



*Advancing Higher Education
Through Insight and Innovation*

Senior Admissions and Enrollment Officers: Experiences and Attitudes

Report prepared for
The Chronicle of Higher Education

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NOTE: This report is a working document that was used by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* staff to prepare their report that appeared in the Admissions Supplement to the May 2, 2008 issue. For this reason, the data appear in tabular rather than graphical form throughout this report.

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PROJECT OVERVIEW AND METHOD

Introduction

This study of senior level enrollment/admissions officials is the fourth in a series of surveys that Maguire Associates has conducted on behalf of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Previous studies have focused on college and university presidents, high school teachers and college/university faculty members (focusing on students' readiness for college), and board members of colleges and universities.

In a period of change and challenges in higher education we have surveyed senior level admissions officers at colleges and universities that have baccalaureate degree programs. Media attention to college admissions (and, increasingly, to financial aid policies) puts an enormous amount of pressure on admissions officers. At the same time, there is widespread public misunderstanding about how the admissions process actually works. We are interested in who is playing these key roles in colleges/universities and what their experiences and views are.

Method

Maguire Associates staff, in conjunction with *Chronicle* editorial staff members, designed the survey to be conducted entirely online. The survey included questions on the following topics: respondent and institutional characteristics; how admissions officials spend their time, job satisfaction, admissions and enrollment management practices and policies; and views concerning industry trends.

Our goal in recruiting survey respondents was to reach essentially the same (originally 1,338) nonprofit institutions that award baccalaureate degrees (with or without graduate level programs) that were the focus of the presidents' study. Over time there have been some shifts in institutional classification that occurred with the 2005 publication of the new Carnegie classifications. Once we had a list of target institutions we approached Higher Education Publications, Inc. (HEP) and purchased contact information for everyone in their database who was classified under the title of "Director of Admissions" or "Dean/Director of Enrollment Management" for our target institutions. We went over the lists to remove those who didn't belong in the sampling framework of this study (e.g., directors of graduate admissions or law school admissions). Where the HEP list did not have an email address, we looked up or imputed (from apparent email conventions) as many as we could. The few people for whom we could find no email address were removed from our population.

The first recruiting email came from the Editor of the *Chronicle* and the reminder email came from Maguire Associates. After the first email we researched all the "bounce-backs" and were able to correct many of them. The invitation was re-sent, either to a

corrected email address or to the new incumbent of the position. In the end, we believe that the email invitations and the reminders reached 2,081 individuals representing 1,371 institutions.

As a supplement to this report, we are providing copies (electronically) of the analyses on which our conclusions are based. In the report of our findings below, either the table number from the statistical output (for group comparisons) or the question number from the Annotated Survey Instrument (for descriptive statistics on top-line findings) is shown in parentheses for ease of reference.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Overall Number of Respondents

A total of 461 admissions officers responded to the survey. The overall response rate for those who received the study invitation was 22%, a quite respectable figure for a survey of this kind¹.

Professional Title

Table 1 shows the distribution of various professional titles among the respondents (S1); however, two titles, Vice President of Enrollment and Director of Admission(s), together accounted for over 55% of the sample.

Admissions officers occupy differing rungs of the academic staff ladder. Combining across job content descriptors, we find approximately 26% with “Vice President,” about 35% with “Director,” and about 12% with “Dean” in their title.

Table 1: Professional Title of Respondents

Title	Percent
Vice President of Admission(s)	0.9%
Vice President of Enrollment (Management/Services)	24.9%
Dean of Admission(s)	6.5%
Dean of Enrollment (Management/Services)	5.2%
Director of Admission(s)	31.5%
Director of Enrollment (Management/Services)	3.7%
Not Reported	0.4%
Other senior level enrollment management/admissions position (including Associate VP for EM, Assistant VP for Enrollment, Dean of Admission & Financial Aid, etc.)	26.9%

- In a comparison across institutional affiliation, we found that private, non-religious institutions were considerably more likely to have a “Dean” and less likely to have a “Director,” while public institutions were more likely than others to have unique titles that didn’t fit into the other categories (Table 3.31d).

¹ This response rate is nearly the same as among college admissions personnel in the most recently reported NACAC survey, “State of College Admission 2006.”

Length of Time Worked in Admissions

Given that our respondents were senior level admissions officers, it is not surprising to find that most of them had worked in the field for a long time (Q1d). Over 70% have been working in admissions for 10 years or more.

Table 2: Length of Time Worked in Admissions

Time Period	Percent
Less than 1 year	2.0%
1 year	1.7%
2 years	2.2%
3 years	2.2%
4 years	3.0%
5 years	3.3%
6 years	3.0%
7 years	3.5%
8 years	3.3%
9 years	2.8%
10 -14 years	18.0%
15 – 19 years	18.0%
20-24 years	15.2%
25 – 29 years	11.3%
30 or more years	10.0%
<i>Not Reported</i>	0.7%

We reclassified the length of time worked in admissions into three categories (10 years or less, 11-20 years, and 21 or more years) and examined its relationship to other variables.

- Several findings in this area were to be expected. In general, those who have been in the profession longer have been in their position longer, are older, and have higher salaries (all from Table 3.31b). Among those with 21 or more years of experience there is a higher percentage of Vice Presidents of Enrollment Management/Services than among the less experienced (Table 3.1b).
- Those who have worked between 11 and 20 years in admissions are more likely to be involved in obtaining or analyzing recruitment assessment data and in strategic planning than the least experienced group is (Table 3.8b). However, the middle group in terms of experience is also more likely to be involved in supervising, managing, or training staff than the most experienced group is

- (Table 3.8b). In addition, they reported more use of marketing/market research consultants than the most experienced respondents did (Table 3.16b).
- Less experienced (1-10 years) staff are more likely to be working in institutions with smaller undergraduate admissions budgets (Table 3.9b).
 - The most experienced admissions officers were more likely to use alumni/ae in recruitment efforts than either of the other two less experienced groups (Table 3.12b).
 - The least experienced group reports a higher percentage of annual staff turnover (17.9%) than the most experienced group (13.3%) (Table 3.19b).
 - The most experienced admissions officers, perhaps because of their visibility, report being somewhat more likely to experience pressure to admit students due to alumni/donor preference and for political reasons or connections (Table 3.21b).
 - Perhaps because they have observed the scene for a longer period of time, the most experienced group is more likely than the least experienced group to feel that prospective student stress and anxiety about the admissions process has increased (Table 3.24b).
 - The reported average SAT (in Math and Critical Reading) and Composite ACT scores are higher in the schools where the most experienced group works, in comparison to the scores at the institutions represented by the least experienced group (Table 3.29b). The most experienced group also reports a higher overall cost of attendance for their school than either of the less experienced groups (Table 3.30b).

