

# 2017 | STATE OF COLLEGE ADMISSION

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**NACAC**

National Association for  
College Admission Counseling

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Highlights from the 2017 *State of College Admission* report include findings related to the transition from high school to postsecondary education in the United States, gathered primarily through NACAC's annual Admission Trends Survey and Counseling Trends Survey. The 2016 report also includes information about the recruitment and admission process for transfer and international students.

## College Applications

The increase in the number of colleges to which each student applies continues a near perfectly upward trend, which is reflected in college reports of increased application volume.

- **Growth in Application Volume Continues:** Between the Fall 2015 and Fall 2016 admission cycles, the number of applications from first-time freshmen increased 7 percent; applications from prospective transfer students increased by 1 percent; and international student applications increased by 13 percent, on average.
- **Colleges Accept Nearly Two-Thirds of First-Time Freshmen Applicants, on Average; National Average Acceptance Rate Rebounds:** The percentage of applicants offered admission at four-year colleges and universities in the United States—referred to as the average selectivity rate—was 66.1 percent for Fall 2015. The national average acceptance rate edged up from 64.7 percent

in Fall 2013, after reaching a low of 63.9 percent in Fall 2012.

- **Decline in Average Yield Rate for First-Time Freshmen:** The average yield rate for Fall 2015 (35.1 percent) decreased slightly from 36.2 percent in Fall 2014.
- **Transfer Acceptance Rate Slightly Lower than Freshmen Rate; Yield Much Higher:** Among institutions that enroll transfer students, average selectivity for Fall 2016 was 62 percent, compared to 66 percent for first-time freshmen. However, almost two-thirds (65 percent) of transfer applicants who were admitted ultimately enrolled, compared to only 28 percent of freshman admits.
- **International Student Acceptance Rate is Low; Yield Slightly Higher than First-Time Freshmen:** At institutions that enroll first-time international students, the admit rate for this population (55 percent) is lower than both transfer and first-time freshmen students. The average yield rate for international students is 32 percent.

## Recruitment and Yield Strategies

College admission offices use a variety of strategies to recruit prospective students, particularly those who would be likely to attend if admitted. Colleges are broadening their recruitment efforts to bring in more transfer and international students.

- **Beyond the High School Graduate:** More than two-thirds of Admission Trends Survey respondents indicated that transfer students are considerably important to meeting overall recruitment goals, and almost 40 percent rated international students as considerably important.
- **Top Recruitment Strategies:** Email and institutional websites are the primary means by which colleges recruit first-time freshmen, transfer students, and international students. However, colleges employ a broader range of strategies when recruiting domestic high school students. Four other factors were each rated as considerably important by more than 50 percent of colleges—hosting campus visits, connecting with high school counselors, visiting high school, and sending direct mail.
- **Early Decision (ED) and Early Action (EA) Activity Increases:** Between Fall 2015 and Fall 2016, colleges reported an average increase of 5 percent in the number of Early Decision applicants and 6 percent in ED admits. The number of Early Action applications increased by 15 percent and the number of students accepted through EA increased by 16 percent.
- **Wait List Activity Increases; Likelihood of Wait List Acceptance Remains Low:** For the Fall 2016 admission cycle, 39 percent of institutions reported using a wait list. Institutions

accepted an average of 23 percent of all students who chose to remain on wait lists. From Fall 2015 to Fall 2016, the number of students offered a place on an admission wait list increased by 11 percent, on average, and the number admitted increased by 31 percent.

### Factors in Admission Decisions

The factors that admission officers use to evaluate applications from first-time freshmen have remained largely consistent over the past 20 years. Students' academic achievements—which include grades, strength of curriculum, and admission test scores—constitute the most important factors in the admission decision. Admission decision factors for first-time international students are similar to those for domestic students, but the transfer admission decision process differs in significant ways.

- **Admission Offices Identify Grades, High School Curriculum, and Test Scores as Top Factors for First-Time Freshmen:** The top factors in the admission decision were: grades in college preparatory courses, overall high school GPA, admission test scores, and strength of curriculum. Among the next most important factors were the essay, a student's demonstrated interest, counselor and teacher recommendations, extracurricular activities, and class rank.
- **Top Factor for International Students is English Proficiency Exam Scores:** After English proficiency, the factors for admission decisions with international applicants are remarkably similar to those for domestic students, with one notable exception. A greater proportion of colleges rated the essay/writing sample as considerably important for international applicants, likely because of the additional confirmation of English skills that the essay provides.
- **For Transfer Admission Decisions, Grades Matter Most:** The only transfer admission decision factors rated considerably important by a substantial proportion of colleges were overall GPA at the student's prior postsecondary institution and average grades in transferrable courses.

### College Counseling in Secondary Schools

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 have additional constraints on the amount of time they can dedicate to college counseling.

- **Student-to-Counselor Ratio:** According to US Department of Education data, in 2014–15 each public school counselor (including elementary and secondary) was responsible for 482 students, on average. NACAC survey data indicated an average high school student-to-counselor ratio, including part-time staff, of 281-to-1, on average.

- **College Counseling Staff:** In 2016, 28 percent of public schools reported employing at least one counselor (full- or part-time) whose exclusive responsibility was to provide college counseling, compared to 49 percent of private schools.
- **College Counseling Activities:** Some differences exist between the duties and activities of counselors employed at public schools versus those who work at private schools, data show.
  - On average, public school counselors spent 20 percent of their time on postsecondary counseling in 2016, while their private school counterparts spent 31 percent of their time on college counseling.
  - The proportion of students who had individual meetings with counselors increased at each grade level—29 percent in ninth grade, 36 percent in 10th grade, 62 percent in 11th grade, and 81 percent in the senior year of high school.
  - Only one-quarter (25 percent) of all counselors reported being an integral part of this process, and 30 percent had some involvement. Counselors at private schools were more likely to report being integral to the curriculum development process (36 percent) in comparison to those at public schools (24 percent).

# INTRODUCTION

## NACAC's Mission

Supporting students in the transition from high school to college has been at the core of NACAC's mission since the association was founded in 1937. Given changes in both the national and global economy in recent decades, as well as rapidly shifting student demographics, the role of professionals who assist students in this process has never been more important. Expert projections indicate that 65 percent of US jobs will require some type of postsecondary education by 2020; however, a deficit of 5 million workers with those credentials is projected if the country's postsecondary attainment rates do not increase substantially.<sup>1</sup> Nearly all of the jobs (99 percent) created during the most recent recession recovery (since 2008) have gone to workers with at least some college education.<sup>2</sup> To the detriment of both individuals and communities, those whose highest degree is a high school diploma are denied

the many benefits that college graduates enjoy, including:

- higher incomes and increased lifetime earnings
- lower levels of unemployment and poverty
- decreased reliance on public assistance programs
- increased job satisfaction
- greater likelihood of receiving employer-sponsored pensions and health insurance
- healthier lifestyles
- higher levels of civic engagement.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, as of 2015 only 33 percent of all adults age 25 and older had obtained at least a bachelor's degree.<sup>4</sup> Even more significant, underserved minority groups and students from low-socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds fall behind in every step of the attainment process: high school graduation, college enrollment, and postsecondary credential completion.

In recognition of the important role that community colleges have in achieving national postsecondary attainment goals, NACAC has more recently expanded the association's resources, advocacy, and research efforts to serve community college professionals. An increasing number of students are achieving their educational goals at two-year colleges and exploring the two-year to four-year transfer pathway to a bachelor's degree. Transfer also provides an opportunity for students to find success when the first college enrollment experience proves not to serve the student well. According to US Department of Education data, approximately one-third (32 percent) of all first-time degree-seeking students attended a two-year institution in Fall 2015.<sup>5</sup> Almost 40 percent of students who began postsecondary education in Fall 2008 transferred at least once in the following six years.<sup>6</sup> And, contrary to popular belief, many students "reverse transfer," meaning they move from a four-year college to a two-year college. Among that same

<sup>1</sup> Carnevale, A.P., Smith, N., and Strohl, J. (2013). *Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020*. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

<sup>2</sup> Carnevale, A.P., Jayasundera, T., and Gulish, A. (2016). *America's Divided Recovery: College Haves and Have-Nots*. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

<sup>3</sup> Ma, J., Pender, M., Welch, M. (2016). *Education Pays 2016: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society*. College Board: Washington, DC.

<sup>4</sup> US Census Bureau. (2017). *Educational Attainment in the United States: 2016*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office..

<sup>5</sup> US Department of Education. (2017). *Digest of Education Statistics*. Table 303.30. Washington, DC: NCES.

<sup>6</sup> Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Wakhungu, P.K, Yuan, X., & Harrell, A. (2015, July). *Transfer and Mobility: A National View of Student Movement in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2008 Cohort* (Signature Report No. 9). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

Fall 2008 cohort, more than half of those who transferred from four-year institutions moved to a community college.<sup>7</sup>

NACAC has also expanded its focus to include support for professionals who work with students from outside the US and those who advise US students interested in pursuing postsecondary degrees abroad. The growth of international student enrollment at American high schools, colleges, and universities—as well as increased interest among American students to study abroad—is adding a global dynamic to the work of college counseling and admission professionals. In 2015, more than 4.5 million students enrolled in tertiary education outside of their country of citizenship<sup>8</sup>, and a growing number of non-US students are seeking high school diplomas in American high schools—73,019 in 2013.<sup>9</sup> The number of US citizens pursuing full undergraduate degrees abroad reached nearly 47,000 in 2011–12, up 5 percent from the previous year.<sup>10</sup>

### State of College Admission Report

The 2017 *State of College Admission* report provides up-to-date information on a number of issues that impact students' transition from high school to postsecondary education, as well as the admission process for

transfer students and international students attending postsecondary institutions in the United States. The report covers the recruitment strategies that colleges use to attract each group of prospective students and the process by which candidates are evaluated. The report also includes a chapter dedicated to school counseling in US secondary schools, given the integral role school counselors play

in putting students on the path to postsecondary success.

