.7	11.8	17.3
<b>Yield</b>			
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	20.3	37.4	52.8
30 to 45 percent	14.8	18.3	29.5
46 to 60 percent	15.6	10.0	21.9
More than 60 percent	19.0	5.0	28.6

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2009.

### Early Decision in Depth

For the third year in a row, about half (47 percent) of colleges reported increases in the number of Early Decision applications. There was a more dramatic rise, however, in the percentage of colleges reporting increases in the number of students admitted

<sup>23</sup> Correlation between offering Early Decision and: selectivity (.318),  $p < .01$ ; Correlation between offering Early Action and: yield (-.255),  $p < .01$

<sup>24</sup> Correlation between maintaining a wait list and: selectivity (.352), yield (-.178),  $p < .01$

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 Early Action are not obligated to accept the institution's offer of admission or to submit a deposit prior to May 1. Under non-restrictive Early Action, 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 Early Decision plan, students may apply to other institutions, but may have only one Early Decision 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 Early Decision commitment. The institution must notify the applicant of the decision within a reasonable and clearly stated period of time after the Early Decision 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 Early Decision plans may restrict students from applying to other early plans. Institutions will clearly articulate their specific policies in their Early Decision 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 Restrictive Early Action plans place restrictions on student applications to other early plans. Institutions will clearly articulate these restrictions in their Early Action policies and agreements with students. Students who are admitted under Restrictive Early Action are not obligated to accept the institution's offer of admission or to submit a deposit prior to May 1.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> NACAC's Statement of Principles of Good Practice (SPGP). Available online at: <http://www.nacacnet.org/AboutNACAC/Policies/Pages/default.aspx>

**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 2000 to Fall 2009**

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<b>Percentage of colleges reporting change in ED applications</b>										
Increased	58%	58%	53%	43%	37%	58%	63%	49%	49%	47%
Stayed the same	27	29	28	33	18	24	12	19	18	26
Decreased	15	13	17	24	45	18	25	31	33	28
<b>Percentage of colleges reporting change in students admitted ED</b>										
Increased	--	--	42	30	29	48	47	36	43	65
Stayed the same	--	--	41	44	22	31	16	32	26	30
Decreased	--	--	18	26	49	21	38	32	32	5

-- Data are not available.

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Surveys, 2000 through 2009.

through Early Decision. Sixty-five percent reported increases, compared to 43 percent in 2008 and 36 percent in 2007. Twenty-eight percent reported decreases in the number of Early Decision applicants, while only 5 percent reported decreases in Early Decision admits (see Table 10).<sup>26</sup>

Early Decision applicants represent only a small portion of the total applicant pool at colleges that have ED policies. Only seven percent of all applications for Fall 2009 admission to ED colleges were received through Early Decision. Colleges with Early Decision policies reported a higher acceptance rate for their ED applicants as compared to all applicants (70 percent versus 55 percent), and the gap between the acceptance rates has grown in recent years. For the Fall 2006 admission cycle, the gap was only 8 percentage points (61 percent compared to 53 percent). Given the binding nature of Early Decision policies, the average yield rate for Early Decision admits was 86 percent, substantially higher than the average yield rate for all students admitted to ED colleges (34 percent) (see Table 11).

**Table 11. Key statistics for Early Decision colleges: Fall 2009**

	Mean
Mean percentage of all applications received at ED colleges through Early Decision	7.0%
Mean percentage of Early Decision applications accepted (ED selectivity rate)	69.5
Mean overall selectivity rate for institutions with Early Decision	54.6
Mean percentage of admitted ED students who enrolled (ED yield rate)	86.3
Mean overall yield rate at ED colleges	33.5

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2009.

**Early Action in Depth**

Results of the 2009 Admission Trends Survey indicate growth in Early Action activity. Nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of colleges reported an increase in Early Action applications and a similar proportion (73 percent) reported increases in the number of students who were admitted through Early Action (see Table 12).<sup>27</sup>

**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 2000 to Fall 2009**

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<b>Percentage of colleges reporting change in EA applications</b>										
Increased	73%	65%	72%	68%	56%	80%	70%	81%	65%	74%
Stayed the same	19	27	21	22	7	6	18	7	16	7
Decreased	8	8	7	10	37	14	12	13	19	19
<b>Percentage of colleges reporting change in students admitted EA</b>										
Increased	--	--	53	53	48	73	57	72	60	73
Stayed the same	--	--	35	36	15	7	24	13	24	15
Decreased	--	--	9	11	37	20	20	15	16	13

-- Data are not available.

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Surveys, 2000 through 2009.

<sup>26</sup> Results of the survey do not indicate the magnitude of these changes.

<sup>27</sup> Results of the survey do not indicate the magnitude of these changes.

**Table 13. Key statistics for Early Action colleges: Fall 2009**

	Mean
Mean percentage of all applications received at EA colleges through Early Action	41.4%
Mean percentage of Early Action applications accepted (EA selectivity rate)	71.1
Mean overall selectivity rate for institutions with Early Action	66.9
Mean percentage of admitted EA students who enrolled (EA yield rate)	30.4
Mean overall yield rate at EA colleges	28.0

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2009.

**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 2009**

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

-- Data are not available.

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Surveys, 2000 through 2009.

Forty-one percent of applications to colleges that had Early Action admission policies were received through Early Action (see Table 13). These colleges reported a slightly higher acceptance rate for EA applicants in comparison to the overall applicant pool (71 percent versus 67 percent). Unlike Early Decision, Early Action did not provide a significant benefit to institutions in terms of yield rates. For the Fall 2009 admission cycle, EA colleges reported a very similar yield rate for EA applicants compared to the overall applicant pool (30 percent versus 28 percent).

**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 2009 admission cycle was 39 percent, which is somewhat higher than most recent years, with the exception of Fall 2007 when it reached a high of 41 percent. Almost half of colleges and universities (47 percent) reported increases from Fall 2008 in the number of students who were placed on wait lists, and 51 percent reported increases in the number of students admitted off of wait lists (see Table 14).<sup>28</sup>

Institutions reported placing an average of 10 percent of all applicants on the wait list for the Fall 2009 admission cycle, and an average of 57 percent of wait-listed students opted to remain

**Table 15. Mean percentage of students admitted off the wait list: Fall 2009**

	Mean percentage admitted
<b>Total</b>	<b>33.8%</b>
<b>Control</b>	
Public	31.0
Private	35.1
<b>Enrollment</b>	
Fewer than 3,000 students	35.2
3,000 to 9,999	30.6
10,000 or more	36.2
<b>Selectivity</b>	
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	12.4
50 to 70 percent	35.9
71 to 85 percent	54.4
More than 85 percent	46.6
<b>Yield</b>	
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	40.2
30 to 45 percent	25.3
46 to 60 percent	23.7
More than 60 percent	31.3

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2009.

on the wait list. Institutions accepted an average of 34 percent of all students who chose to remain on wait lists, up from 30 percent in Fall 2008 and Fall 2007, and 29 percent in Fall 2006. As expected, chances of being admitted off the wait list were lower at more selective colleges. On average, only 12 percent of wait-listed students were ultimately admitted from the group of most selective colleges (see Table 15).<sup>29</sup>

For the first time on the 2009 Admission Trends Survey, NACAC asked colleges that use wait lists to indicate whether they stratify the wait list according to certain applicant characteristics to create priority groups for admission. Not surprisingly, the most common way in which institutions stratify wait lists is based on academic characteristics (56 percent), followed closely by students' interest in attending the institution (45 percent). Some institutions also prioritize the wait list based on a commitment to attend if admitted (33 percent) or ability to pay (27 percent).