Length of Service in Current Position

By contrast to respondents' years of admission work experience, it is striking that over one-third of the respondents had been serving in their position for two or fewer years (Q1c) (see Table 3 on the next page). Evidently there is considerable turnover, even in these relatively high level positions.

Table 3: Length of Time Serving in Current Position

Time Period	Percent
Less than 1 year	8.9%
1 year	8.7%
2 years	18.9%
3 years	11.5%
4 years	9.1%
5 years	7.6%
6 years	6.5%
7 years	4.8%
8 years	5.9%
9 years	2.2%
10 -14 years	9.5%
15 – 19 years	3.7%
20-24 years	0.9%
25 – 29 years	0.9%
30 or more years	0.9%
<i>Not Reported</i>	0.2%

Annual Salary

Respondents in the survey serve in a wide range of sizes and types of institution and have a range of position titles. While about one-third of them earn between \$60,000 and 90,000, over 10% earn less and the rest earn more, including almost 12% who earn \$150,000 or more (Q1f) (Table 4, next page).

Table 4: Annual Salary in Current Position

Annual Salary	Percent
Less than \$40,000	1.5%
\$40,000 - \$49,999	4.8%
\$50,000 - \$59,999	6.1%
\$60,000 - \$69,999	12.1%
\$70,000 - \$79,999	10.6%
\$80,000 - \$89,999	10.6%
\$90,000 - \$99,999	9.8%
\$100,000 - \$109,999	8.0%
\$110,000 - \$119,999	6.5%
\$120,000 - \$129,999	6.5%
\$130,000 - \$139,999	6.1%
\$140,000 - \$149,999	3.9%
\$150,000 or more	11.5%
<i>Not Reported</i>	2.0%

- We reclassified salary into three categories (below \$70,000, \$70,000 to \$99,999, and \$100,000 or more) and examined its relationship to institutional affiliation. At private religiously-affiliated institutions 37% earn below \$70,000 – much higher than the equivalent percentage for public institutions (16.4%) or non-religiously affiliated private institutions (12.7%). The differences at the \$100,000 or more end of the pay scale are equally substantial (Table 3.31d).

Gender

Sixty-one percent of the respondents were male (Q5a). This percentage is nearly the same as it was among governing board members (63%) and less than that among college presidents (81%), as reported in our earlier surveys.

- Women are slightly less likely than men to occupy a “Vice President” or “Dean” level position and slightly more likely to be a “Director” or to have a different position title (Table 3.31g).
- Women report working somewhat longer hours than men do (Table 3.31g); 81% of women report working 50 hours a week or more, while 70% of men report working that much.
- There is no difference in reported satisfaction level between women and men (Table 3.4g).

- Women report higher usage of faculty and of current students in recruitment activities than men do (Table 3.12g).
- Though most admissions officers do not make much use of enrollment/admissions consultants, women (2.83 on five-point scale) are slightly more likely to do so than men (2.62) (Table 3.16g).
- Finally, women perceive that prospective student stress and anxiety have increased more than men do (Table 3.24g). This difference may occur because, by virtue of their job titles, women may be somewhat closer to the direct admissions process than men are.

Racial/Ethnic Group

The three groups of institutional leaders whom we have surveyed are similar to each other in being overwhelmingly White (Q5c). The second largest group is African American/Black, at approximately 5-6% for each group.

Table 5: Ethnic Composition of Chronicle Survey Respondents: Admissions/EM Officers, Governing Board Members, and Institution Presidents

Ethnicity	Admissions/EM Officers	Board Members	Presidents
White	88.9%	89.5%	88.6%
Black/African-American	5.2%	5.5%	6.0%
<i>Prefer not to answer</i>	1.5%	1.4%	2.6%
Hispanic/Latino	2.2%	1.2%	1.3%
Asian	0.9%	1.0%	0.7%
Multi-racial	0.4%	0.5%	0.4%
Other	0.7%		
Native American	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%
<i>Not reported</i>	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%

Age

Admissions and EM officers are a generally younger group than board members and presidents (Q5b) (Table 6, next page). They are concentrated in the 40-59 age range, while presidents are concentrated most heavily in the 50-65 age range. Board members also have a substantial proportion of respondents who are over the age of 65.

Table 6: Age of Survey Respondents: Admissions /EM Officers, Governing Board Members, and Institution Presidents

Age Range	Admissions/EM Officers	Board Members	Presidents
Under 40	25.8%	4.4%	0.1%
40 – 49	29.7%	11.4%	6.3%
50 – 59	35.6%	34.2%	42.1%
60 – 65	7.6%	21.7%	36.8%
Over 65	0.9%	27.9%	13.4%
<i>Not Reported</i>	0.4%	0.3%	1.3%

Alumni/ae Status

We found it striking that fully 28% of our respondents were graduates of the school at which they were working (Q5d).

- We found that, when we combined job titles to reflect status (grouping “Vice President” and “Dean” and “Director” together) alumni were more likely than non-alumni to occupy a “Director” position (52.7% versus 35.6%) (Table 3.31h). They were also less likely to be earning a salary of \$100,000 or more (30.1% versus 48.1% of non-alumni) (Table 3.31h).
- Alumni were less likely to be very recent hires (in their position for less than one year). Among alumni, 2.3% were brand new on the job, while 11.6% of non-alumni were (Table 3.6h).
- Alumni were also somewhat more likely to be responsible only for undergraduate admissions (Table 3.2h) and to report less involvement in strategic planning (rating 4.48 on a six-point scale) than non-alumni (4.81) (Table 3.8h).