The report is divided into four chapters: College Applications; Recruitment and Yield Strategies; Factors in Admission Decisions; and Secondary School Counseling. Also available at [www.nacacnet.org/soca](http://www.nacacnet.org/soca) is a series of topical infographics, data visualizations, and PowerPoint slide presentations.

### Methodology in Brief

The information presented in the report primarily includes data gathered through NACAC's annual Counseling Trends Survey and Admission Trends Survey.

NACAC's Counseling Trends Survey (CTS) collects information from secondary school counselors and counseling departments about their priorities and work responsibilities, particularly as they relate to helping students transition to college; and their practices in communicating with students, parents, and colleges. The 2016 survey was mailed to a total of 11,139 US high schools, and 2,266 responses were received.

NACAC administers its annual Admission Trends Survey (ATS) to US four-year colleges that are NACAC members. NACAC collects data related to application volume; application practices; 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 staffing. Since 2014, NACAC has expanded ATS to incorporate questions related to the admission process for prospective transfer and international students. NACAC received 603 responses in 2016.

(See *Appendix A: Methodology* for more detailed information about survey administration and data analysis.)

<sup>7</sup> Shapiro, D., Dunder, A., Wakhungu, P.K, Yuan, X., & Harrell, A. (2015, July). *Transfer and Mobility: A National View of Student Movement in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2008 Cohort* (Signature Report No. 9). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

<sup>8</sup> Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (2017). *Education at a Glance, 2017*. Washington, DC: OECD.

<sup>9</sup> Farrugia, C. (2014). *Charting New Pathways to Higher Education: International Secondary Students in the United States*. New York: Institute of International Education (IIE).

<sup>10</sup> Belyavina, R., Li, J., and Bhandari, R. (2013). *New Frontiers: U.S. Students Pursuing Degrees Abroad*. New York: Institute of International Education (IIE).

# 01

## CHAPTER 1 COLLEGE APPLICATIONS

Each year, US colleges and universities receive hundreds of thousands of applications from first-time domestic students, transfer students, and international students. Results of recent NACAC Admission Trends Surveys indicate that the number of applications has continued to increase across four-year colleges.

### Application Volume

Results of the 2016 Admission Trends Survey indicate that the average number of applications increased for each group of prospective students between the Fall 2015 and Fall 2016 admission cycles. Applications from first-time freshmen increased by 7 percent, on average, and applications from prospective transfer students increased by 1 percent. Although applications from international students represented the smallest

proportion of all applications received, they increased by 13 percent from Fall 2015 to Fall 2016.<sup>1</sup> Applications for each group of prospective students also had increased from Fall 2014 to Fall 2015, by 6 percent, 4 percent, and 23 percent, respectively.

According to the Higher Education Research Institute's *The American Freshmen* report series, 35 percent of first-time freshmen had applied to seven or more colleges

during the Fall 2016 admission cycle, after reaching a peak of 36 percent in Fall 2015. Since Fall 2013, more than 80 percent of first-time freshmen have applied to at least three colleges each year (see Figure 1).

Application volume increases have created a growing burden on admission office staff who evaluate prospective students for admission. According to Admission Trends Survey (AD) results, the average

### PERCENT CHANGE IN THE NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS BETWEEN FALL 2015 AND FALL 2016



Transfer  
1%



First-time freshmen  
7%



International  
13%

<sup>1</sup> International percent change responses trimmed 5 percent due to extreme outliers.

number of applications for each admission office staff member (excluding administrative staff) is 854. The number of applications per admission officer increases with both applicant selectivity rates and enrollment size (see Table 1).

### Acceptance and Yield Rates

The acceptance rate for a college or university is defined as the percentage of applicants who are offered admission. Institutions with lower acceptance rates are

considered more highly selective, meaning a smaller number of applicants are admitted. The selectivity of US postsecondary institutions range from acceptance rates of fewer than 10 percent to more than 90 percent of applicants. An institution's yield rate is defined as the percentage of admitted students who ultimately enroll in the institution, after considering other admission offers. Although yield rates may have little relevance

to prospective students, accurately predicting yield is critical to colleges looking to avoid either over- or under-enrollment.

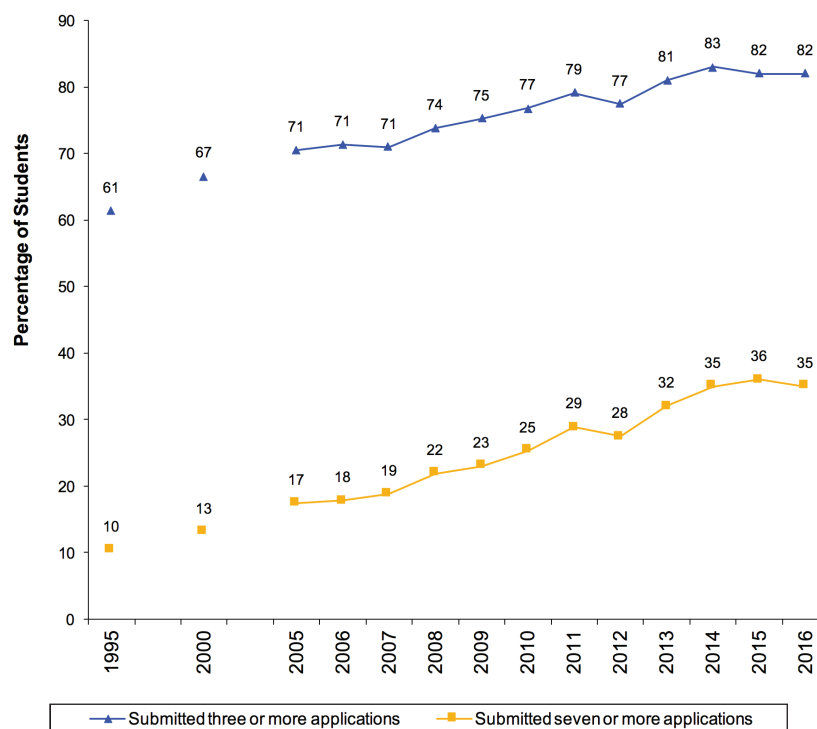
### First-Time Freshmen

According to data collected by the US Department of Education, the national average acceptance rate for first-time freshmen across all four-year institutions in the US was nearly two-thirds (66.1 percent) for the Fall 2015 admission cycle. The rate edged up from 64.7 percent in Fall 2013, after reaching a low of 63.9 percent in Fall 2012—the year in which the total number of high school graduates reached a peak. For Fall 2015, the average acceptance rate at private institutions was about 5 percentage points lower than the average rate at public institutions (64.4 percent versus 69.5 percent).

The most selective four-year colleges—defined as those accepting less than half of all applicants—received 37 percent of all Fall 2015 applications, but enrolled only 22 percent of all first-time undergraduate students. Two-thirds of first-time, full-time freshmen (66 percent) were enrolled in institutions with selectivity rates between 50 percent and 85 percent (see Table 2).

For the Fall 2015 freshman class, the average yield rate among four-year colleges and universities was 35.1 percent, down from 36.2 percent in Fall 2014 and 35.7 percent in Fall 2013.

FIGURE 1. INCREASES IN FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN APPLICATION SUBMISSION: 1995 TO 2016



SOURCE: Eagan, K., Stolzenberg, E.B., Zimmerman, H.B., Aragon, M.C., Sayson, H.W., & Rios-Aguilar, C. (2017). *The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2016*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA.

Eagan, M. K., Stolzenberg, E.B., Ramirez, J.J., Aragon, M.C., Suchard, M.R., and Rios-Aguilar, C. (2016) *The American freshman: Fifty-Year trend, 1996–2015*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.



TABLE 1. APPLICATIONS PER ADMISSION OFFICER, FALL 2016

	N	Mean
<b>All Survey Respondents</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>854</b>
<i>Control</i>		
Public	28	1,472
Private	48	494
<i>Enrollment</i>		
Fewer than 3,000 students	32	317
3,000 to 9,999	33	693
10,000 or more	10	3,174
<i>Selectivity</i>		
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	14	2,011
50 to 70 percent	30	771
71 to 85 percent	22	460
More than 85 percent	10	353

NOTE: Both admission counselors and mid/senior level admission officials were included in the analyses.

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2016.

### Transfer and International Students

Among 2016 Admission Trends Survey respondents that accept

transfer students, the average acceptance rate for transfer applicants was slightly lower than for the first-time freshmen

population (62 percent, compared to 66 percent). However, the yield for accepted transfer students was much higher (65 percent, compared to 28 percent).

A similar analysis of institutions that accept international students showed that first-time international students are accepted at a lower rate (55 percent) than both transfer and first-time freshmen students. The yield rate for international students was 32 percent, indicating they were only slightly more likely to enroll than accepted first-time freshmen applicants (see Table 3).