Private colleges were more likely than publics to prioritize their wait lists according to academic credentials (62 percent versus 36 percent), interest in attending (53 percent versus 19 percent), and ability to pay (35 percent versus 7 percent). Smaller institutions and those with lower yield rates also were more likely to stratify the wait list by both ability to pay and interest in attending.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Results of the survey do not indicate the magnitude of these changes.

<sup>29</sup> Correlation between percent of students admitted off the wait list and: selectivity (-.511),  $p < .01$

<sup>30</sup> Correlation between stratifying wait list by ability to pay and: enrollment (-.196), yield rate (-.230),  $p < .01$ ; Correlation between stratifying wait list by interest in attending and: enrollment (-.217), yield rate (-.244),  $p < .01$

## CHAPTER 4. FACTORS IN THE ADMISSION DECISION

### CONTENTS

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- Factors in the Admission Decision: Change Over Time
- Factors in the Admission Decision by Institutional Characteristics
- Key Factors In Depth
  - Grades and Strength of Curriculum
  - Standardized Admission Test Scores
  - Demonstrated Interest
- Student Characteristics as Contextual Factors
- Revoking Admission Offers

### Factors in the Admission Decision: 2009 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. Nearly 87 percent of all colleges and universities rated grades in college prep courses as “considerably important,” followed by 71 percent for strength of curriculum, 58 percent for admission test scores, and 46 percent for grades in all courses.
- A second set of factors—essay or writing sample, teacher and counselor recommendations, extracurricular activities, class rank, and student’s demonstrated interest—were rated primarily as moderately important. With the exception of demonstrated interest, fewer than 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.
- The student interview and subject test scores (AP, IB) 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 one-third of colleges indicated that they do not consider interviews or subject test scores. They are used by some colleges to provide information for comparing candidates with similar academic qualifications.
- SAT II scores, state graduation exam scores, portfolios, and work were among the lowest rated factors in admission decisions for 2009. 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 16 shows a complete overview of the relative importance of factors in the admission decision in 2009.

**Table 16. Percentage of colleges attributing different levels of importance to factors in the admission decision: 2009**

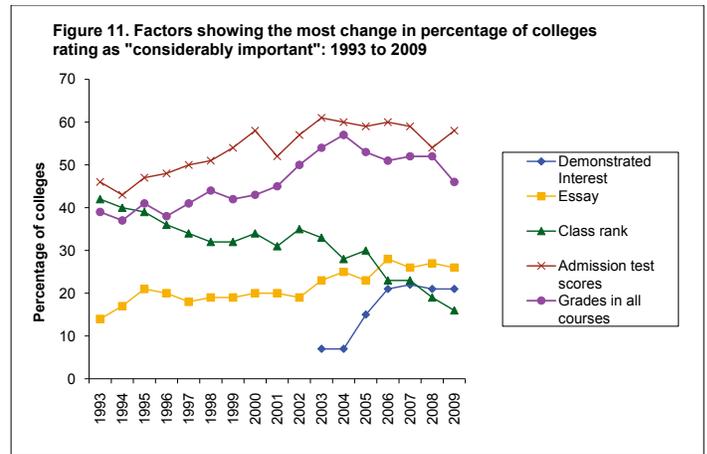
Factor	Considerable importance	Moderate importance	Limited importance	No importance
Grades in college prep courses	86.5%	11.5%	1.6%	0.3%
Strength of curriculum	70.7	22.0	5.9	1.3
Admission test scores (SAT, ACT)	57.8	32.0	9.2	1.0
Grades in all courses	45.6	43.9	9.8	0.7
Essay or writing sample	26.4	37.5	19.9	16.3
Teacher recommendation	17.4	47.7	23.7	11.2
Student’s demonstrated interest	20.7	27.0	27.6	24.7
Counselor recommendation	17.1	50.0	22.0	10.9
Class rank	16.3	42.2	31.7	9.8
Interview	6.6	26.3	31.9	35.2
Subject test scores (AP, IB)	7.0	27.2	33.6	32.2
Extracurricular activities	8.9	43.9	34.3	12.9
SAT II scores	5.0	11.0	28.0	56.0
Portfolio	8.4	11.0	35.8	44.8
State graduation exam scores	3.0	15.9	27.2	53.8
Work	1.7	20.2	43.7	34.4

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2009.

**Factors in Admission: Change Over Time**

Table 17 illustrates how the percentage of colleges rating factors in the admission decision as considerably important has changed over time, from 1993 to 2009. Academic performance in college prep courses has been consistently rated as the top factor in admission decisions over this 16-year time frame, with nearly 80 percent of colleges or more rating it as considerably important. The importance of other factors, such as teacher and counselor recommendations, the student interview, and extracurricular activities also has remained relatively unchanged.

Those factors that have shown the most change over this 16-year period 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 60 percent. Similarly, grades in all courses increased in importance from 1993 to 2004, but has declined again in more recent years. The proportion of colleges rating demonstrated interest as



SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2009.

considerably important increased dramatically between 2003 (when it was first measured) and 2006, but has held at around 20 percent in the past few years. The factor showing the most decline in importance is class rank. The proportion of colleges rating it as considerably important reached a low of 16 percent for 2009, down from 42 percent in 1993.

**Table 17. Percentage of colleges attributing considerable importance to factors in the admission decision: 1993 to 2009**

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

-- Data are not available.

<sup>1</sup> Beginning 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.

<sup>2</sup> Beginning 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 2009.

### 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 18.

#### 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 2.5 times more applications for Fall 2009 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, subject test scores (AP, IB), the portfolio, and demonstrated interest.
- Public colleges were more likely than privates to consider class rank to be considerably important, while private colleges rated it more often as moderately important.<sup>31</sup>

#### 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 essay/writing sample, interview, counselor and teacher recommendations, demonstrated interest, and state graduation exam scores.
- Larger colleges attributed somewhat greater importance to strength of curriculum and class rank.<sup>32</sup>

**Table 18. Percentage of colleges attributing considerable importance to factors in the admission decision by institutional characteristics: 2009 (continued on next page)**

	Grades in college prep courses	Strength of curriculum	Admission test scores	Grades in all courses	Essay/writing sample	Teacher rec.	Demonstrated interest	Counselor rec.
<b>Total</b>	<b>86.5%</b>	<b>70.7%</b>	<b>57.8%</b>	<b>45.6%</b>	<b>26.4%</b>	<b>17.4%</b>	<b>20.7%</b>	<b>17.1%</b>
<b>Control</b>								
Public	89.9	74.7	70.9	51.9	12.5	6.3	13.9	6.3
Private	85.3	69.2	53.5	43.6	31.4	21.4	23.2	21.0
<b>Enrollment</b>								
Fewer than 3,000 students	83.6	65.6	55.1	44.9	28.4	20.0	24.7	18.5
3,000 to 9,999	90.8	78.5	62.1	43.1	25.8	13.8	15.2	16.9
10,000 or more	93.2	81.8	63.6	52.3	18.2	11.4	11.4	11.4
<b>Selectivity</b>								
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	85.7	81.6	51.0	45.8	48.0	24.0	14.0	28.0
50 to 70 percent	88.7	70.1	59.2	44.9	23.5	14.4	24.0	10.3
71 to 85 percent	89.8	70.4	58.6	53.5	22.2	17.5	22.4	18.6
More than 85 percent	78.8	65.4	59.6	32.7	13.5	11.5	13.5	13.5
<b>Yield</b>								
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	94.3	76.2	49.2	40.3	25.2	17.9	16.3	18.7
30 to 45 percent	82.8	76.2	60.2	48.8	26.0	17.2	21.3	17.2
46 to 60 percent	78.1	53.1	68.8	43.8	18.8	9.4	28.1	6.3
More than 60 percent	84.2	42.1	77.8	68.4	35.0	16.7	22.2	16.7