It seems from these data that alumni occupy somewhat lower status positions (“Director” versus “Dean” or “Vice President”) and, probably because of this difference, are less likely to earn top salaries or be quite as involved in strategic planning. Perhaps alumni, when they do achieve top level jobs, do so by leaving their *alma mater* for a new position.

HOW DO SENIOR LEVEL ADMISSIONS/ENROLLMENT OFFICERS SPEND THEIR TIME?

Areas of Responsibility

We found that nearly two-thirds of our respondents (62.5%) focused entirely on undergraduate admissions/enrollment at their institution (S4), while the others were responsible for one or more other areas as shown in Table 7. Respondents are somewhat less likely to have Continuing Education duties on top of their work in undergraduate admissions than is the case for Graduate or Professional education (S6). In a subsequent analysis, we found a total of 20 people (4.3% of the whole sample) who reported having duties in all three areas shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Importance of Sources of Information to Board Members

Area of Admissions/Enrollment Responsibility	Percent with Responsibility
Graduate (N = 378)	33.3%
Professional (N = 232)	30.6%
Continuing Education (N = 303)	22.8%

Hours Worked

Admissions/Enrollment officers report typically working long hours; almost three-quarters of them work more than 50 hours a week or more (Q1e).

Table 8: Hours Worked in a Week

Hours Worked per Week	Percent
Fewer than 20 hours	0.0%
20 – 29 hours	0.0%
30 – 39 hours	0.7%
40 – 49 hours	24.7%
50 – 59 hours	45.8%
60 – 69 hours	22.3%
70 – 79 hours	5.0%
80 hours or more	1.3%
<i>Not Reported</i>	0.2%

- Admissions/enrollment officials who work at institutions with a budget of \$1M or more report working more hours; 34.2% work 60 hours a week or more, versus 24.0% of those in institutions with smaller budgets (Table 3.6c).

Work Time Devoted to Various Activities

The data shown in Table 9 indicate that communication with other campus offices is the most highly rated activity for the amount of time spent, followed closely by supervising, managing or training staff and strategic planning (Q1g). Lower-rated activities such as communicating with prospective students or parents are more likely the regular duties of line Admissions Office staff than more senior level officials. There is a great degree of variability in people’s responses to “reviewing student applications,” based on their job title.²

Table 9: Ratings of Time Spent on Various Activities

Area or Activity	Average Rating
Communicating with other campus offices (e.g., financial aid, advancement, President)	4.94
Supervising, managing, and/or training staff	4.85
Strategic planning	4.72
Analyzing recruitment assessment data	4.55
Developing marketing materials	4.19
Obtaining recruitment assessment data	4.13
Reviewing admissions policies	3.97
Budget development and tracking	3.90
On-campus recruitment efforts	3.81
Doing work for the school that is not directly related to admissions	3.65
Communicating with prospective students	3.48
Communicating with parents of prospective students	3.39
Reviewing student applications	3.30
Off-campus recruitment efforts (including time spent traveling)	3.05

Scale: 1 = None; 2 = Very Low Amount; 3 = Low Amount; 4 = Moderate Amount; 5 = High Amount; 6 = Very High Amount

² In a supplementary analysis we found that VPs of Enrollment rated this activity at 2.65, while VPs of Admissions gave an average rating of 3.50 and Deans of Admissions gave the highest rating of any group, 4.33.

JOB SATISFACTION

Overall Level of Satisfaction

As Table 10 below indicates, admissions officers are on average “mostly satisfied” with their current position (Q1a)³. The average rating was 4.0.

Table 10: Satisfaction with Current Position

Not at All Satisfied 1	Slightly Satisfied 2	Moderately Satisfied 3	Mostly Satisfied 4	Extremely Satisfied 5
0.7%	3.5%	16.3%	54.9%	24.7%

Factors Associated with Respondents' Satisfaction

We examined the data to see what differentiated those who were relatively lower in satisfaction (scale points 1-3) from the “mostly satisfied” (scale point 4) and the “extremely satisfied” (scale point 5).

- “Extremely satisfied” respondents report spending more time on “strategic planning” than the lower satisfaction group does (Table 3.8a).
- Almost 58% of the “extremely satisfied” group report having a plan in place for dealing with upcoming student demographic changes (versus 41.5% for the middle group and 37.2% of the less satisfied group) (Table 3.13a).
- Among those who have a plan, the “extremely satisfied” group gives a higher rating for the strength of the plan than the other two groups do (Table 3.14a).
- The “extremely satisfied” group expresses higher satisfaction with the level of Information Technology support that they receive than the other groups do (Table 3.18a).
- In a subsequent analysis, we found a statistically significant, positive correlation between satisfaction level and two variables related to resources: the respondent’s annual salary and the undergraduate admissions office budget⁴.
- There is modest evidence that the most highly satisfied admissions officers worked at institutions that had somewhat higher profile students. The mean reported Composite ACT score (23.99) for the “extremely satisfied” group was higher than that for the lower satisfaction group (22.82). There were slight, but

³Presidents and Board members were asked a similar but not identical “job satisfaction” question, also using a five-point scale. The average ratings were 4.34 for presidents and 4.32 for board members.

⁴ $r = .146, p = .002$ for salary; $r = .114, p = .015$ for admissions office budget.

not statistically significant differences in the reported average SAT scores as well (Table 3.29a).

- There was no difference in satisfaction level across the three types of institutional affiliation (public, private religiously-affiliated, and private non-religious) (Table 3.4d).

Taken together, these findings suggest that admissions officers who are able to engage in successful strategic planning are more likely to be highly satisfied. Even though some of the problems and challenges that respondents encounter may differ across types of institutional affiliation, and certainly their available resources differ, there is no difference in satisfaction across respondents from the three types of institution.