### Application Fees

According to US Department of Education data, 80 percent of four-year, not-for-profit colleges had an application fee for the Fall 2015 admission cycle, which averaged \$44. Public colleges were more likely to report having application fees than privates (94 percent versus 74 percent), but no difference was found in the average fee amount. Larger enrollment sizes and lower selectivity rates were associated with higher average fees.

## THE AVERAGE ACCEPTANCE RATE FOR FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN

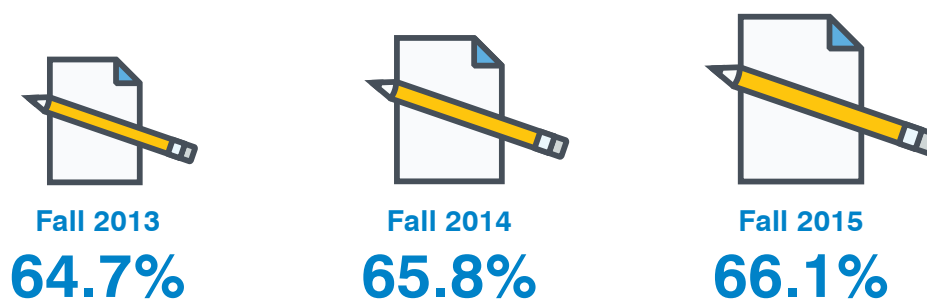


TABLE 2. APPLICATIONS AND ENROLLMENT, BY SELECTIVITY: FALL 2015

Selectivity	National share of institutions	Average number of applications per institution	National share of applications	National share of full-time, first-time degree seeking undergraduates
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	19.2%	11,924	36.7%	21.5%
50 to 70 percent	35.9	5,772	33.3	34.7
71 to 85 percent	28.7	5,032	23.2	31.1
More than 85 percent	16.3	2,589	6.8	12.8

*N* = 1,555

*SOURCE: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2015-16). Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Data Center. Washington, DC: NCES. [Includes Title-IV participating, four-year public and private not-for-profit, degree-granting (primarily baccalaureate) institutions in the US that enroll first-time freshman and are not open admission.]*

TABLE 3. KEY STATISTICS FOR TRANSFER AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADMISSION:  
FALL 2016

<b>Transfer</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Transfer Selectivity Rate	382	62.1%
Overall Freshman Selectivity Rate for Institutions with Transfer Students	388	66.0%
Transfer Yield Rate	381	65.2%
Overall Yield Rate for Institutions with Transfer Students	389	27.6%
<b>International</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>
International Selectivity Rate	279	54.5%
Overall Freshman Selectivity Rate for Institutions with International Students	363	66.3%
International Yield Rate	279	31.7%
Overall Yield Rate for Institutions with International Students	363	27.7%

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2016.

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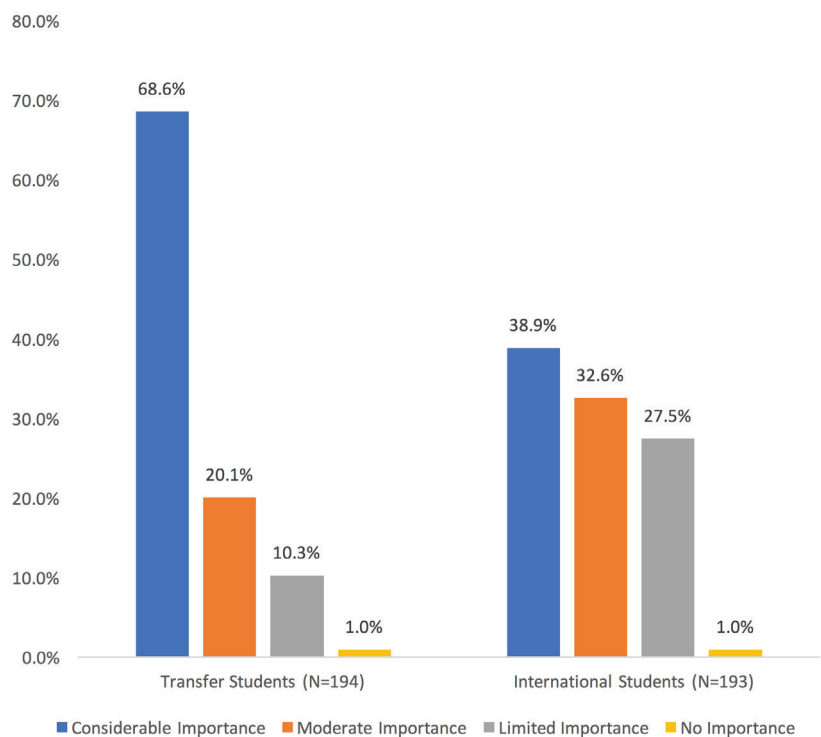
## CHAPTER 2 RECRUITMENT AND YIELD STRATEGIES

### Beyond the High School Graduate

As shown in Figure 2, more than two-thirds of Admission Trends Survey respondents indicated that transfer students are considerably important to meeting overall recruitment goals, and only 11 percent reported that they had little or no importance. A greater proportion of public colleges rated transfer students as considerably important as compared to private colleges (80 percent versus 62 percent). Colleges with larger enrollments and those with higher acceptance rates also rated transfer students as more important.

Almost 40 percent of colleges rated international students as considerably important to their enrollment goals, and nearly one-third indicated moderate importance for this group. Larger colleges tended to rate international students as more important to meeting enrollment goals.

FIGURE 2. IMPORTANCE OF PROSPECTIVE STUDENT POPULATIONS IN MEETING INSTITUTIONAL ENROLLMENT GOALS



SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2016.

### Recruitment Strategies by Prospective Student Group

Results of NACAC's 2016 Admission Trends Survey indicate that many of the recruitment methods used for traditional domestic high school students are also useful with other populations. For example, contacting students through email and engaging with them through the institution's website were the most important

recruitment strategies that colleges and universities use for first-time freshmen, transfer students, and international students. For high school students, an additional four factors were each rated as considerably important by at least 50 percent of colleges. They were: hosting campus visits, outreach to high school counselors, high school visits, and direct mail. More than half of colleges (56 percent) also

MEAN NUMBER OF COUNTRIES IN WHICH COLLEGES RECRUIT



TABLE 4. PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING “CONSIDERABLE IMPORTANCE” TO VARIOUS RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES, BY PROSPECTIVE STUDENT POPULATION: FALL 2016

Factor	First-Time Freshmen	Transfer	International (First-Time Freshmen)
Website	87.6%	86.0%	88.1%
Email	79.7	72.1	78.5
Hosted Campus Visit	76.2	55.6	30.4
High School Counselor	57.3	15.4	36.1
High School Visit (in the US)	54.9	9.8	9.8
Direct Mail	50.5	25.0	2.8
College Fairs	41.7	19.7	15.5
Social Media	40.0	32.2	35.6
Community Based Organizations	20.2	3.4	4.2
Test-Optional Policy	15.3	9.8	11.8
Alumni	12.1	9.2	11.1
Articulation Agreements with Community Colleges	10.4	57.4	11.6
Community College Outreach/Partnerships	8.5	61.8	5.7
High School Visit (Outside the US)	6.0	0.6	19.4
Conditional/Provisional Admission Program	3.9	2.4	10.3
International Student Recruitment Agents	—	—	12.6
Partnerships with International Colleges/Universities	—	—	16.4
State or Regional Recruitment Consortium	—	—	4.5
Federal Government Support	—	—	11.7
Foreign Government Support	—	—	11.1
Pathways Programs	—	—	13.5

—Question was only asked for international students.

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2016.



# 49%

OF SELECTIVE COLLEGES  
OFFERED EARLY DECISION

rated college visits as considerably important in recruiting transfer students (see Table 4). A variety of other strategies were used with both transfer and international recruitment, but only email and website were very highly rated as recruitment tools.

Survey respondents reported that they actively recruited in 10.7 countries, on average. For the purpose of the survey, “active recruitment” was defined as engaging in recruitment activities that involve either maintaining an in-country office/staff presence or periodic staff travel to students’ home countries (e.g. attending education fairs, making high school visits, conducting site visits with international student recruitment agents.) Private colleges recruited in 15.8 countries, on average, nearly

twice as many as public colleges. The number of countries also increased with selectivity.

(A complete breakdown of how colleges rated various recruitment strategies by population can be found in Appendix Tables B.1 to B.3.)

### Early Decision (ED)

Twenty percent of respondents to NACAC’s 2016 Admission Trends Survey offered ED. Private colleges were more likely than public institutions to offer Early Decision policies (30 percent compared to 5 percent), as were selective colleges. Nearly half (49 percent) of the most selective colleges (those accepting fewer than 50 percent of applicants) had an Early Decision application option. (See Appendix C for a detailed description of Early Decision and Early Action



# 43%

OF COLLEGES WITH LOW  
YIELD RATES OFFERED  
EARLY ACTION

policies.)

Early Decision applicants represent only a small portion of the total applicant pool at colleges that have ED policies. Only 6 percent of all applications for Fall 2016 admission to ED colleges were received through Early Decision. The proportion of all applications received through ED increased with the admission selectivity rate.

As expected, colleges with Early Decision policies reported a higher acceptance rate for their ED applicants as compared to all applicants (60 percent versus 48 percent). Given the binding nature of Early Decision policies, the average yield rate for Early Decision admits was 87 percent, substantially higher than the average yield rate for all students admitted to ED colleges (25 percent) (see Table 5). More

TABLE 5. KEY STATISTICS FOR EARLY DECISION COLLEGES: FALL 2016

	N	Mean Percent
Applications Received through Early Decision	69	5.8
Early Decision Selectivity Rate	69	59.5
Overall Selectivity Rate for Institutions with Early Decision Policies	79	47.9
Early Decision Yield Rate	57	86.6
Overall Yield Rate for Institutions with Early Decision Policies	79	25.2

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2016.

selective colleges tended to have higher ED yield rates.