<sup>31</sup> Correlations between private college status and attribution of importance in admission: essay/writing sample (.320), interview (.428), counselor recommendation (.345), teacher recommendation (.335), extracurricular activities (.225), demonstrated interest (.252), subject test scores (AP, IB) (.158),  $p < .01$

<sup>32</sup> Correlations between enrollment and attribution of importance in admission: interview (-.352), teacher recommendation (-.230), counselor recommendation (-.226), demonstrated interest (-.221), state graduation exams (-.165),  $p < .01$ ; essay (-.122), class rank (.127), strength of curriculum (.146),  $p < .05$

*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 2009 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 factors included the essay, teacher recommendations, extracurricular activities, work, and portfolios.
- The more selective institutions also placed more emphasis on subject test scores (AP and IB) and SAT II scores.<sup>33</sup>

*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, teacher and counselor recommendations, and work.
- Institutions with high yield rates attributed more importance to admission test scores.<sup>34</sup>

**Table 18 (continued from previous page). Percentage of colleges attributing considerable importance to factors in the admission decision by institutional characteristics: 2009**

	Class rank	Interview	Subject test scores (AP, IB)	Extracurricular activities	SAT II scores	Portfolio	State graduation exam scores	Work
<b>Total</b>	<b>16.3%</b>	<b>6.6%</b>	<b>7.0%</b>	<b>8.9%</b>	<b>5.0%</b>	<b>8.4%</b>	<b>3.0%</b>	<b>1.7%</b>
<b>Control</b>								
Public	26.6	0.0	2.5	5.1	5.2	5.1	7.6	2.5
Private	12.4	8.9	8.6	10.3	5.0	9.5	1.4	1.4
<b>Enrollment</b>								
Fewer than 3,000 students	13.7	10.2	7.3	8.2	5.2	8.3	2.1	1.5
3,000 to 9,999	18.5	0.0	9.4	12.3	4.7	9.4	4.6	1.6
10,000 or more	25.0	0.0	2.3	6.8	4.7	7.1	4.5	2.3
<b>Selectivity</b>								
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	18.4	6.1	10.0	24.5	14.3	16.0	2.0	2.0
50 to 70 percent	15.2	6.2	3.2	7.2	4.1	7.5	3.2	1.1
71 to 85 percent	17.3	9.2	10.4	5.2	1.0	4.2	3.1	2.1
More than 85 percent	15.4	1.9	3.8	3.8	3.9	5.8	3.8	1.9
<b>Yield</b>								
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	12.9	5.7	9.2	10.6	3.3	5.8	3.3	1.6
30 to 45 percent	18.7	5.7	4.1	9.1	4.2	9.2	3.3	2.5
46 to 60 percent	28.1	9.4	6.3	0.0	9.4	3.1	3.1	0.0
More than 60 percent	5.6	11.1	11.1	11.1	11.1	16.7	0.0	0.0

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Correlations between selectivity and attribution of importance in admission: essay (.238), extracurricular activities (.239), work (.242), portfolio (.208), SAT II scores (.308), p < .01; strength of curriculum (.128), teacher recommendation (.119), subject test scores (.119), p < .05

<sup>34</sup> Correlations between yield and attribution of importance in admission: strength of curriculum (-.307), extracurricular activities (-.250), teacher recommendation (-.185), counselor recommendation (-.238), admission test scores (.163), p < .01; work (-.125), grades in college prep courses (-.145), p < .05

## The 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 that 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.<sup>35</sup> 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 that 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.<sup>36</sup>

Unfortunately, students across the nation do not have equal access to college preparatory curricula. According to results of NACAC's 2009 Counseling Trends Survey, there were important differences among types of schools in both college prep offerings and average enrollments in those curricula (see Table 19). For 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, but no difference was found in the percentage of students enrolled.<sup>37</sup>

In addition, larger schools were more likely than smaller schools to offer all four types of college prep curricula, but smaller schools had a greater proportion of students enrolled in both IB and dual enrollment courses (see Table 19).<sup>38</sup>

Schools with higher percentages of students eligible for free and reduced price lunch programs (FRPL) were less likely to offer AP and enriched curricula, and the average enrollment in these courses also was lower (see Table 19).<sup>39</sup>

**Table 19. Percentage of schools that offer college preparatory curricula and mean percentage of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders enrolled by school characteristics: 2009**

	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
<b>Total</b>	<b>79.1%</b>	<b>23.9%</b>	<b>4.4%</b>	<b>27.4%</b>	<b>80.6%</b>	<b>37.5%</b>	<b>83.6%</b>	<b>14.3%</b>
<b>Control</b>								
Public	77.5	20.0	4.2	20.6	79.7	34.3	89.9	14.3
Private	90.9	48.5	4.8	67.5	87.3	59.4	36.1	13.6
Private non-parochial	88.1	54.0	5.7	78.8	82.4	64.6	28.2	11.8
Private parochial	97.2	37.0	2.9	37.7	98.6	49.8	53.5	16.1
<b>Enrollment</b>								
Fewer than 500 students	58.4	23.8	1.6	56.3	67.5	37.4	79.6	19.0
500 to 999	84.1	22.4	2.9	47.5	84.8	38.2	82.0	12.8
1,000 to 1,499	97.3	24.5	4.3	13.5	91.1	37.3	86.5	9.6
1,500 to 1,999	98.4	25.3	11.5	14.1	93.6	37.4	92.6	11.8
2,000 or more	99.4	26.7	13.5	15.7	92.3	39.6	91.1	10.2
<b>Free and reduced price lunch</b>								
0 to 25 percent of students eligible	86.7	25.6	4.2	26.4	84.5	40.4	87.5	13.8
26 to 50 percent	73.0	17.1	5.6	13.7	76.6	31.6	91.7	14.8
51 to 75 percent	66.3	16.6	3.3	23.7	78.2	30.7	89.9	14.6
76 to 100 percent	66.9	15.7	1.5	10.0	69.1	25.3	86.6	13.7
<b>Students per counselor</b>								
100 or fewer	61.4	26.8	2.1	42.6	71.6	39.6	72.1	20.0
101 to 200	77.8	26.5	3.9	28.5	80.9	41.4	81.6	14.7
201 to 300	85.0	22.7	4.4	31.4	82.4	37.0	82.2	12.9
301 to 400	82.2	21.7	5.5	26.2	83.8	35.4	89.6	14.0
401 to 500	82.7	23.6	5.3	7.6	82.4	33.2	90.6	12.5
More than 500	73.4	23.4	5.4	21.7	76.3	36.7	89.4	14.5

SOURCE: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2009.

<sup>35</sup> Sixty-five percent of respondents to NACAC's 2009 Counseling Trends Survey reported that they weight students' high school GPAs to account for course difficulty.

<sup>36</sup> U.S. 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.: U.S. Department of Education.