Sources of Dissatisfaction

The 94 respondents who gave lower ratings (scale points 1, 2, or 3) were asked to describe the “main sources of any dissatisfaction you may feel.” Their responses were classified as follows:

Table 11: Sources of Dissatisfaction (Open-Ended)

Reason for Dissatisfaction	Percent
Not enough resources	18.1%
Unrealistic expectations	11.7%
Current inter/intra office organization	11.7%
Too much work	9.6%
Lack of support/understanding	8.5%
Salary	7.4%
Issues with senior management	6.4%
Micro-managing superiors	4.3%
Lack of vision/strategic planning	4.3%
No advancement/new challenges	3.2%
Decline in traditional markets	2.1%
Institutional characteristics	2.1%
Co-workers	1.1%
I have more responsibilities than my title suggests	1.1%
<i>Not Reported</i>	8.5%

These responses indicate substantial stress for the respondents who admitted to being not very satisfied with their jobs. The combination of the top two along with “lack of support/understanding” paints a picture of admissions officers who feel expected to accomplish too much with too little, a theme that is echoed in the open-ended comments.

Satisfaction with the Level of IT Support

IT support is critical to the effective and efficient operation of an admissions office. The average rating given to IT on a five-point scale is 2.91 (Q21) – just below “moderately satisfied.”

- Admissions officers with higher budgets (over \$1M) are more satisfied with IT support than other officers are (Table 3.18c).
- Respondents from religiously-affiliated institutions are less satisfied with IT support (2.76 average rating) than either public (3.05) or other private schools (3.01) (Table 3.18d).

Challenges Faced by Admissions Officers

All respondents, regardless of their level of satisfaction, were asked, “In a sentence or two, please state the biggest challenge you face as a senior level enrollment management/admissions official,” and 417 out of the 461 respondents did so (Q1h). We classified the responses into general categories. Below, we will describe each of the categories and include one or more quotations from what our respondents said. Of course, some of the categories and themes overlap.

Administrative Issues (Staff, Time Management, etc.)

This group of 117 responses represented 28.1% of the total. There were many mentions of lack of time, inadequate resources, staff motivation and turnover, and burdensome workload. One consequence is that admissions staff find it difficult to get to do the planning and analysis that they feel is necessary.

Handling the demands of the job -- the workload continues to grow each year while budgets and staffing do not.⁵

Keeping a well trained and motivated staff is one of my biggest challenges. There is a great deal of turnover in the profession and we are having to retrain new counselors at least every year, which takes a lot of time.

The increased marketing to younger students nationwide means our staff must strive to bring in the current year's class and also work with 3 to 4 future year groups. The demand is taxing on our staff and on our fiscal resources.

Finding qualified employees for the salary rate offered by my institution

Finding appropriate time to plan. I am always pulled in so many directions that I can't find time to plan.

Enrollment management is now more about retention and financial aid than admissions--so having time for admissions is a challenge.

⁵ The most recently published NACAC survey results back up this claim, suggesting that for most of their respondents staffing has not increased while applications have risen in the last few years.

In the area of marketing and recruitment, there are never adequate resources - staff, time, money, etc. to do what needs to be done and to continue to add additional and most expensive electronic methods of interacting with prospective students and parents. On the scholarship and financial aid side of the house, the balancing battle over competing priorities - discount rates, net tuition revenues, academic profile, diversity, etc. Then, of course, there are always the issues of retention and graduation rates and lack of adequate programs to move us to the 90% markers.

We are understaffed; we have multiple campuses; we just migrated to Banner, and a new administration does not recognize the impact on staff who had to assume the major responsibility for the implementation.

Young admissions counselors are less and less willing to put in the time to travel and contact prospective students via telephone, IM, etc.

Not having a seat at the decision table.

too much to do... too little time... no life!

Meeting Competing Goals and Expectations

Eighty-nine responses, or 21.3% of the total, addressed the complex balancing act that admissions officers must perform. Net tuition revenue, enrollment and student quality goals, and changing priorities all pose challenges. Coping with competing agendas from different constituencies of the college or university is also required of admissions officers.

Ensuring we meet the multiple enrollment targets, particularly net revenue. It's a huge challenge to keep the discount rate down as costs increase and other sources of aid remain the same.

Insuring that our enrollment management plans integrate with the institutional strategic plans, especially where it concerns meeting budget requirements.

Having our enrollment goals changed at the 11th hour to meet unexpected budgetary constraints.

Being asked to meet or exceed goals without increased resources. No direct voice at the cabinet level.

Overcoming internal barriers (mostly from academic elitists) that prevent opportunities to achieve strategic enrollment goals.

Crafting the class and meeting revenue projections in a need-blind, capped enrollment environment.

With a new president my challenge is to understand his expectations and change our plans accordingly

Dealing with the transition of the college from an average quality institution to an elite one.

The biggest challenge is the pressure to simultaneously achieve enrollment goals for quantity, quality, diversity, and new tuition revenue. Other major challenges include garnering institutional support for developing and supporting a professional enrollment staff; furthermore,

there is the challenge of aligning strategic priorities of faculty, in particular, with enrollment-related issues.

Recruiting students who will stay at the university

Bringing in high quality, 'great fit' students at a quantity my institution needs to survive. My success is determined by the decision-making prowess of 17 year-olds.

Coordinating with and Educating Others on Campus

In these 76 responses, or 18.2% of the total, respondents emphasized the important part of their work that consists of communicating with others on campus in order to do their job as effectively as possible. These responses bring to mind the finding cited above that, of the 14 different activities presented for ways admissions/enrollment management officers spend their time, “communicating with other campus offices” was rated the highest.

Communicating and 'selling' the idea of campus-wide strategic planning for enrollment.
Developing a culture of sophisticated marketing, recruitment, data assessment, etc

Dealing with deans and faculty that do not understand the market driven nature of enrollment in higher education today.

I have a number of areas that impact enrollment under me, but do not have all areas, therefore can only hope to encourage or persuade when change is needed, but no authority to make changes in a few areas that impact enrollment.

The biggest challenges involve complex integration of admissions, academic affairs & records, financial aid, student services and billing.

Support from executive administration (colleagues and supervisor) for the necessary changes that we need to make as an institution to affect enrollments; more recruiting is not the only answer.