Between Fall 2015 and Fall 2016, colleges reported an average increase of 5 percent in the number of Early Decision applicants and 6 percent in ED admits. In a prior survey, colleges also had reported increases in ED applications and ED admits between Fall 2014 and Fall 2015 (10 percent and 11 percent, respectively).

### Early Action (EA)

Thirty-four percent of four-year colleges offered EA plans, according to results of the 2016 Admission Trends Survey. Private colleges were more likely than publics to have Early Action application options (39 percent compared to 26 percent, respectively). Colleges with the lowest yield rates also were more likely to offer Early Action. Forty-three percent of colleges with yield rates lower than 30 percent used Early Action.

For Fall 2016, 43 percent of applications to colleges that had Early Action admission plans were received through EA. Similar to the pattern with Early Decision, colleges with Early Action accepted a greater proportion of EA applicants when compared to the overall applicant pool (71 percent versus 65 percent). Unlike Early Decision, Early Action

did not provide a significant benefit to institutions in terms of yield rates. The average yield rate for EA admits was nearly identical to that of the overall applicant pool (25 percent and 23 percent, respectively) (see Table 6).

From Fall 2015 to Fall 2016, the number of Early Action applications increased by 15 percent and the number of students accepted through EA increased by 16 percent, on average. Colleges also had reported average increases in EA applications and EA admits between Fall 2014 and Fall 2015 of 7 percent each.

### Wait Lists

For the Fall 2016 admission cycle, 39 percent of institutions reported using a wait list. Private institutions were more likely than public colleges and universities to maintain a wait list (45 percent compared to 31 percent), as were those with lower acceptance rates. Nearly three-quarters (72 percent) of the most selective institutions (accepting fewer than half of all applicants) maintained a wait list.

Institutions reported placing an average of 10 percent of all applicants on the wait list for the Fall 2016 admission cycle, and an average of 48 percent of waitlisted students opted to remain on the wait list. Private colleges and those



## THE MOST SELECTIVE COLLEGES ADMITTED ONLY 14 PERCENT OF WAITLISTED STUDENTS

with lower acceptance rates placed a greater proportion of students on wait lists, on average.

Institutions admitted an average of 23 percent of all students who chose to remain on wait lists. Selective colleges were least likely to admit students from a wait list. Only 14 percent of students who accepted a wait list spot at the most selective colleges (those accepting fewer than half of all applicants) were ultimately admitted. Between Fall 2015 and Fall 2016, the average number of students offered a wait list position increased by 11 percent, and the number admitted increased by 31 percent. As reported on the 2015 Admission Trends Survey, between Fall 2014 and Fall 2015, the average number of students offered a wait list position increased by 16 percent, and the number admitted increased by 41 percent.

TABLE 6. KEY STATISTICS FOR EARLY ACTION COLLEGES: FALL 2016

	N	Mean Percent
Applications Received through Early Action	91	43.2
Early Action Selectivity Rate	88	71.1
Overall Selectivity Rate for Institutions with Early Action Policies	132	65.2
Early Action Yield Rate	84	24.8
Overall Yield Rate for Institutions with Early Action Policies	131	23.3

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2016.

# 03

## CHAPTER 3 FACTORS IN ADMISSION DECISIONS

There is no definite plan or specific combination of factors that will guarantee a student admission to his or her preferred institution. Colleges and universities review many aspects of prospective student applications in order to determine which students will be admitted. In addition to considering the merits of each applicant, most universities also consider the composition of the entering freshmen and transfer classes as a whole in order to ensure that a diverse group of students with a variety of academic and extracurricular interests will enrich the campus experience. The importance of various factors in the admission decision also differ depending on a student's designation as a first-time freshman, transfer, or international student. While first-time freshmen and international students had similarities in regard to top admission factors, top factors for transfer students were considerably different. Institutional characteristics, such

as enrollment size and acceptance rate, also impact the importance of admission factors.

### **Factors in the Admission Decision: First-Time Freshmen, 2016 (see Table 7)**

- Grades in high school have been among the top decision factors for first-time freshmen for decades. Total GPA and grades in college prep courses were each rated as considerably important by 77 percent colleges. Admission test scores and strength of curriculum were also rated considerably important by more than half of colleges (54 percent and 52 percent, respectively).
- A second set of factors were most often considered to be moderately important. These factors tend to provide insight regarding personal qualities and interest of students, as well as more detail on academic performance. They include essays or writing samples; teacher and counselor

recommendations; student's demonstrated interest; class rank; and extracurricular activities.

- A final group of admission decision factors were given moderate or considerable importance by a small percentage of institutions, on average, likely because they are relevant only to a small subset of colleges. These factors included subject test scores (AP, IB), portfolios, SAT II scores, interviews, state graduation exam scores, and work experience.

### **Factors in the Admission Decision: International Students, 2016 (see Table 8)**

- The top factors in admission decisions for first-time international students applying to four-year US colleges were similar to those of first-time domestic students, with the important exception of English proficiency exam scores. Eighty percent of colleges rated these proficiency



TABLE 7. PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACTORS IN ADMISSION DECISIONS: **FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN, FALL 2016**

Factor	N	Considerable Importance	Moderate Importance	Limited Importance	No Importance
Grades in College Prep Courses	216	76.9%	12.5%	9.3%	1.4%
Grades in All Courses	218	77.1	13.8	6.4	2.8
Strength of Curriculum	218	51.8	35.3	7.3	5.5
Admission Test Scores (SAT, ACT)	219	54.3	27.9	13.7	4.1
Essay or Writing Sample	217	18.9	35.9	22.1	23.0
Counselor Recommendation	213	14.6	46.0	25.8	13.6
<b>Student's Demonstrated Interest</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>13.7</b>	<b>25.5</b>	32.1	28.8
Teacher Recommendation	211	10.9	46.4	28.0	14.7
Class Rank	217	9.2	24.0	34.6	32.3
Subject Test Scores (AP, IB)	216	6.9	30.6	30.6	31.9
Portfolio	210	6.2	5.7	27.6	60.5
Extracurricular Activities	214	7.9	36.0	36.9	19.2
SAT II Scores	212	2.4	6.1	21.2	70.3
Interview	213	4.7	17.4	31.9	46.0
State Graduation Exam Scores	210	1.9	7.6	21.9	68.6
Work	211	2.8	15.6	47.4	34.1

**SOURCE:** NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2016

scores as considerably important, followed by grades in college prep courses and grades in all courses (66 percent each), and strength of curriculum (47 percent).

- The moderately important decision factors also were similar to those for domestic students, with a few exceptions worth noting. Nineteen percent of colleges rated the essay/writing sample as considerably important for domestic students, compared to 23 percent for international students. For

international students, the essay can serve as another indicator of English proficiency in addition to offering information about student experiences and academic interests.

- A national certificate signifying graduation or school attendance was also an important factor for international students, rated as considerably important by 28 percent of institutions and as moderately important by an additional 24 percent.

### Factors in the Admission Decision: Transfer Students, 2016 (see Table 9)

- The factors considered in transfer admission decisions are notably different than those for first-time domestic and international students. The only two factors that are rated as considerably important by a majority of colleges were overall GPA at prior postsecondary institutions (81 percent) and average grades in transferable courses (75 percent).

TABLE 8. PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACTORS IN ADMISSION DECISIONS: **INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS (FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN)**, FALL 2016

Factor	N	Considerable Importance	Moderate Importance	Limited Importance	No Importance
English Proficiency Exam Scores	193	80.3%	16.1%	1.0%	2.6%
Grades in College Prep Courses	195	66.2	20.5	9.2	4.1
Grades in All Courses	196	66.3	21.4	9.7	2.6
Strength of Curriculum	196	46.9	33.2	10.7	9.2
Admission Test Scores (SAT, ACT)	197	36.5	27.9	24.4	11.2
Essay or Writing Sample	197	23.4	32.5	21.8	22.3
National School Leaving or Graduation Certificate	180	28.3	24.4	21.1	21.1
Counselor Recommendation	191	13.6	41.9	24.1	26.1
Teacher Recommendation	189	10.6	43.9	27.0	18.5
Subject Test Scores (AP, IB)	196	6.6	31.1	25.0	37.2
<b>Student's Demonstrated Interest</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>14.1</b>	<b>25.7</b>	31.4	28.8
Class Rank	196	6.1	16.8	31.6	45.4
Interview	191	8.4	16.2	29.8	45.5
Portfolio	192	5.7	6.3	26.0	62.0
Extracurricular Activities	194	6.2	30.4	39.7	23.7
SAT II Scores	193	2.6	6.7	20.2	70.5
Work	191	2.1	11.5	46.1	40.3

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2016

Unlike other prospective student populations, these factors serve as direct evidence of a student's ability to succeed in college-level academic coursework.

- For transfer students, many factors related to high school performance fall to the level of moderate to limited importance, including grades, strength of the high school curriculum, and recommendations from teachers and counselors.
- In contrast to first-time prospective students, 77 percent of colleges rated admission test scores (SAT, ACT) as having limited or no importance in transfer admission decisions.