<sup>37</sup> Correlation between private college status and mean percentage of students enrolled in college prep curricula: AP (.502), IB (.515), enriched curriculum (.347),  $p < .01$

<sup>38</sup> Correlation between enrollment and offering college prep curricula: AP (.339), IB (.167), enriched curriculum (.211), dual enrollment (.108),  $p < .01$ ; Correlation between enrollment and mean percentage of students enrolled in college prep curricula: IB (-.426), dual enrollment (-.189),  $p < .01$

<sup>39</sup> Correlation between percent eligible for FRPL and offering college prep curricula: AP (-.196), enriched curriculum (-.117),  $p < .01$ ; Correlation between percent eligible for FRPL and mean percentage of students enrolled in college prep curricula: AP (-.270), enriched curriculum (-.249),  $p < .01$

Results of the College Board’s Annual Survey of Colleges 2009<sup>®</sup> show the average number of high school course units (years of study) that colleges required and recommended for students interested in attending their institutions. On average, colleges required the most years of study in English (3.9), academic electives (3.3) and math (2.9). 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 both required and recommended course units for math in comparison to private colleges (see Table 20).<sup>40</sup>

Institutions with higher selectivity levels required more total academic units. They also recommended a greater number of foreign language, math and science course units than their

less selective counterparts (see Table 20).<sup>41</sup> These data do not indicate the level of coursework that 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. Ninety percent of colleges placed considerable or moderate importance on this factor (see Table 16). According to the College Board’s Annual Survey of Colleges 2009<sup>®</sup>, an average of 60 percent of enrolled students submitted SAT scores for Fall 2009 admission, and 52 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 (see Table 21).<sup>42</sup>

**Table 20. Mean number of high school course units required and recommended by colleges: 2009 (continued)**

	Total academic units		History		English		Foreign language	
	Req.	Rec.	Req.	Rec.	Req.	Rec.	Req.	Rec.
<b>Total</b>	<b>16.0</b>	<b>18.4</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>2.4</b>
<b>Control</b>								
Public	16.3	18.7	1.5	1.9	4.0	4.0	2.0	2.4
Private	15.8	18.3	1.7	2.2	3.9	3.9	2.1	2.4
<b>Enrollment</b>								
Fewer than 3,000 students	15.9	18.4	1.7	2.1	3.9	4.0	2.0	2.4
3,000 to 9,999	16.3	19.1	1.6	2.3	3.9	4.0	2.0	2.6
10,000 or more	16.2	18.7	1.4	1.9	4.0	4.0	2.0	2.7
<b>Selectivity</b>								
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	16.4	19.1	1.7	2.4	3.9	4.0	2.2	3.0
50 to 70 percent	16.3	19.1	1.6	2.1	4.0	4.0	2.0	2.5
71 to 85 percent	15.9	18.4	1.6	2.0	4.0	4.0	2.0	2.3
More than 85 percent	15.1	17.8	1.5	2.2	3.9	3.9	2.0	2.2
<b>Yield</b>								
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	16.0	19.2	1.7	2.3	4.0	4.0	2.1	2.7
30 to 45 percent	16.1	18.7	1.6	2.2	4.0	4.0	2.0	2.5
46 to 60 percent	16.3	18.2	1.5	1.9	4.0	3.9	2.0	2.3
More than 60 percent	15.3	17.4	1.9	2.1	3.8	4.0	2.1	2.1

**Table 20 (continued). Mean number of high school course units required and recommended by colleges: 2009**

	Math		Academic elective		Social studies		Science	
	Req.	Rec.	Req.	Rec.	Req.	Rec.	Req.	Rec.
<b>Total</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>3.1</b>
<b>Control</b>								
Public	3.1	3.7	3.1	3.1	2.4	2.9	2.6	3.3
Private	2.8	3.3	3.5	3.4	2.3	2.7	2.4	3.0
<b>Enrollment</b>								
Fewer than 3,000 students	2.9	3.3	3.5	3.2	2.3	2.7	2.4	3.0
3,000 to 9,999	3.1	3.7	3.2	3.4	2.4	2.9	2.6	3.3
10,000 or more	3.1	3.8	2.6	3.3	2.3	3.0	2.6	3.4
<b>Selectivity</b>								
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	3.1	3.6	2.8	2.9	2.3	2.7	2.5	3.4
50 to 70 percent	3.0	3.5	3.4	3.4	2.2	2.8	2.5	3.2
71 to 85 percent	3.0	3.4	2.9	3.2	2.4	2.8	2.5	3.0
More than 85 percent	2.9	3.2	3.5	2.7	2.4	2.7	2.4	2.8
<b>Yield</b>								
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	3.0	3.6	2.9	3.3	2.3	2.8	2.4	3.3
30 to 45 percent	3.0	3.5	3.3	3.0	2.3	2.8	2.6	3.2
46 to 60 percent	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.3	2.5	2.7	2.6	2.9
More than 60 percent	3.0	3.3	3.2	3.4	2.2	2.5	2.4	3.0

SOURCE: The College Board Annual Survey of Colleges 2009<sup>®</sup>. Data presented here include four-year, not-for-profit institutions only.

<sup>40</sup> Correlation between public college status and: required math course units (.249), recommended math course units (.225), p < .01

<sup>41</sup> Correlation between selectivity and course units required: total (.122), p < .01; Correlation between selectivity and course units recommended: foreign language (.349), math (.202), science (.202), p < .01

<sup>42</sup> Correlation between institutional selectivity and percentage of enrolled students who submitted test scores: SAT (.278), ACT (-.212), p < .01

**Table 21. Mean percentage of first-year students who submitted standardized test scores by institutional characteristics: 2009**

	SAT	ACT
<b>Total</b>	<b>59.7</b>	<b>52.4</b>
<b>Control</b>		
Public	60.8	55.2
Private	59.0	50.9
<b>Enrollment</b>		
Fewer than 3,000 students	57.9	51.3
3,000 to 9,999	67.0	50.9
10,000 or more	64.4	54.4
<b>Selectivity</b>		
Accept less than 50 percent of applicants	75.9	40.6
50 to 70 percent	63.4	50.0
71 to 85 percent	55.3	55.1
More than 85 percent	47.0	61.5
<b>Yield</b>		
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	71.5	42.3
30 to 45 percent	61.6	51.5
46 to 60 percent	48.7	62.0
More than 60 percent	48.3	59.6

SOURCE: The College Board Annual Survey of Colleges 2009<sup>®</sup>. Data presented here include four-year, not-for-profit institutions only.

### Demonstrated Interest

For the past seven years, NACAC's Admission Trends Survey has documented colleges' attention to applicants' interest in attending their institutions as a factor in admission decisions. From 2003 to 2006, the percentage of colleges that rated demonstrated interest as a considerably important factor increased from 7 percent to 21 percent (see Table 17). Since that time, the percentage has held steady at just over 20 percent. In 2009, 76 percent of colleges assigned some level of importance to a student's interest in attending the institution (21 percent considerable, 27 percent moderate, and 28 percent limited) (see Table 16). As shown earlier in the chapter, private colleges and smaller colleges placed greater emphasis on students' demonstrated interest during the admission process (see Table 18).

Likely methods that colleges and universities could use to ascertain a student's interest include campus visits, interviews, content of open-ended essays, contact by students with the admission office, letters of recommendation, and early application through either Early Action or Early Decision.

### Student Characteristics as Contextual Factors

NACAC's 2009 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.<sup>43</sup> As shown in Table 22, 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. Between 25 and 30 percent 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.<sup>44</sup>
- Larger colleges rated first-generation status and state or county of residence as having more influence, while smaller colleges rated ability to pay more highly.<sup>45</sup>
- 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, and alumni relations.<sup>46</sup>
- Institutions with lower yield rates also attributed somewhat more importance to many of the student characteristics, including race/ethnicity, first-generation status, state or county of residence, high school attended, and alumni relations.<sup>47</sup>

### Revoking Admission Offers

During the Fall 2009 admission cycle, 22 percent of colleges reported that they had revoked an admission offer, compared to 21 percent in 2008. The average number of offers that were revoked was 23, compared to 10 in 2008.