Helping the institution understand the value of planning and implementation of processes to manage enrollment

It is difficult to engage faculty in the recruitment process. However, faculty are the most vocal critics of enrollment declines or student quality.

My biggest challenge is getting other senior administrators to support the enrollment/recruitment/retention efforts. Their resistance to change and collaboration is still surprising, but I am most often told that EM just creates more work for everyone, so they are not interested in participating unless the president requires it.

Keeping admission criteria relevant in an ever-changing diverse demographic population and educating the general campus community (and senior administration) regarding the proper and ethical use of standardized testing in the admission process is an on-going challenge. I have conducted numerous validity studies that indicate that there is a strong need to adjust the 'weight' given to test scores vs. academic achievement; this may sometimes be construed by some that the quality of the incoming class diminishes based on the single fact of test scores going down. Here, the criterion has been modified and any downward trend in test scores has

always been accompanied by an increase in HS academic grade point averages. Preliminary assessment has shown that many applicants with very good high school records most often perform as well as counterparts with more moderate academic GPAs with higher test scores. I make very good use of the CEEB validity studies to keep admission criteria current and effective.

Budgets

Budget issues have been mentioned elsewhere, of course, but there were 48 comments, 11.5% of the total, that focused particularly strongly on budget issues.

Champagne aspirations, beer budget

Lack of money on two fronts: financial aid for students and sufficient recruitment budget

Budget and funding to operate the admissions plan. Budget support is minimal and consequently, the process is bogged down because we don't have enough help during peak season.

[State] budget reductions, state's stop and go attitude on enrollment

Having an adequate budget; mounting an effective marketing message for a small, private, [religion name] college; how to handle an increasing percentage of academically unprepared applicants.

The biggest challenge I face is figuring out ways to connect with students given an operating budget that hasn't increase but one year in the nine years I have been in the position

Other

The final 87 (20.1%) of the responses were less easy to classify. Several of these comments related to situations endemic to public institutions.

Getting the state legislators to understand that admission policies are best left to the individual institutions and that one size, in fact, does not fit all. Changing the Mission of the University into its operational form.

Managing enrollment at a public institution at which state taxpayers feel entitled to enroll their children, regardless of academic ability or timeliness in application.

Managing enrollment in a fiscally challenging environment (university, system, and state levels) in which available resources and resulting enrollment space consistently does not meet demand.

Keeping up with industry trends, technological innovations, etc., is also challenging.

Balancing the 'high touch' versus 'high tech' needs and wants of our very diverse student population. And, of course, budget constraints go without saying!

Handling emerging technologies and determining and managing the right mix and frequency of message to our multiple audiences

Keeping up with new trends/data sources while getting my 'normal' work done too.

Keeping up with the technology used by students and communicating well

Staying abreast of changes in the profession

Staying current with market conditions etc. and communicating that to the President's Staff.

Lack of a clear institutional strategy is another challenge.

I have two main challenges: 1) understanding our enrollment needs without a comprehensive university strategic plan; and 2) maintaining a competent and well supported staff when low salaries, poor benefits and a small amount of professional development is the norm.

It takes a comprehensive plan to be successful, it is more than just the admissions office.

lack of strategic planning on enrollment issues.

The biggest challenge I face is that of helping the institution be consistent in developing strategies based on data rather than opinions/feelings.

Some respondents identify the need for additional sources of revenue in order to reduce tuition dependency.

Obtaining the necessary support, both financial and personnel, for research data. Motivating divisions to look beyond campus and become energized by competition. Focus on advancement efforts vs. dependency on enrollment revenue.

The affordability of college is an issue for a number of respondents.

Changing a campus climate which has traditionally not been very concerned about affordability issues.

Keeping tuition rates as low as possible

Balancing tuition costs and perceived value

Access and Affordability

Several of the comments make clear the competing pressures, trade-offs and dilemmas that characterize work in college admissions today.

Coming from a moderately selective liberal arts school, the imbalance of male to female applicants continues to be a challenge. In order to keep a balance, guys with marginal academics are admitted while female seats continue to remain extremely competitive.

Balancing needs and resources for undergraduate and continuing education students.
Implementing online marketing for graduate and undergraduate online programs

On a broader scope the biggest challenge is keeping higher education affordable. Locally, the biggest challenge is serving and attempting to please so many college constituents--academic departments, music directors, coaches, budget officer, and the alumni.

My job is overwhelmingly public in nature, with dozens of constituencies, many of them often competing with one another.

The biggest challenge I face is balancing mission related activities with goal related activities. Can I/we be enrollment driven and also best serve students?

In some ways the whole nature of the admissions enterprise is changing.

I would say the most significant challenge facing admissions is the changing nature of our admissions procedures. The recruitment funnel no longer exists and students approach institutions of higher education when they are ready (often using the application as the first point of inquiry).

CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS' INSTITUTIONS

The type of setting in which admissions work is carried out is a critical determinant of all aspects of the admissions process and the particular issues and challenges faced by the professionals whom we surveyed⁶. As indicated in Table 12, the majority of the institutions represented by our respondents have graduate and/or continuing education programs as well as undergraduate programs.

Table 12: Other Programs Offered at Respondents' Institutions

Type of Program	Percent
Graduate	82.0%
Continuing Education	68.1%
Professional	50.3%

Respondents came from every state in the country and from the District of Columbia (Q5e). Based on the U.S. state in which respondents said their institution was located, we classified respondents' institutions into U.S. Census regions as shown in Table 13 (next page). In the second column we have shown the corresponding percentages among the 2,081 people who received the original study invitation. For the sake of comparison we show the same information for the trustees and the presidents in our earlier surveys. The percentages are quite comparable across all four analyses.