#### **Factors in Admission Decisions for First-Time Freshmen: Change Over Time**

Because NACAC only recently began to collect annual data regarding transfer and international students, change in admission

factor importance over time is limited to first-time freshmen. Academic performance in college prep courses has been consistently rated as the top factor in admission decisions, with between 75 and 87 percent of colleges rating it as considerably important. In fact, ratings of many admission decision factors have remained remarkably stable. Notable exceptions include declining importance of class rank and interviews (see Table 10).

TABLE 9. PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACTORS IN ADMISSION DECISIONS: TRANSFER STUDENTS, FALL 2016

Factor	N	Considerable Importance	Moderate Importance	Limited Importance	No Importance
Overall GPA at Prior Postsecondary	198	80.8	10.1	6.6	2.5
Average Grades in Transferable Courses	198	75.3	16.2	5.1	3.5
High School Grade Point Average	201	14.4	25.4	44.3	15.9
Strength of High School Curriculum	200	10.5	24.0	37.5	28.0
Essay or Writing Sample	199	15.1	27.1	27.6	30.2
Articulation with Prior Postsecondary Institution	197	17.3	29.9	23.9	28.9
Grades in College Prep Courses in high school	197	14.7	27.4	37.1	20.8
Teacher Recommendation	194	8.2	35.6	30.9	25.3
Student's Demonstrated Interest	195	12.8	20.5	33.3	33.3
Quality of Postsecondary Institution	196	10.2	30.6	38.8	20.4
Counselor Recommendation	196	6.6	26.0	34.2	33.2
Admission Test Scores (SAT, ACT)	200	7.5	16.0	44.0	32.5
Extracurricular Activities	197	5.1	19.8	46.2	28.9
Portfolio	193	6.7	4.7	25.4	63.2
Interview	195	3.6	14.9	28.7	52.8
State Graduation Exam Scores	194	—	1.5	18.0	80.4
Work	196	2.6	13.8	49.5	34.2
High School Class rank	199	1.0	8.5	19.6	70.9
SAT II scores	195	—	3.1	15.9	81.0
Subject Test Scores (AP, IB)	199	2.5	15.6	27.1	54.8

—No institutions in category.

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2016.

TABLE 10. PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING “CONSIDERABLE IMPORTANCE” TO FACTORS IN ADMISSION DECISIONS: **FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN, FALL 2006 TO FALL 2016**

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Grades in College Prep Courses	76%	80%	75%	87%	83%	84%	82%	82%	79%	—	77%
Strength of Curriculum	62	64	62	71	66	68	65	64	60	—	52
Admission Test Scores	60	59	54	58	59	59	56	58	56	—	54
Grades in All Courses	51	52	52	46	46	52	50	52	60	—	77
Essay or Writing Sample	28	26	27	26	27	25	20	22	22	—	19
Class Rank	23	23	19	16	22	19	13	15	14	—	9
Counselor Recommendation	21	21	20	17	19	19	16	16	17	—	15
<b>Demonstrated Interest</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>17</b>	—	<b>14</b>
Teacher Recommendation	20	21	21	17	19	17	15	14	15	—	11
Interview	10	11	11	7	9	6	7	8	4	—	5
Extracurricular Activities	8	7	7	9	7	5	7	10	6	—	8
Work	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	3	1	—	3
Subject Test Scores (AP, IB)	8	7	8	7	10	7	5	8	7	—	7
State Graduation Exams	6	4	4	3	4	4	2	3	4	—	2
SAT II Scores	5	6	7	5	5	5	4	6	5	—	2
Portfolio	—	—	7	8	6	7	5	6	7	—	6

—Data are not available.

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Surveys, 2006 through 2016.

TABLE 11. PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF INFLUENCE TO STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS IN ADMISSION DECISIONS: FALL 2016

	N	Considerable Influence	Moderate Influence	Limited Influence	No Influence
<i>FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN</i>					
High School Attended	208	1.9	17.3	42.8	38.0
Race/Ethnicity	210	3.8	14.8	17.1	64.3
State or County of Residence	210	.5	10.0	27.1	62.4
First-generation Status	211	3.3	16.6	28.9	51.2
Ability to Pay	209	2.4	1.9	16.3	79.4
Gender	209	1.9	8.1	12.4	77.5
Alumni Relations	211	.5	8.5	38.9	52.1
<i>TRANSFER STUDENTS</i>					
High School Attended	196	—	4.6	34.2	61.2
Race/Ethnicity	197	3.6	11.2	17.8	67.5
State or County of Residence	197	.5	6.6	22.3	70.6
First-generation Status	196	3.6	11.2	24.5	60.7
Ability to Pay	197	2.5	2.5	13.2	81.7
Gender	197	2.0	6.6	8.1	83.2
Alumni Relations	197	.5	7.6	38.1	53.8
<i>INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS (FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN)</i>					
High School Attended	192	3.6	12.5	37.5	46.4
Race/Ethnicity	194	2.1	7.7	14.9	75.3
State or County of Residence	195	3.1	11.8	23.1	62.1
First-generation Status	193	3.1	10.9	20.7	65.3
Ability to Pay	194	21.1	18.6	9.8	50.5
Gender	193	2.1	6.7	8.3	82.9
Alumni Relations	194	.5	6.7	39.7	53.1

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2016.

In analyzing this data, however, it is important to focus on the long-term trends for each factor rather than any year-to-year changes, as such differences may be due to variations in the annual survey samples.

### Factors in Admission by Institutional Characteristics: First-Time Freshmen, 2016

This section highlights differences in the level of importance attributed to admission factors based on institutional characteristics. The results presented below are limited to admission factors for prospective first-time freshmen. Lack of variation for transfer and international admission factor ratings prohibited analysis for these groups.

The top four admission decision factors for first-time freshmen are consistent across all types of institutions. However, institutional characteristics determined the relative level of importance assigned to some admission factors.

- Private colleges placed relatively more importance on grades in college prep courses, strength of curriculum, and the essay/writing sample. Public schools gave slightly more weight to admission test scores.
- Smaller institutions attributed more importance to the essay/writing sample than their larger counterparts.
- Strength of curriculum and the essay/writing sample were valued more highly by institutions with lower acceptance rates.

(See Appendix Table B.4. for a correlation matrix of statistically significant associations.)

### Student Characteristics as Contextual Factors in Admission Decisions for First-Time Freshmen, Transfer, and International Students, 2016

Colleges were asked to rate the influence of certain student characteristics—race/ethnicity, first-generation status, high school attended, state or county of residence, gender, alumni relations, and ability to pay—in terms of how they affect evaluation of the main admission factors. Although, for the most part, college admission officers give very little importance to these characteristics, there are some findings worth noting (see Table 11). For example, 19 percent of colleges rated the high school attended as either moderately or considerably important in first-time freshmen admission decisions. In both freshmen and transfer admission decisions, a similar proportion of colleges attributed at least limited importance to alumni relations (48 percent and 46 percent, respectively).

Interesting differences also were found in the relative importance given to these factors based on institution type. Data provided on the 2016 NACAC Admission Trends Survey allowed for comparison by institutional characteristics for each prospective student group—first-time freshmen, transfer students, and international students.

### *Institutional Control*

- Private colleges gave more weight to high school attended, first-generation status, gender, and alumni relations when evaluating the applications of each student group.
- Private colleges gave greater consideration to race/ethnicity and ability to pay when evaluating first-time freshmen and transfer students.

### *Enrollment*

- For all three prospective student groups, smaller institutions gave more weight to ability to pay.

### *Selectivity*

- When evaluating applications from each student group, institutions that were more selective placed more emphasis on first-generation status and gender.
- For both first-time freshmen and transfer students, institutions with lower acceptance rates were more likely to consider race/ethnicity in evaluating applications. For first-time freshmen, institutions were more likely to consider high school attended.
- For international students, selective institutions gave more weight to alumni relations.

(See Appendix Tables B.5. – B.7. for complete correlation matrices of statistically significant associations.)

# 04

## CHAPTER 4 SCHOOL COUNSELING

### Introduction

Using data from NACAC's 2016 Counseling Trends Survey, this chapter explores the different facets of the school counseling profession as they relate to precollege advising, including student-to-counselor ratios, counseling department priorities, college counseling activities, and counselor professional development.

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>1</sup> School counselors play a key role in assisting students through the transition to postsecondary education. By collaborating with school administrators, teachers, community representatives, government officials, and parents, school counselors can be significant assets throughout the college application and admission process.

### Student-to-Counselor Ratios

According to the US Department of Education, in 2014–15 each public school counselor (including pre-kindergarten, elementary, and secondary counselors<sup>2</sup>) was responsible for overseeing 482 students, on average.<sup>3</sup> Counselors at public secondary schools had smaller caseloads than their primary school counterparts, serving an average of 437 students. As highlighted in Figure 3, these ratios have changed very little over the past 10 years.