**Table 22. Percentage of colleges attributing different levels of importance to the influence of student characteristics on the evaluation of factors in the admission decision: 2009**

	Considerable importance	Moderate importance	Limited importance	No importance
Race/ethnicity	5.9	22.1	17.9	54.1
First-generation status	6.5	18.8	27.3	47.4
Gender	4.6	9.2	18.3	68.0
Alumni relations	1.9	16.6	38.3	43.2
High school attended	2.6	25.8	28.8	42.8
State or county of residence	3.2	11.0	24.4	61.4
Ability to pay	0.7	3.9	15.3	80.1

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2009.

<sup>43</sup> In surveys prior to 2006, race/ethnicity, state or county of residence, alumni relations, and ability to pay were listed along with the other factors.

<sup>44</sup> Correlation between private college status and influence in evaluation of admission decision factors: gender (.191), alumni relations (.198),  $p < .01$ ; high school attended (.113), ability to pay (.144), state or county of residence (-.123),  $p < .05$

<sup>45</sup> Correlation between enrollment and influence in evaluation of admission decision factors: first-generation status (.181), state or county of residence (.201), ability to pay (-.152),  $p < .01$

<sup>46</sup> Correlation between selectivity and influence in evaluation of admission decision factors: race/ethnicity (.323), gender (.267), first-generation status (.293), state or county of residence (.230), alumni relations (.149),  $p < .01$

<sup>47</sup> Correlation between yield and influence in evaluation of admission decision factors: high school attended (-.241), alumni relations (-.254),  $p < .01$ ; race/ethnicity (-.143), first-generation status (-.145), state or county of residence (-.147),  $p < .05$

## 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

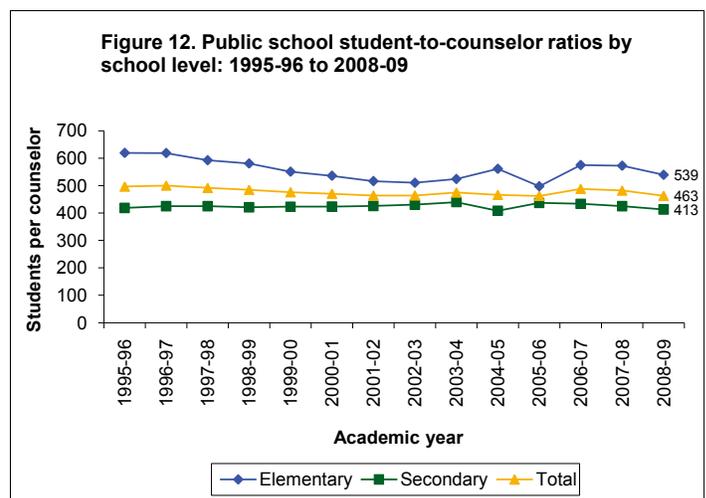
### College Counseling Defined

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 postsecondary 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.<sup>48</sup> 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 2008–09 each public school counselor (including elementary and secondary) had responsibility for 463 students, on average. Counselors at secondary schools had slightly smaller caseloads, serving an average of 434 students. Moreover, these ratios have changed very little over the past 13 years (see Figure 12).<sup>49</sup>

Results of NACAC’s 2009 Counseling Trends Survey, which includes private schools, indicated a high school student-to-counselor ratio, including part-time staff, of 261:1, 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 2009, the average student-to-college counselor ratio was 320:1, including part-time counselors (see Table 23).<sup>50</sup>



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: Common Core of Data Build a Table. (1995-96 to 2008–09). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

<sup>48</sup> National Association for College Admission Counseling. (1990). “Statement on Precollege Guidance and the Role of the School Counselor.” Available at: [www.nacacnet.org/AboutNACAC/Policies/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.nacacnet.org/AboutNACAC/Policies/Pages/default.aspx).

<sup>49</sup> In this case secondary is defined as grades 6 through 12.

<sup>50</sup> 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.

**Table 23. Mean student-to-counselor ratios and student-to-college counselor ratios by school characteristics: 2009**

	Mean number of students per counselor	Mean number of students per college counselor
<b>Total</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>320</b>
<b>Control</b>		
Public	270	325
Private	195	283
<i>Private non-parochial</i>	206	298
<i>Private parochial</i>	170	252
<b>Enrollment</b>		
Fewer than 500 students	217	244
500 to 999	278	344
1,000 to 1,499	283	368
1,500 to 1,999	287	356
2,000 or more students	335	451
<b>Free and reduced price lunch</b>		
0 to 25 percent of students eligible	264	304
26 to 50 percent	287	339
51 to 75 percent	260	325
76 to 100 percent	226	351

SOURCE: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2009.

*Variation in Student-to-Counselor Ratios*

According to NACAC’s 2009 Counseling Trends Survey, public schools had higher student-to-counselor ratios than their private counterparts.<sup>51</sup> Public school counselors were responsible for about 75 more students, on average (see Table 23). In addition, more than three-quarters of private schools (76 percent) reported that they had at least one counselor (full- or part-time) whose sole responsibility was to provide college counseling for students, compared to 34 percent of public schools. Larger schools also tended to have higher ratios for both total counselors and college counselors (see Table 23).<sup>52</sup>

US Department of Education data show that public school student-to-counselor ratios also varied widely from state to state. In 2008–09, some states had exceedingly high student-to-counselor ratios including California (814:1), Minnesota (759:1), Arizona (743:1), and Utah (733:1). See Table 24 for the public school student-to-counselor ratios for all states.

**Counseling Department Priorities and “Time on Task”**

*Counseling Department Priorities*

On NACAC’s 2009 Counseling Trends Survey, respondents were asked to rank order the importance of four main counseling department goals. As shown in Table 25, “helping students with their academic achievement in high school” was ranked as the highest priority of counseling departments, followed closely by “helping students plan and prepare for postsecondary education.” “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.

**Table 24. Public School Student-to-Counselor Ratios, by State: 2008–09**

State	Students	Counselors	Students per counselor
<b>U.S. Total</b>	<b>49,265,044</b>	<b>107,802</b>	<b>457</b>
Alabama	745,668	1,873	398
Alaska	130,662	280	467
Arizona	1,087,817	1,465	743
Arkansas	478,965	1,440	333
California	6,322,528	7,768	814
Colorado	818,443	2,117	387
Connecticut	567,198	1,119	507
Delaware	125,430	285	440
District of Columbia	68,681	250	275
Florida	2,631,020	6,058	434
Georgia	1,655,792	3,691	449
Hawaii	179,478	661	272
Idaho	275,154	634	434
Illinois	2,119,707	3,155	672
Indiana	1,046,147	1,939	540
Iowa	487,559	1,377	354
Kansas	471,060	1,125	419
Kentucky	670,030	1,461	459
Louisiana	684,873	2,878	238
Maine	192,935	606	318
Maryland	843,861	2,428	348
Massachusetts	958,910	2,222	432
Michigan	1,659,921	2,602	638
Minnesota	836,048	1,101	759
Mississippi	491,962	2,099	234
Missouri	917,871	2,462	373
Montana	141,899	459	309
Nebraska	292,990	799	366
Nevada	433,371	848	511
New Hampshire	197,934	851	233
New Jersey	1,381,420	2,252	613
New Mexico	330,245	844	391
New York	2,740,805	6,673	411
North Carolina	1,488,645	3,984	374
North Dakota	94,728	283	335
Ohio	1,817,163	3,642	499
Oklahoma	645,108	1,693	381
Oregon	575,393	1,103	522
Pennsylvania	1,775,029	4,597	386
Rhode Island	145,342	409	355
South Carolina	718,113	1,873	383
South Dakota	126,764	317	400
Tennessee	971,950	2,756	353
Texas	4,752,148	10,936	435
Utah	559,778	764	733
Vermont	92,446	447	207
Virginia	1,235,795	4,009	308
Washington	1,037,018	2,111	491
West Virginia	282,729	730	387
Wisconsin	873,750	1,884	464
Wyoming	87,161	442	197