⁶ As in this whole study, the unit of analysis for this section is the respondent and not the institution. While most institutions are represented by only one individual, there are some instances in which more than one person from an institution replied to the survey. This was expected, as there were 1,371 institutions represented among the 2,081 surveyed individuals. Among the 461 replies we received, 341 provided an institutional email address at the end of the survey so that they could receive links to reports of the findings. An analysis of the domain names for these emails (with the individual names stripped off) found that 318 (93%) came from distinct institutions. Even if every single one of the 120 that did not provide an email address came from an institution already represented, the duplicate rate could not go above 31%. It seems likely that the "true" rate of duplication is closer to the 7% that we found among those who volunteered their email addresses.

Table 13: Census Region of Institution

Census Region	Admissions/EM Officers - Respondents	Admissions/EM Officers – Population Surveyed	Governing Board Members	Presidents
Northeast	26.9%	26.6%	29.2%	24.0%
Midwest	28.6%	26.6%	32.6%	30.2%
South	30.6%	33.0%	25.4%	32.1%
West	12.6%	13.9%	11.1%	12.0%
<i>Not Reported</i>	1.3%	-----	1.7%	1.7%

Respondents were asked to characterize the type of affiliation of their institution: public, private-religious, or private non-religiously affiliated (Q5f). For the sake of comparison we also show the percentages of institutional affiliation represented in the studies of the trustees and the presidents.

Table 14 shows the percentages of each institutional affiliation among the respondents to our survey in the first column. We also show the population data in the presidents’ survey and the percentages of institutional affiliation among the respondents in that earlier study. (Data for the trustees are not comparable on this variable.) There is a very high degree of overlap between the set of institutions from which we invited respondents for the current survey and the set of institutions whose presidents were invited to participate in the Presidents’ Survey. Therefore, the similarity of percentages of institutional affiliations of our Admissions/EM Officers and the population percentages for the Presidents’ study reinforces our impression that our respondents are representative of the population from which they come.

Table 14: Institutional Affiliation

Institutional Affiliation	Admissions/EM Officers - Respondents	Presidents - Population	Presidents - Respondents
Public	33.2%	37% ⁷	34.8%
Private – religiously affiliated	44.7%	40%	41.8%
Private – not religiously affiliated	21.3%	23%	22.6%
<i>Not Reported</i>	0.9%	----	0.8%

In our earlier studies, we found that institutional affiliation is a very important determinant of other institutional characteristics. Therefore, we will display the data

⁷ This information was reported as whole percentages only in the presidents’ survey report.

separately by institutional affiliation as well as for the whole group for the following characteristics: full-time undergraduate enrollment, average test scores, full-pay direct cost estimate, and estimated size of endowment. The statistic shown in Table 15 is the mean (arithmetic average) unless otherwise stated.

Table 15: Institutional Characteristics for the Total Sample and by Institutional Affiliation

Characteristic	Total Sample	Public	Private - Religious	Private – Not Religious
Estimated full-time enrollment	4,958	10,585	1,902	2,861
SAT Math	552	547	541	578
SAT Critical Reading	555	542	547	580
SAT Writing	553	540	544	580
ACT Composite	23.6	22.9	23.4	25.1
Estimated total full-time direct cost of attendance	\$25,682.22	\$14,414.86	\$29,388.47	\$34,280.12
Estimated endowment (mean)	\$175,862,770	\$192,959,639	\$142,996,834	\$229,552,896
(median)	\$36,000,000	\$33,000,000	\$27,000,000	\$65,000,000

Most of the differences across these measures are not surprising.

- Public institutions have substantially larger enrollments than either type of private institution (Q5j, Table 3.30d).
- Private institutions that have no religious affiliation have higher test scores than public and religiously-affiliated institutions, which are quite similar to each other (Q5i, Table 3.29d).
- Private institutions without religious affiliation are more expensive than religiously-affiliated institutions, which in turn are much more expensive than public institutions (Q5k, Table 3.30d).
- Though the mean endowments differ in the expected directions, the differences are not statistically significant⁸ (Q5m, Table 3.30d). We have also shown the median – the number “in the middle” of the distribution (half are above and half are below this number). The median is a more realistic estimate of the “average” endowment because averages can be distorted by a small number of much higher or lower numbers.

⁸ The most likely reason is that the mean of the private, non-religious institutions is raised because of the impact of a relatively small number of institutions that have very large endowments. This contributes greatly to the variance and makes finding the difference to be statistically significant less likely.

ADMISSIONS AND ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

In this section we discuss the “nuts and bolts” of how the admissions operations that our respondents represent actually operate. Topics include staffing, budget, recruitment procedures, etc.

As noted earlier when we described the position titles of the survey respondents, institutions differ in the titles they use for senior level admissions officials (S1).

Table 16: Senior Level Admissions/Enrollment Management Titles that Exist at the Institution

Admissions/Enrollment Management Title	Percent
Vice President of Admission(s)	2.8%
Vice President of Enrollment (Management/Services)	49.9%
Dean of Admission(s)	12.1%
Dean of Enrollment (Management/Services)	7.8%
Director of Admission(s)	60.7%
Director of Enrollment (Management/Services)	8.0%
Other senior level enrollment management/admissions position (please specify) <i>Top Mentions:</i> <i>Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management (n = 23)</i> <i>Associate Provost for Enrollment Management (n = 7)</i> <i>Assistant Vice President for Enrollment (n = 6)</i> <i>Dean of Admission & Financial Aid (n = 5)</i> <i>Associate Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management (n = 5)</i>	25.8%
<i>Not Reported</i>	0.4%

Institutions also vary widely in the size of their admissions operation, though somewhat over half of the respondents work with a staff of between five and 14 (Q2a) (Table 17, next page).

Table 17: Number of Full-time Admissions Staff

Number of Staff	Percent
Fewer than 5	2.2%
5 – 9	23.6%
10 – 14	32.5%
15 – 19	16.3%
20 – 29	11.7%
30 – 39	6.7%
40 - 49	2.6%
50 or more	3.9%
<i>Not Reported</i>	0.4%

- Given that private religiously-affiliated schools tend to be both smaller and less resource rich, it is not surprising that they tend to have smaller admissions staffs (Table 3.9d).

Staff turnover is a serious issue for Admissions offices. On average, respondents report having to replace 15.1% of their staff members each year (Q2m), though there is a great deal of variability in the responses.