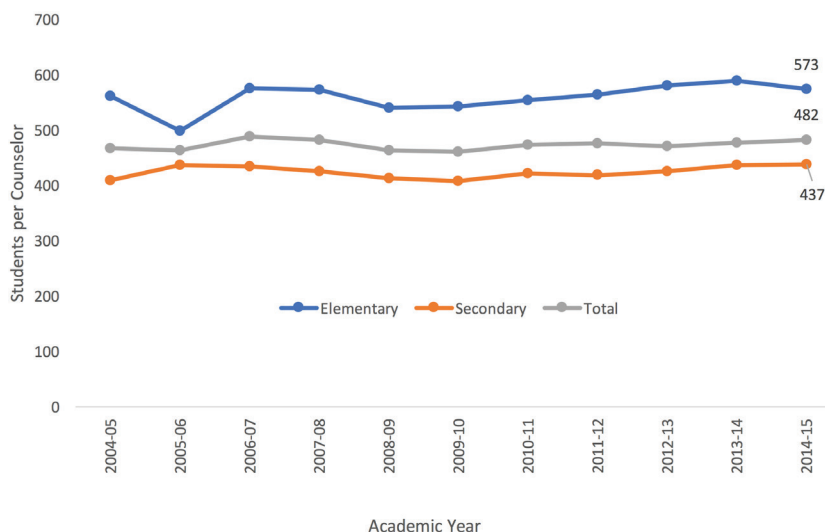
Results of NACAC's 2016 Counseling Trends Survey indicated the average student-to-counselor

<sup>1</sup> National Association for College Admission Counseling. (1990). *Statement on Precollege Guidance and the Role of the School Counselor*. Available at: <https://www.nacacnet.org/advocacy—ethics/statement-of-principles-of-good-practice>.

<sup>2</sup> For this analysis, elementary school is defined as grades K-5 and secondary as grades 6-12.

<sup>3</sup> US Department of Education. (2016). *Common Core of Data State Nonfiscal Survey Public Elementary/Secondary Education: School Year, 2014–15 Version 1a*. Washington, DC: NCES.

FIGURE 3. PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENT-TO-COUNSELOR RATIOS BY SCHOOL LEVEL: 2004–05 TO 2014–15



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

SOURCE: US Department of Education. *Common Core of Data State Nonfiscal Survey Public Elementary/Secondary Education: School Years 2004–05 thru 2014–15*. Washington, DC: NCES.

ratio for both public and private secondary schools combined, taking into account part-time staff, was 281-to-1. This number exceeds the 250-to-1 maximum ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association.<sup>4</sup> Data regarding the extent to which college advising is part of counselors' job responsibilities showed the average student-to-college counselor ratio was 314-to-1.<sup>5</sup>

Public institutions assigned substantially more students to

each counselor. There also were significant differences in the student-to-counselor and student-to-college counselor ratios by enrollment size. Overall, the largest schools had significantly higher ratios than institutions with fewer than 1,500 students (see Table 13).

Notably, while nearly half (49 percent) of private schools reported that they had at least one counselor (full- or part-time) whose sole responsibility was to provide college counseling for students, only 28

percent of public institutions had a dedicated college advisor. Schools with high student-to-counselor ratios were also less likely to have a dedicated college counselor.

US Department of Education data show that student-to-counselor ratios vary widely. In 2013–14, only three states—New Hampshire, Vermont, and Wyoming—had ratios below ASCA's 250:1 recommended threshold. The states with the highest number of students per counselor included Arizona (924), California (760), Michigan (729), Minnesota (723), and Illinois (664).

(A list of average public school student-to-counselor ratios for all 50 states plus the District of Columbia can be found in Appendix Table B.8.)

### Staff Time for College Counseling

Postsecondary admission counseling is one of many functions of school counselors. On average, the time that counselors in secondary schools spend on various tasks breaks down in the following way:

- Postsecondary admission counseling (21 percent)
- Choice and scheduling of high school courses (23 percent)
- Personal needs counseling (23 percent)
- Academic testing (14 percent)
- Occupational counseling and job placement (7 percent)

<sup>4</sup> American School Counselor Association. (2016). *The role of the school counselor*. Alexandria, VA: ASCA.

<sup>5</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. Both full-time and part-time counselors were included in this calculation.



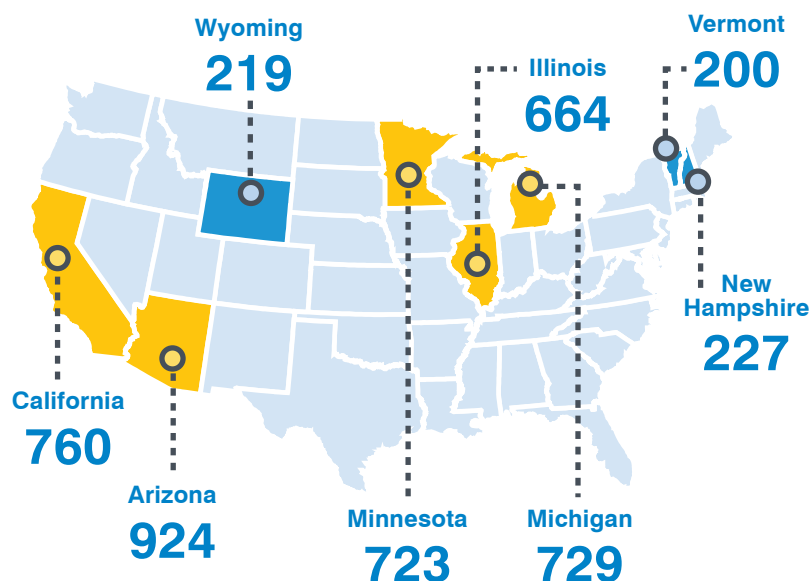
TABLE 12. AVERAGE STUDENT-TO-COUNSELOR AND STUDENT-TO-COLLEGE COUNSELOR RATIOS, BY SCHOOL TYPE AND ENROLLMENT, 2016

	Students per Counselor	Students per College Counselor
<b>Total</b>	<b>281</b>	<b>314</b>
<i>Type</i>		
Public	287	316
Private	235	296
<i>Enrollment</i>		
Fewer than 500 students	223	238
500 to 999	329	378
1,000 to 1,499	325	366
1,500 to 1,999	342	385
2,000 or more students	394	473
<i>Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL)</i>		
0 to 25% of students eligible	277	314
26 to 50%	291	319
51 to 75%	297	326
76 to 100%	258	284

NOTE: Independent *t*-tests and one-way ANOVAs showed there was a statistical difference between the number of students per counselor and: school type:  $t(2017)=4.3, p < .001$ ; Enrollment:  $F(4, 2019) = 54.0, p < .001$ ; and FRPL:  $F(3, 1637) = 3.8, p = .01$ . There also was a statistical difference between students per college counselor and Enrollment,  $F(4,1999) = 64.6, p < .001$ ; and FRPL:  $F(3, 1621) = 2.6, p < .05$ .

SOURCE: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2016

### STATES WITH HIGHEST AND LOWEST RATIOS



- Teaching (6 percent)
- Other non-guidance activities (6 percent)

However, the division of time among these task differs significantly based on school characteristics. For example, private school counselors spent substantially more time on college counseling when compared to their public school counterparts (31 percent versus 20 percent). Counselors at schools with more students eligible for free and reduced price lunch spent less time on postsecondary admission counseling.

(A more detailed breakdown of the time counselors spent on task by various school characteristics can be found in Appendix Table B.9.)

### Counselor Activities

As part of NACAC's 2016 Counseling Trends Survey, respondents were asked to indicate the counseling department's level of involvement in developing curricula that aligns with postsecondary requirements. Only one-quarter (25 percent) of counselors reported being an integral part of this process and 30 percent had some involvement. Counselors at private schools were more likely to report being integral to the curriculum development process (36 percent) in comparison to those at public schools (24 percent). Counselors who worked at smaller schools also were more likely to be an essential part of curriculum development (28 percent at schools with fewer than 500 students compared to only 16 percent at schools with 2,000 or more students)

Results of a recent NACAC report based on a longitudinal study of more than 23,000 high school students showed that high school seniors who talked one-on-one with a school counselor were:

- 6.8 times more likely to complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)
- 3.2 times more likely to attend college
- 2 times more likely to attend a bachelor's degree program<sup>6</sup>

Speaking with a counselor in ninth grade also was found to have a positive outcome on students' college-going behavior. Students who met with a counselor in ninth grade to discuss going to college had 22 percent higher odds of meeting with a counselor as a senior to specifically discuss financial aid.

NACAC's 2016 Counseling Trends Survey asked respondents to report the percentage of students who they met with individually at each grade level. As expected, the proportion of students who had these individual meetings with counselors increased at each grade level—29 percent in ninth grade, 36 percent in 10th grade, 62 percent in 11th grade, and 81 percent in the senior year of high school. The proportion of students benefiting from individual meetings varied predictably by the school type, but only during the junior and senior year. During 11th grade, 60 percent of students at public schools, on average, met individually with counselors, compared to 75 percent at private schools. During the senior year, the difference between public and private schools was smaller (80 percent versus 88 percent), but still significant.

## COUNSELING DEPARTMENT PRIORITIES



### Public Schools

**60 percent of students met individually with a counselor in 11th grade.**



### Private Schools

**75 percent of students met individually with a counselor in 11th grade.**

<sup>6</sup> Dunlop Velez, Erin. (2016). *How Can High School Counseling Shape Students' Postsecondary Attendance?* National Association for College Admission Counseling.

# APPENDIX A. METHODOLOGY

The 2017 *State of College Admission* report primarily uses data collected from two annual NACAC surveys: Counseling Trends Survey (CTS) and Admission Trends Survey (ATS).

## Counseling Trends Survey

The purpose of NACAC's annual Counseling Trends Survey (CTS) is to collect information from secondary school counselors and counseling departments about their priorities and work responsibilities, particularly as they relate to helping students

transition to college; and their practices in communicating with students, parents, and colleges.