SOURCE: Common Core of Data Build a Table. (2008–09). US Department of Education, Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

**Table 25. Mean ranking of counseling department responsibilities by school characteristics: 2009 (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
<b>Total</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>3.4</b>
<b>Control</b>				
Public	2.1	1.7	2.8	3.4
Private	1.5	2.1	2.6	3.8
<i>Private non-parochial</i>	1.4	2.2	2.5	3.8
<i>Private parochial</i>	1.6	2.0	2.6	3.8
<b>Enrollment</b>				
Fewer than 500 students	2.0	1.9	2.7	3.4
500 to 999	2.1	1.7	2.8	3.4
1,000 to 1,499	2.1	1.5	2.9	3.5
1,500 to 1,999	2.0	1.6	2.9	3.5
2,000 or more	2.2	1.5	2.8	3.5
<b>Free and reduced price lunch</b>				
0 to 25 percent of students eligible	2.0	1.7	2.8	3.5
26 to 50 percent	2.2	1.8	2.8	3.3
51 to 75 percent	2.2	1.6	2.9	3.2
76 to 100 percent	2.4	1.5	2.7	3.4
<b>Students per counselor</b>				
100 or fewer	2.0	2.0	2.6	3.4
101 to 200	2.0	1.7	2.8	3.5
201 to 300	2.0	1.7	2.8	3.4
301 to 400	2.1	1.6	2.8	3.4
401 to 500	2.2	1.6	3.0	3.3
More than 500	2.0	1.7	2.8	3.5

SOURCE: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2009.

<sup>51</sup> Correlation between public school status and: student-to-counselor ratio (.170),  $p < .01$

<sup>52</sup> Correlation between enrollment and: student-to-counselor ratio (.234), student-to-college counselor ratio (.250),  $p < .01$

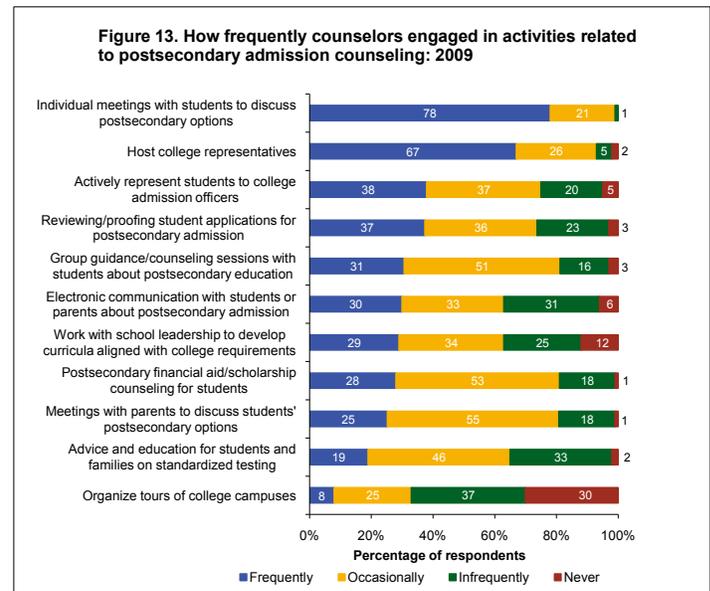
High schools differed in how they ranked the priorities of their counseling departments. For example, public schools ranked “helping students with their academic achievement in high school” as the top priority while private schools ranked “helping students plan and prepare for postsecondary education” 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.<sup>53</sup> 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” 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 25).<sup>54</sup>

*Time on Task*

Most counselors have a variety of job responsibilities in addition to college counseling. Results of NACAC’s survey showed that in 2009, high school counseling staffs spent an average of only 26 percent of their time on postsecondary admission counseling. Counselors in public schools reported spending only 22 percent of their time on college counseling, compared to 54 percent for private school counselors. Counselors at higher-income schools also spent more time on postsecondary counseling compared to their counterparts at lower-income schools (see Table 26). In addition, counselors at schools with lower student-to-counselor ratios spent more time on postsecondary counseling.<sup>55</sup>

*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 2009 included individual meetings with students to discuss postsecondary admission options and hosting college representatives. Nearly 40 percent of counselors also reported that they frequently engaged in actively representing students to college admission offices (38 percent) and reviewing student applications for postsecondary admission (37 percent) and reviewing student applications (37 percent).



SOURCE: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2009

**Table 26. Mean percentage of time that counseling staffs spent on various tasks by school characteristics: 2009**

	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
<b>Total</b>	<b>26.0%</b>	<b>23.7%</b>	<b>19.5%</b>	<b>14.0%</b>	<b>7.0%</b>	<b>4.9%</b>	<b>4.9%</b>
<b>Control</b>							
Public	22.3	25.1	20.5	14.7	7.6	4.8	5.0
Private	53.6	12.8	11.5	9.2	2.6	5.6	4.7
Private non-parochial	57.4	11.9	8.8	8.9	2.4	5.9	4.9
Private parochial	45.3	14.9	17.5	10.0	3.1	5.0	4.1
<b>Enrollment</b>							
Fewer than 500 students	26.4	18.9	18.3	15.6	7.4	7.2	6.3
500 to 999	27.8	23.1	20.4	14.3	6.7	3.6	4.1
1,000 to 1,499	26.0	27.5	19.7	12.3	7.0	3.3	4.1
1,500 to 1,999	23.7	29.4	20.6	11.5	7.1	3.8	3.9
2,000 or more	21.6	32.0	21.5	11.6	6.2	2.9	4.1
<b>Free and reduced price lunch</b>							
0 to 25 percent of students eligible	26.0	24.4	21.1	12.6	7.2	4.2	4.4
26 to 50 percent	20.6	23.6	20.6	15.8	8.2	5.6	5.6
51 to 75 percent	19.9	24.9	20.0	16.7	7.5	5.0	5.8
76 to 100 percent	20.4	26.9	19.1	14.3	7.4	6.3	5.5
<b>Students per counselor</b>							
100 or fewer	29.9	19.1	16.4	15.0	7.8	6.8	5.1
101 to 200	29.1	21.5	19.8	13.1	6.8	5.2	4.5
201 to 300	25.7	24.2	20.5	12.9	7.0	4.7	4.9
301 to 400	22.6	26.2	20.1	14.5	7.4	4.1	5.2
401 to 500	22.5	27.9	19.0	15.5	6.1	3.9	5.1
More than 500	26.0	21.8	19.0	17.0	6.6	4.7	5.0

SOURCE: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2009.