Admissions Budgets vary substantially across institutions, though almost half are reported to be between \$100,000 and \$999,999.

Table 18: Admissions Office Budget

Budget Amount	Percent
Less than \$100,000	2.4%
\$100,000 – \$499,999	20.8%
\$500,000 – \$999,999	27.3%
\$1,000,000 – \$1,999,999	28.2%
\$2,000,000 – \$2,999,999	9.8%
\$3,000,000 – \$3,999,999	3.7%
\$4,000,000 – \$4,999,999	3.0%
\$5,000,000 or more	2.8%
<i>Not Reported</i>	2.0%

- Private, religiously-affiliated institutions comprise over half of the schools with budgets of less than \$1M; private non-religious schools comprise 15.5% of the lower budget schools and 26.9% of the higher budget schools (Table 3.26c).

Respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of their budget that they spent on various student recruitment methods (Q2c). The data suggest that in-person approaches continue to be an important component of recruiting work.

Table 19: Admissions Office Budget Spent on Recruitment Techniques

Recruitment Activity	Percent of Budget
Printed materials (e.g., viewbooks, brochures, letters)	24.1%
In-person (e.g., school visits, college fairs)	22.9%
Website and other electronic formats (e.g., email, text messaging)	10.6%

- Respondents from both types of private institution report spending a higher percentage of their budget on electronic formats than respondents from public institutions (Table 3.10d).

Many admissions offices make use of marketing/market research consultants and/or enrollment admissions consultants to assist them in their work. On a five-point scale respondents gave the following ratings (Q2k)⁹.

Table 20: Frequency of Use of Consultants for the Total Sample and by Institutional Affiliation

Type of Consultant	Total Sample	Public	Private - Religious	Private – Not Religious
Marketing/market research consultants	2.73	2.47	2.94	2.72
Enrollment/admissions consultants	2.70	2.23	3.00	2.81

Scale: 1 = Never; 2 = Rarely; 3 = Occasionally; 4 = Frequently; 5 = On an Ongoing basis

- Respondents from private religiously-affiliated institutions are more likely to report use of marketing/market research consultants than those from public institutions (Table 3.16d). Respondents from each type of private institution are more likely to report use of enrollment/admissions consultants than those from public institutions (Table 3.16d).
- More use of marketing/market research consultants is reported by respondents with large budgets (\$1M or more) than those with smaller budgets (Table 3.16c).

Respondents on average estimated that they spent 4.6% of their budget on marketing/market research consultants and 3.3% of their budget on enrollment/admissions consultants (Q2k). Differences across types of institutional affiliation

⁹ Though the frequency breakdown is not shown in the Annotated Instrument, it indicates that over 50% of respondents report using consultants of each kind at least “occasionally.”

paralleled those of the preceding analysis, though only the finding for enrollment/admissions consultants was statistically significant (Table 3.17d).

Respondents were asked to indicate which ones of a list of electronic/web-based tools were employed in their office as part of the recruitment/admissions process (Q2d).

Table 21: Use of Electronic/Web-Based Tools

Electronic Tool	Percent
Admissions office website	98.0%
Current student blogs	43.6%
Faculty blogs	6.5%
Instant messaging	35.8%
Live Webcam from one or more campus sites	17.1%
Online/web chats	36.7%
Personalization of the School's website according to prospect preferences	23.0%
Podcasts	15.4%
Text messaging	18.7%
Virtual campus tour	56.2%
Not Reported	1.5%
Other	19.3%
<i>Email (n = 23)</i>	
<i>Social networking (n = 18)</i>	
<i>Interactive Features on website (n = 16)</i>	
<i>Video (n = 9)</i>	
<i>Accepted student web site (n = 8)</i>	
<i>Customized emails (n = 5)</i>	
<i>E-newsletters (n = 4)</i>	
<i>Admissions blog (n = 2)</i>	
<i>Parent blogs (n = 1)</i>	
<i>Not reported (n = 3)</i>	

- Respondents from public institutions are less likely to report use of current student blogs and text messaging than others, while respondents from private non-religious schools are substantially more likely to report using online/web chats (Table 3.11d).
- Presumably because they have the resources to do so, respondents from institutions with larger budgets (over \$1M) are more likely to report usage of current student blogs, live webcams, online/web chats, personalization of the School's website, and a virtual campus tour than those from institutions with a smaller budget (Table 3.11c).

Admissions/enrollment management offices vary in the degree to which they engage various constituent groups in the process of recruiting undergraduate students. Respondents were asked to rate the degree to which they employed five different constituent groups in this work (Q2e).

Table 22: Constituent Group Participation in Undergraduate Recruitment

Constituent Group	Rating of Degree of Engagement
Current students	3.63
Faculty	3.31
Athletic coaches	3.21
Alumni/ae	2.54
Parents of current students	2.15

Scale: 1 = Not at all; 2 = Slightly; 3 = Moderately; 4 = Quite a lot; 5 = Very much

Current students are the most commonly engaged group, followed by faculty and athletic coaches. Substantially less engagement for alumni/ae and parents of current students is reported by our respondents.

- Respondents from admissions offices with large budgets (over \$1M) report relatively more engagement of alumni and current students and less engagement of athletic coaches than respondents from offices with smaller budgets (Table 3.12c).
- Those who work at non-religious, private schools were more likely than public institution respondents to report engagement of alumni, and respondents from each type of private institutions were more likely to report faculty involvement. Respondents from institutions with a religious affiliation reported higher involvement of athletic coaches than those at other private institutions, and both groups reported more involvement of coaches than respondents from public institutions did (Table 3.12d).

In the view of Maguire Associates, effective admissions offices make savvy use of alumni/ae in recruitment. Accordingly, we did a deeper examination of the factors associated with more, versus less engagement of alumni in undergraduate recruitment efforts. The “low engagement” group consisted of the 252 who answered “Not at all” or “Slightly,” and the “high engagement group” of 207 answered “Moderately” or higher for how often they engaged alumni. Table 23 (next page) provides a compact summary of the differences we observed. Unless otherwise specified the statements in the table apply to the “high alumni engagement” group in comparison with the lower alumni engagement group.