In February 2017, NACAC distributed the 2016–17 academic year CTS to a school counseling office staff member at 11,139 secondary schools ending in 12th grade. NACAC preference for respondents at each school started with the school counseling department chair, followed by school counselor, college placement advisor, and college advisor. The list of counselors was

purchased from MCH Strategic Data. The survey was administered online using SurveyMonkey. Responses were collected through the beginning of March 2017.

NACAC received 2,266 responses to the survey. Table A.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 87 percent public and 13 percent private, making the sample over-representative

TABLE A.1. NACAC 2016 COUNSELING TRENDS SURVEY SAMPLE COMPARED TO THE NATIONAL SECONDARY SCHOOL POPULATION

	NACAC Respondents	All Schools	NACAC Public Respondents	All Public Schools	NACAC Private Respondents	All Private Schools
N (%)	2,266 <sup>1</sup>	52,669	1,971 (87.0%)	40,000 (75.9%)	289 (13.0%)	12,669 (24.1%)
<i>Total Enrollment</i>						
Mean Enrollment	743	542	785	645	459	214
<i>Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Eligibility<sup>2</sup></i>						
Percentage of Students Eligible	53.5%	—	54.0%	45.1%	40.5%	—

—Not available for private schools.

<sup>1</sup> Survey respondents were asked to indicate participation in both federal and state-sponsored programs; national data is available are from 2015–16 for the federal program only.

<sup>2</sup> The number of public and private NACAC respondents does not add to the total because six high schools did not report school type.

SOURCES: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2016.

US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2017). *Characteristics of Public Elementary and Secondary Schools in the United States: Results From the 2015–16 National Teacher and Principal Survey First Look*.

US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2017). *Characteristics of Private Schools in the United States: Results From the 2015–16 Private School Universe Survey First Look*.

of public schools. NACAC respondents from public schools had a larger proportion of students eligible for free-or-reduced-price lunch in comparison to all public secondary schools. NACAC survey respondents reported larger enrollments compared to all secondary schools, particularly for privates.

### Admission Trends Survey

NACAC conducts its annual Admission Trends Survey (ATS) to better understand admission processes at US colleges and universities. NACAC collects data related to application volume; application practices; 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 staffing. Since 2014, NACAC has expanded ATS to incorporate questions related to the admission process for prospective transfer and international students.

### 2016 ATS

For the 2016–17 academic year administration of the Admission Trends Survey, the questionnaire was divided into two parts—one set of questions was sent to university admission offices and another set to institutional research (IR) offices. Both

portions were administered online using SurveyMonkey. The IR survey was e-mailed in March 2017 to 1,110 four-year postsecondary institutions. In September 2017, the admission office survey was sent to all 1,383 four-year postsecondary institutions that were NACAC members. At the time of the survey, NACAC member institutions represented 80 percent of all degree-granting four-year, not-for-profit, baccalaureate degree-granting, Title-IV participating institutions in the US. NACAC received 604 responses, for an overall response rate of 44 percent. Of the 604 responses, 127 institutions submitted completed surveys (both admission and IR sections); 202 submitted only the admission office portion of the survey; and 275 institutions submitted only the IR office portion. All responses—including those from universities that only answered one half of the survey—were utilized in the analyses.

As shown in Table A.2, NACAC 2016 ATS respondents were relatively representative of all colleges. NACAC respondents had lower yield rates, particularly among private colleges, when compared to the national average. Public NACAC survey respondents were more selective than all public colleges.

### Statistical Method

After the data were cleaned, descriptive and inferential statistics were generated using IBM SPSS Statistics 24. Descriptive statistics—including measures of central tendency and dispersion, such as the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation—provide summary information about the data and highlight patterns. While these figures point out observed differences between sample subgroups, they do not indicate whether these differences occurred merely by chance.

For example, descriptive statistics from the 2016 Counseling Trends Survey showed that, on average, public high schools had a higher student-to-counselor ratio (287:1) than their private school counterparts (235:1). However, to determine whether this gap in the student-to-counselor ratio occurred by mere chance due to the makeup of the sample or reflects an actual statistical difference, inferential statistical tests such as the t-test (when comparing two independent groups) and the one-way ANOVA (when comparing three or more independent groups) were utilized. In the case of the student-to-counselor ratio, an independent t-test confirmed there was a significant statistical difference by school type, with public schools having higher ratios than private schools.

TABLE A.2. NACAC 2016 ADMISSION TRENDS SURVEY SAMPLE COMPARED TO NATIONAL COLLEGE POPULATION

	NACAC Respondents	All Colleges	NACAC Public Respondents	All Public Colleges	NACAC Private Respondents	All Private Colleges
<b>N (%)</b>	<b>604</b>	<b>1736</b>	<b>111 (34%)</b>	<b>558 (32%)</b>	<b>218 (66%)</b>	<b>1,170 (68%)</b>
<i>Total Full-Time Undergraduate Enrollment</i>						
Mean Enrollment	6,049	4,106	11,335	8,825	3,067	1,855
<i>Selectivity and Yield (Percents)</i>						
Mean Selectivity	67.3	66.1	76.2	69.5	62.4	64.4
Mean Yield	24.8	35.1	29.1	35.8	22.3	34.8

*NOTE: Data for all colleges was drawn from the 2014-15 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) using the following criteria: US location, four-year, not-for-profit, baccalaureate degree-granting, and Title IV-participating. Of the 1,736 total institutions, approximately 1,555 (90 percent) provided both selectivity and yield data for Fall 2014.*

*SOURCES: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2016.*

*US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2014-15). Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Data Center. Washington, DC: NCES.*

## APPENDIX B. TABLES

TABLE B.1. PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE TO VARIOUS RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES: FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN, FALL 2016

Factor	N	Considerable Importance	Moderate Importance	Limited Importance	No Importance
Website	185	87.6%	9.7%	2.5%	0.5%
Email	187	79.7	18.7	1.6	0.0
Hosted Campus Visit	185	76.2	18.9	3.8	1.1
High School Counselor	185	57.3	38.4	4.3	0.0
High School Visit (in the US)	184	54.9	37.5	7.6	0.0
Direct Mail	188	50.5	31.9	16.0	1.6
College Fairs	187	41.7	41.7	15.5	1.1
Social Media	185	40.0	41.6	18.4	0.0
Community Based Organizations	183	20.2	37.2	38.8	3.8
Test-Optional Policy	170	15.3	7.6	5.9	71.2
Alumni	182	12.1	31.2	47.3	9.0
Articulation Agreements with Community Colleges	163	10.4	7.4	17.8	64.4
Community College Outreach/Partnerships	164	8.5	9.8	20.7	61.0
High School Visit (Outside the US)	166	0.6	7.8	17.5	68.7
Conditional/Provisional Admission Program	178	3.9	21.3	30.9	43.8

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2016.

TABLE B.2. PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE TO VARIOUS RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES: TRANSFER STUDENTS, FALL 2016

Factor	N	Considerable Importance	Moderate Importance	Limited Importance	No Importance
Website	178	86.0	10.7	2.8	0.6
Email	179	72.1	19.6	6.7	1.7
Community College Outreach/Partnership	178	61.8	24.7	9.0	4.5
Articulation Agreements with Community Colleges	176	57.4	23.9	9.7	9.1
Hosted Campus Visit	178	55.6	23.6	14.0	6.7
Social Media	177	32.2	36.7	28.2	2.8
Direct Mail	180	25.0	27.2	37.2	10.6
College Fairs	178	19.7	37.6	33.7	9.0
High School Counselor	169	15.4	13.6	32.0	39.1
High School Visit (in the US)	163	9.8	10.4	16.6	63.2
Test-Optional Policy	163	9.8	4.3	8.6	77.3
Alumni	174	9.2	19.0	56.9	14.9
Community Based Organizations	175	3.4	22.9	47.4	26.3
Conditional/Provisional Admission Program	169	2.4	14.2	23.7	59.8
High School Visit (Outside the US)	158	0.6	4.4	7.6	87.3

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2016.

TABLE B.3. PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE TO VARIOUS RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES: INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS (FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN), FALL 2016

Factor	N	Considerable Importance	Moderate Importance	Limited Importance	No Importance
Website	176	88.1	8.5	2.8	0.6
Email	177	78.5	16.9	4.0	0.6
High School Counselor	169	36.1	24.9	24.9	14.2
Social Media	174	35.6	36.2	25.9	2.3
Hosted Campus Visit	171	30.4	13.5	32.7	23.4
High School Visit (outside the US)	175	19.4	25.1	28.0	27.4
Partnerships with International Colleges/ Universities	183	16.4	27.9	27.9	27.9
College Fairs	174	15.5	28.2	38.5	17.8
Pathways Programs	178				
International Student Recruitment Agents	183	12.6	26.8	19.7	41.0
Test-Optional Policy	161	11.8	1.9	8.1	78.3
Federal Government Support	180	11.7	22.2	27.8	38.3
Articulation Agreements with Community Colleges	155	11.6	7.7	18.7	61.9
Foreign Government Support	180	11.1	27.8	25.6	35.6
Alumni	171	11.1	25.1	50.9	12.9
Conditional/Provisional Admission Program	165	10.3	17.6	28.5	43.6
High School Visit (in the US)	164	9.8	14.0	31.1	45.1
Community College Outreach/Partnerships	158	5.7	12.7	23.4	58.2
State or Regional Recruitment Consortium	177	4.5	25.4	30.5	39.5
Community Based Organizations	165	4.2	14.5	37.6	43.6
Direct Mail	176	2.8	11.4	46.0	39.8

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2016.