<sup>53</sup> Correlation between public school status and ranking of: “helping students plan and prepare for postsecondary education” (-.251), “helping students with their academic achievement in high school” (.169), “helping students plan and prepare for their work roles after high school” (.166), p < .01

<sup>54</sup> Correlation between percent eligible for FRPL and ranking of: “helping students plan and prepare for their work roles after high school” (.112), “helping students plan and prepare for postsecondary education” (-.154), p < .01

<sup>55</sup> Correlation between percent of time spent on postsecondary counseling and: private school status (.617), percent eligible for FRPL (-.226), student-to-counselor ratio (-.130), p < .01

There are variations in the extent to which students at different types of schools benefit from these services. For example, counselors at private schools engaged more frequently than those at public schools in most of these activities.<sup>56</sup> Counselors at smaller schools spent more time organizing campus tours for students, and those at larger schools spent more time meeting with parents.<sup>57</sup> Counselors at lower-income schools engaged less frequently in individual meetings with students, meetings with parents and electronically communicating with students or parents, as well as 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.<sup>58</sup>

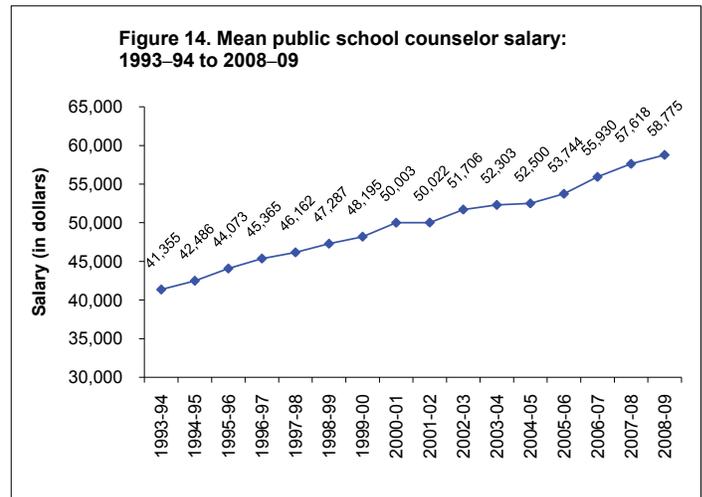
**Professional Development and Compensation**  
*Professional Development on College Counseling*

In 2009, 31 percent of high schools reported that counselors responsible for college counseling were required to participate in professional development related to postsecondary counseling. As shown in Table 27, private high schools were much more likely than publics to require professional development of counselors (51 percent versus 29 percent), and they were more than twice as likely to cover all of the costs of this professional development (67

versus 28 percent). Smaller schools also were more likely to cover all professional development costs (see Table 27).<sup>59</sup>

*Compensation*

According to the Educational Resource Service, the mean public school counselor salary has increased steadily over the past 15 years. In the 2008–09 school year, the mean salary for a public school counselor was \$58,775, up from \$41,355 in 1993–94 (see Figure 14).<sup>60</sup>



SOURCE: Educational Resource Service. (2009). *Salaries and Wages Paid Professional and Support Personnel in Public Schools, 2008–2009*. Arlington, VA.

**Table 27. Percentage of secondary schools that require college counselors to participate in professional development and that cover professional development costs: 2009**

	Percentage of schools that require professional development	Percentage of schools that cover professional development costs		
		All costs	Some costs	No costs
<b>Total</b>	<b>31.2%</b>	<b>32.2%</b>	<b>50.3%</b>	<b>17.5%</b>
<b>Control</b>				
Public	28.5	27.6	53.4	19.1
Private	50.6	67.2	27.2	5.5
<i>Private non-parochial</i>	48.8	73.8	20.6	5.6
<i>Private parochial</i>	54.7	53.3	41.3	5.3
<b>Enrollment</b>				
Fewer than 500 students	30.7	39.9	45.2	14.9
500 to 999	32.3	35.2	49.1	15.6
1,000 to 1,499	31.0	24.5	53.5	22.1
1,500 to 1,999	24.6	20.4	60.7	18.8
2,000 or more	38.9	18.5	61.1	20.4
<b>Free and reduced price lunch</b>				
0 to 25 percent of students eligible	28.7	28.4	55.2	16.4
26 to 50 percent	29.1	30.2	51.3	18.5
51 to 75 percent	30.7	28.6	49.8	21.6
76 to 100 percent	35.6	24.1	51.9	24.1
<b>Students per counselor</b>				
100 or fewer	38.6	36.9	44.9	18.2
101 to 200	37.1	39.3	47.3	13.4
201 to 300	29.1	29.4	54.8	15.8
301 to 400	27.1	26.6	51.5	21.8
401 to 500	22.0	26.0	54.4	19.5
More than 500	31.3	34.7	47.4	17.9

SOURCE: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2009.

<sup>56</sup> Correlation between private school status and frequency of: group meetings with students (.180), individual meetings with students (.130), meetings with parents (.218), electronic communication with students and parents (.308), testing assistance (.262), application assistance (.236), hosting college reps (.133), actively representing students (.255), p < .01

<sup>57</sup> Correlation between enrollment and frequency of: campus tours (-.122), meeting with parents (.136), p < .01

<sup>58</sup> Correlation between percent eligible for FRPL and frequency of: individual meetings with students (-.127), meeting with parents (-.205), electronic communications with students and parents (-.283), hosting college reps (-.100), organizing campus tours (.255), financial aid counseling (.167), p < .01

<sup>59</sup> Correlation between level of professional development cost coverage and: private college status (.250), enrollment (-.127), p < .01

<sup>60</sup> Educational Resource Service. (2009). *Salaries and Wages Paid Professional and Support Personnel in Public Schools, 2008–09*. 36th 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, most colleges continued to report increases in the number of applications they received, due to increases in both the number of high school graduates and the number of applications each student submits. These factors result in very high application loads for admission officers. For the Fall 2009 admission cycle, colleges reported that the average admission officer was responsible for reading 514 applications (see Table 28).

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 2.5 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 28).<sup>61</sup>

**Table 28. Mean number of applications per admission officer by institutional characteristics: 2009**

	Applications per admission officer
<b>Total</b>	<b>513</b>
<b>Control</b>	
Public	949
Private	368
<b>Enrollment</b>	
Fewer than 3,000 students	291
3,000 to 9,999	765
10,000 or more	1,148
<b>Selectivity</b>	
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	728
50 to 70 percent	548
71 to 85 percent	499
More than 85 percent	280
<b>Yield</b>	
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	529
30 to 45 percent	538
46 to 60 percent	534
More than 60 percent	274

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2009.

**Table 29. Median salary of admission staff by institutional budget quartiles: 2009–10**

	Median salary	Median salary by institutional budget			
		Lowest quartile	Second quartile	Third quartile	Highest quartile
Admission Counselor	\$34,581	\$31,240	\$33,523	\$35,509	\$36,534
Associate Director, Admission	54,724	45,081	48,956	57,191	66,223
Director, Admission and Registrar	71,866	59,898	68,783	80,000	97,810
Director, Admission and Financial Aid	105,913	65,000	79,561	133,030	113,556
Chief Admission Officer	84,605	62,378	73,080	90,316	108,868
Chief Enrollment Management Officer	118,648	89,124	112,109	132,613	144,072

SOURCE: College and University Professional Association for Human Resources. (2009–10). *Mid-Level Administrative and Professional Salary Survey and Administrative Compensation Survey*.

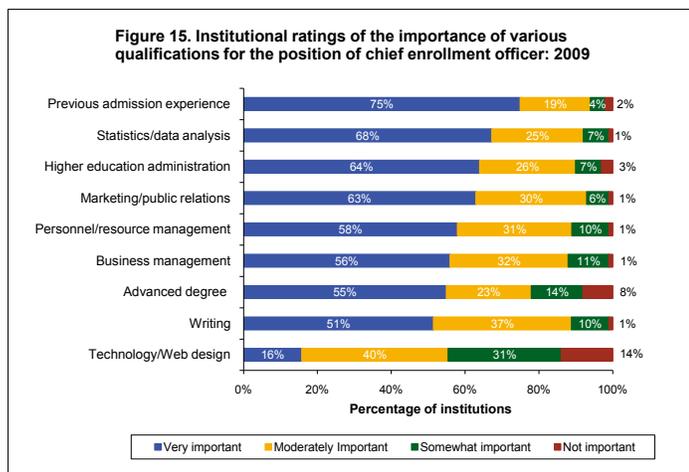
<sup>61</sup> Correlation between application-to-admission officer ratio and: public college status (.525), enrollment (.681), selectivity (.306),  $p < .01$

*Compensation*

Table 29 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 institutional budget, but they vary most widely for higher-level positions. For example, an admission counselor earned \$34,581, on average, in 2009–10, and this salary varied only slightly by the institutional budget quartile. The median salary for a chief admission officer was \$84,605, and this salary ranged from \$62,378 at institutions in the lowest budget quartile to \$108,868 at institutions in the highest budget quartile. Chief enrollment managers earned the highest median salary in 2009–10 at \$118,648.

*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 2009. Previous admission experience was rated as the most important qualification. The second most important qualification was statistics/data analysis followed closely by higher education administration and marketing/public relations. More than half of colleges also rated personnel/resource management, business management, holding an advanced degree, and writing as very important.

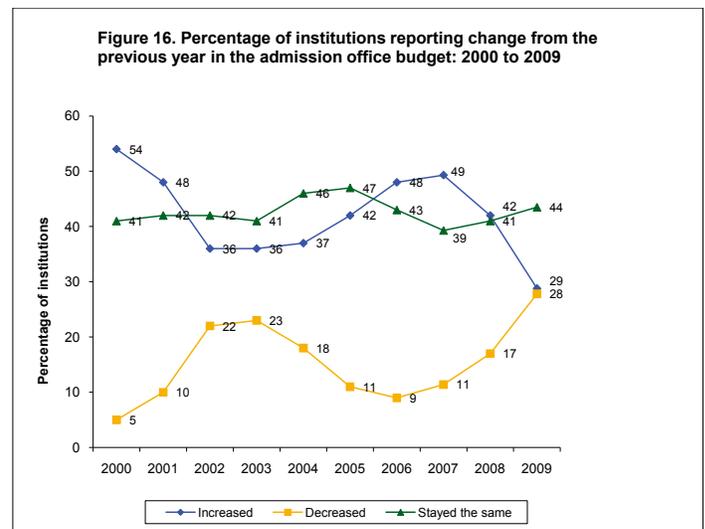


SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2009.

Different types of institutions rated most of the chief enrollment officer skills in very similar ways. However, there were some noteworthy variations by institutional characteristics. For example, institutions with lower yield rates placed greater importance than higher-yield institutions on several experiences and skills, including statistics/data analysis, marketing/public relations, personnel/resource management, previous admission experience, and higher education administration.<sup>62</sup> Both public and larger institutions also considered having an advanced degree to be more important than their private and smaller counterparts. Public institutions also rated skills in technology and Web design as more important than privates.<sup>63</sup>

**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, Web site 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 grew substantially from 17 percent in 2008 to 28 percent in 2009. In addition, only 29 percent of colleges reported a budget increase for 2009, down from 42 percent in 2008 (see Figure 16). Forty-four percent reported no change.



SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Surveys, 2000 through 2009.

<sup>62</sup> Correlation between yield rate and importance of chief enrollment officer skills: higher education administration (-.218), marketing/public relations (-.154), p < .01; previous admission experience (-.151), statistics/data analysis (-.123), personnel/resource management (-.140), p < .05

<sup>63</sup> Correlation between public college status and importance of chief enrollment officer skills: advanced degree (.170), p < .01; technology/Web design (.123), p < .05

<sup>63</sup> Correlation between enrollment and importance of chief enrollment officer skills: advanced degree (.164), p < .01

*Cost to Recruit*

NACAC's 2009 Admission Trends Survey asked institutions to report their total fiscal budget for the Fall 2009 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.<sup>64</sup> 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 (67 percent)
- admission staff benefits (49 percent)
- staff travel expenses for recruitment/yield (99.6 percent)
- expenses for participation in college fairs and other recruitment/yield events (100 percent)
- publication expenses (86 percent)
- payments made to third party contractors for admission or recruitment/yield services (88 percent)

Table 30 shows 2009 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.<sup>65</sup>

For the 2009 admission cycle, an average college admission office spent \$285 in recruitment and office costs for each student who applied, \$428 for each student who was admitted and \$1,378 for each student who enrolled. When staff salaries and benefits were included, the average cost to recruit figures were \$524 per applicant, \$843 per accepted student and \$2,553 per enrolled student (see Table 30).

As shown in Table 30, costs to recruit varied widely among different types of institutions. The following examples refer to cost to recruit figures which included staff salaries and expenses.

- Private colleges spent approximately twice as much as public colleges to recruit both applicants and admitted students, and three times as much to recruit enrolled students for Fall 2009.<sup>66</sup>
- In comparison to the largest colleges (10,000 or more students), the smallest colleges (fewer than 3,000 students) spent nearly three times as much to recruit each applicant and admitted student and nearly four times as much to recruit each enrolled student.<sup>67</sup>
- On average, less selective colleges spent more to recruit applicants, and more selective colleges spent more per admitted student.<sup>68</sup>
- Higher yield institutions had lower recruiting costs for enrolled students in comparison to their lower yield counterparts.<sup>69</sup>

**Table 30. Mean cost to recruit per applicant, admitted student and enrolled student: 2009**

	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
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$285.20</b>	<b>\$427.94</b>	<b>\$1,378.39</b>	<b>\$523.80</b>	<b>\$842.87</b>	<b>\$2,553.32</b>
<b>Control</b>						
Public	125.33	190.92	469.50	321.92	462.66	1,046.14
Private	313.17	463.75	1,505.41	613.53	1,005.82	3,199.26
<b>Enrollment</b>						
Fewer than 3,000 students	314.24	454.57	1,428.53	677.00	1,073.17	3,291.57
3,000 to 9,999	180.29	342.76	1,281.43	357.68	617.36	1,913.32
10,000 or more	133.00	182.92	663.23	244.75	375.99	883.53
<b>Selectivity</b>						
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	260.83	665.45	1,675.12	419.11	1,019.96	2,909.25
50 to 70 percent	232.65	341.42	1,211.44	552.00	971.11	2,729.89
70 to 85 percent	280.35	420.10	1,451.15	438.64	582.65	2,113.13
More than 85 percent	366.88	404.06	1,291.40	714.86	774.70	2,490.04
<b>Yield Rate</b>						
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	274.88	387.11	1,705.05	529.24	831.52	3,206.67
30 to 45 percent	284.16	437.65	1,081.95	559.09	846.54	2,455.72
46 to 60 percent	--	433.92	1,420.71	399.25	673.16	1,729.06
More than 60 percent	333.28	597.14	840.12	689.07	1,367.83	1,848.41

-- 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, 2009.

<sup>64</sup> 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).

<sup>65</sup> Nineteen 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. Thirty-two 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.

<sup>66</sup> Correlation between private college status and cost to recruit (full budget): applicant (.446), admitted student (.501), enrolled student (.614),  $p < .01$

<sup>67</sup> Correlation between enrollment and cost to recruit (full budget): applicant (-.536), admitted student (-.513), enrolled student (-.525),  $p < .01$

<sup>68</sup> Correlation between selectivity and cost to recruit (full budget): applicant (-.292), admitted student (.285),  $p < .05$

<sup>69</sup> Correlation between yield and cost to recruit (full budget): enrolled student (-.290),  $p < .01$