TABLE B.4. CORRELATION MATRIX BETWEEN PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE TO SELECT ADMISSION DECISION FACTORS AND INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS: FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN, FALL 2016

	High School Grades (College Prep Courses)	Strength of Curriculum	Admission Test Scores	Essay/ Writing Sample
Private Institution	.17*	.14*	-.16*	.33**
Enrollment	-.07	.06	.13	-.22*
Selectivity	-.20	-.41**	-.15	-.21*
Yield	-.17	-.04	.33**	-.15

NOTES: N=209. Spearman's Rho correlation coefficients were calculated. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2016

TABLE B.5. CORRELATION COEFFICIENT MATRIX BETWEEN INFLUENCE OF STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS IN ADMISSION DECISIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS: FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN, FALL 2016

	High School Attended	Race/ Ethnicity	State or County of Residence	First- Generation	Ability to Pay	Gender	Alumni Relations
Private	.25**	.21**	-.02	.14*	.34**	.18*	.36**
Enrollment	-.01	.04	.20	.08	-.21*	.04	-.18
Selectivity	-.27*	-.34**	-.37**	-.42**	-.14	-.38**	-.16
Yield	-.15	.18	.05	.20	-.17	.17	-.14

NOTE: Spearman's Rho correlation coefficients were calculated. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Counselor Survey, 2016

TABLE B.6. CORRELATION COEFFICIENT MATRIX BETWEEN INFLUENCE OF STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS IN ADMISSION DECISIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS: TRANSFER STUDENTS, FALL 2016

	High School Attended	Race/Ethnicity	State or County of Residence	First-Generation	Ability to Pay	Gender	Alumni Relations
Private	.26**	.20**	-.02	.17*	.31*	.15*	.37**
Enrollment	-.11	.10	.22*	.07	-.30*	.06	-.17
Selectivity	-.17	-.33***	-.27*	-.36**	-.04	-.28*	-.20
Yield	-.08	.20	.13	.18	-.16	.16	-.01

NOTE: Spearman's Rho correlation coefficients were calculated. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Counselor Survey, 2016

TABLE B.7. CORRELATION COEFFICIENT MATRIX BETWEEN INFLUENCE OF STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS IN ADMISSION DECISIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS: INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS (FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN), FALL 2016

	High School Attended	Race/Ethnicity	State or County of Residence	First-Generation	Ability to Pay	Gender	Alumni Relations
Private	.30**	.10	.15*	-.14*	.13	.14*	.35**
Enrollment	-.03	.10	.17	.04	-.22*	.08	-.10
Selectivity	-.18	-.19	-.31**	-.29**	-.07	-.35**	-.23*
Yield	-.21	.16	.16	.27*	.10	.22*	-.07

NOTE: Spearman's Rho correlation coefficients were calculated. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Counselor Survey, 2016

TABLE B.8. PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-TO-COUNSELOR RATIOS, BY STATE: 2014–2015

State	Total Enrollment	Counselors	Students per Counselor
Alabama	221,068	647	453
Alaska	38,431	190	441
Arizona	331,552	789	924
Arkansas	141,653	731	373
California	1,949,755	4,366	760
Colorado	254,643	1,567	383
Connecticut	167,790	721	466
Delaware	39,346	200	429
District of Columbia	17,634	130	361
Florida	823,249	3,230	485
Georgia	501,605	2,108	484
Hawaii	50,925	372	293
Idaho	85,232	284	610
Illinois	621,275	2,053	664
Indiana	316,465	1,396	543
Iowa	145,862	424	418
Kansas	140,324	707	473
Kentucky	196,733	677	453
Louisiana	194,791	480	468
Maine	56,361	262	315
Maryland	254,072	1,215	369
Massachusetts	288,934	1,351	423
Michigan	484,956	1,558	729
Minnesota	263,074	1,016	723
Mississippi	134,857	603	438
Missouri	268,921	576	347
Montana	41,816	161	319
Nebraska	89,964	408	387
Nevada	134,640	571	517
New Hampshire	58,807	348	227
New Jersey	401,874	1,895	370
New Mexico	99,260	447	451
New York	827,493	3,802	635
North Carolina	454,963	2,427	378

*Continues.*

TABLE B.8. PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT-TO-COUNSELOR RATIOS, BY STATE:  
2014–2015 (continued)

State	Total Enrollment	Counselors	Students per Counselor
North Dakota	30,421	134	307
Ohio	519,938	2,255	453
Oklahoma	184,170	958	427
Oregon	179,757	427	571
Pennsylvania	549,398	2,692	395
Rhode Island	42,892	270	423
South Carolina	216,723	798	369
South Dakota	37,301	119	402
Tennessee	288,408	1,012	339
Texas	1,450,441	6,928	449
Utah	178,910	767	684
Vermont	26,338	254	200
Virginia	382,598	1,929	370
Washington	333,318	1,449	482
West Virginia	80,543	486	373
Wisconsin	264,550	1,177	467
Wyoming	26,732	270	219

SOURCE: US Department of Education. (2016). *Common Core of Data State Nonfiscal Survey Public Elementary/Secondary Education Survey: School Year, 2014–15 Version 1a*. Washington, DC: NCES.

TABLE B.9. PERCENTAGE OF TIME COUNSELING STAFF SPENT ON VARIOUS TASKS, BY SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS: 2016

	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>All Schools</b>	<b>21.3%</b>	<b>22.7%</b>	<b>23.3%</b>	<b>13.9%</b>	<b>7.2%</b>	<b>6.0%</b>	<b>5.6%</b>
<i>Type</i>							
Public	19.8	23.8	23.7	14.1	7.6	5.5	5.5
Private	31.0	15.6	20.4	12.8	5.0	8.8	6.5
<i>Private non-parochial</i>	32.2	13.3	22.9	12.2	4.8	9.3	5.3
<i>Private parochial</i>	30.1	17.3	28.5	13.2	5.1	8.4	7.4
<i>Enrollment</i>							
Fewer than 500 students	21.2	19.9	22.2	15.0	7.7	7.9	6.3
500 to 999	22.2	23.4	24.3	14.6	2.9	4.2	5.4
1,000 to 1,499	21.6	25.6	24.6	12.3	7.0	4.2	4.8
1,500 to 1,999	19.3	28.9	26.6	9.8	6.5	3.4	5.4
2,000 or more	19.5	34.9	22.4	9.6	6.3	4.0	3.4
<i>Free and Reduced-Price Lunch</i>							
0 to 25% of students eligible	23.9	24.2	25.1	11.8	6.4	5.3	3.4
26 to 50%	20.6	23.1	23.6	13.4	7.4	6.2	5.8
51 to 75%	18.4	23.2	23.2	15.6	8.0	5.6	6.0
76 to 100%	17.4	25.4	23.5	15.3	7.5	4.5	6.3
<i>Students per Counselor</i>							
100 or fewer	20.5	21.4	23.4	12.7	7.7	8.3	6.3
101 to 200	22.8	20.3	23.1	13.3	7.7	7.2	5.6
201 to 300	21.9	23.4	23.9	13.2	7.2	5.4	5.0
301 to 400	19.4	24.7	23.7	14.8	6.8	4.7	5.9
401 to 500	20.5	24.0	22.7	15.3	6.5	5.1	5.8
More than 500	21.8	23.6	20.0	15.7	7.2	5.2	6.4

SOURCE: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2016.

Note: Independent *t*-tests and one-way ANOVAs showed there was a statistical difference between the percentage of time devoted to postsecondary admission counseling and: Control  $t(1868) = -13.3, p < .001$ ; FRPL:  $F(3, 1543) = 19.2, p < .001$ ; and Students per counselor:  $F(5, 1818) = 3.3, p < .01$ .

# APPENDIX C. EARLY DECISION AND EARLY ACTION DEFINED

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 information outlines agreed-upon definitions and conditions, included in NACAC's *Statement of Principles of Good Practice: NACAC's Code of Ethics and Professional Practices*.<sup>1</sup>

## Standard application plans

**Regular Decision:** Students submit their applications by a specified deadline and are notified of a decision within a clearly stated period of time.

**Rolling Admission:** Students apply at any time after a college begins accepting applications until a final closing date, which may be as late as the start of the term for which they are applying. Students are notified of a decision as their applications are completed and are reviewed.

## Early application plan

**Early Action (EA):** Students apply by an earlier deadline to receive a decision in advance of the college's Regular Decision notification date. Students will not be asked to accept the college's offer of admission or to submit a deposit prior to May 1.

## Restrictive early application plans

**Early Decision (ED):** Students commit to a first-choice college and, if admitted, agree to enroll and withdraw their other college applications. Colleges may offer ED I or II with different deadlines. This is the only application plan where students are required to accept a college's offer of admission and submit a deposit prior to May 1.

**Restrictive/Single Choice Early Action (REA):** Students apply to a college of preference and receive a decision in advance of its Regular Decision notification date. Colleges place certain restrictions on applying under other early application plans. Students admitted under Restrictive Early Action are not obligated to accept the college's offer of admission or to submit a deposit prior to May 1.

<sup>1</sup> NACAC's *Statement of Principles of Good Practice: NACAC's Code of Ethics and Professional Practices* is available online at: [www.nacacnet.org/SPGP](http://www.nacacnet.org/SPGP).



# NACAC

National Association for  
College Admission Counseling