**Table 23: Summary of Differences between Respondents Reporting
“High” versus “Low” Alumni Engagement**

Item Content and Finding
More among those earning \$110,000/year or more (Table 3.7e).
More time spent on the following: communicating with prospective students and their parents; obtaining recruitment assessment data; on-campus recruitment; off-campus recruitment; reviewing student applications; and reviewing admissions policies (Table 3.8e)
Where there is a smaller staff, there is a higher percentage of <i>low engagement</i> (Table 3.9e)
Higher percentage of use of website and other electronic formats (Table 3.10e)
Higher percentage of use of the following: Live webcam from one or more sites; online/web chats; podcasts; and virtual campus tour (Table 3.11)
Substantially higher reported engagement of other constituency groups (athletic coaches, faculty, current students, and parents of current students) (Table 3.12e)
Somewhat more likely to have a plan for addressing student demographic changes (Table 3.13e).
Substantially more likely to have a plan for marketing to parents (Table 3.13e)
Somewhat more likely to see a need to increase the economic diversity of their institution (Table 3.15e)
Higher rating on satisfaction with IT support (Table 3.18e)
Less unlikely to feel pressure for admissions because of student’s ability to pay, alumni/donor preferences, and political reasons/connections (Table 3.21e)
Less unlikely to report that a student’s likelihood of attendance would affect their evaluation for admissions (Table 3.22e)
More perception that there has been an increase in prospective student stress and anxiety about the admissions process (Table 3.24e)
More likelihood that standardized test scores in writing will affect admissions decisions (Table 3.28e)
Higher standardized test scores (by approximately 40 points on SAT measures and 1.5 points on the Composite ACT) (Table 3.29e)
Higher total cost of attendance (Table 3.30e)
Higher mean and median institutional endowment (Table 3.30e for mean; extra analysis for median)
Higher percentage of legacy undergraduates (Table 3.30e)

Engagement of alumni seems to be associated with a relatively resource-rich setting and with a number of innovative, high-energy admissions practices.

A very high percentage (91.5%) of respondents said that their institutions practiced need-blind admissions with respect to first-year undergraduates from the United States (Q3a). This was defined as, “admissions decisions are made without considering an applicant’s financial ability to pay.”

Two important characteristics of admissions practices are the “discount rate” (the proportion of grant aid relative to the total amount of gross tuition and required fees, Q5l) and the percentage of “legacy” students (sons or daughters of alumni) who are admitted and enroll (Q5n). Table 24 shows these percentages for the total sample and separately for each of the types of school affiliation.

Table 24: Discount Rate and Percentage of Legacy Students for Total Sample and by Institutional Affiliation

Measure	Total Sample	Public	Private - Religious	Private – Not Religious
Estimated discount rate	33.2%	19.1%	37.0%	34.5%
Percentage of “legacy” students	10.9%	13.4%	11.4%	7.6%

- Respondents from private institutions of both kinds discount their tuition by substantially more than those from public institutions do (Q5l, Table 3.30d).
- Those who work at public institutions reported a higher estimated percentage of “legacy” students than respondents from either type of private institution (Q5n, Table 3.30d)¹⁰.

¹⁰ While this result might seem surprising, it makes sense given the areas of the country where there are large public institutions and not many private ones. The majority of college students nationwide attend college close to home, and that may have been even truer for the parents of current students than it is now. A subsequent analysis indicated that our finding was mostly due to the institutions that are in the 17 states that the Census classifies as “South.”

ADMISSIONS AND ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT POLICIES

The previous section focused on questions that dealt with practices – what admissions offices actually do. In this section we address admissions professionals’ planning and policy development along with their perceptions about the pressures to which they are subject.

Planning

There is a widely reported concern that demographic trends over the next number of years will result in a more competitive and difficult climate for many college admissions offices. We asked respondents if their office had a plan for addressing these expected changes. Table 25 shows the results and indicates that just under half of the institutions have addressed this concern (Q2f).

Table 25: Plan for Addressing Student Demographic Change

Status of Plan	Percent
Yes	44.7%
No, but a plan is in development	43.0%
No, and a plan is <u>not</u> in development	12.4%

- There was no significant difference in response to the question based on the institutional affiliation of the respondent (Table 3.13d).
- Among the respondents who worked in a high-budget admissions office (\$1M or more) there was a higher proportion of those who reported having a plan in place (Table 3.13c)

Those who reported that their institution had a plan were asked to rate the strength of their plan on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 was “Very Weak” and 5 was “Very Strong.” The most common response, with 56.6% of the respondents, was scale point 4, or “Somewhat Strong.” The average rating was 3.74 (Q2g).

- There were no differences in this self-evaluation based on either institutional affiliation or admissions budget size (Tables 3.14d and 3.14c, respectively).

The survey also included a question on whether or not the respondent’s institution had an organized plan for marketing to parents of prospective students. Half reported that a plan was already in place (Q2h).

- Respondents from private, religiously-affiliated institutions were more likely to report having a marketing plan in place (57.8%) than those from public institutions (45.1%) or the non-religiously affiliated private institutions (42.9%) (Table 3.13d).

Policy Matters

Admissions offices frequently deal with questions about the composition of their incoming class. Table 25 displays the ratings the respondents gave to a question about the need to improve undergraduate enrollment along five dimensions. The average ratings clustered around the mid-point of the scale (“Moderate need”); within this narrow range the highest rated need was for higher ability students and the lowest rated need was for economic diversity (Q2i).

Table 26: Need to Improve Undergraduate Enrollment on Various Dimensions

Dimension	Rating of Need
Higher ability students	3.39
Ethnic diversity	3.28
Geographic diversity (within the U.S.)	3.16
International student representation	3.08
Economic diversity	2.91

Scale: 1 = Very Low Need; 2 = Low Need; 3 = Moderate Need; 4 = High Need; 5 = Very High Need

- Respondents from public institutions gave higher ratings to the need to enroll more high ability students than either of the two private institution groups did (Table 3.15d).
- Respondents from private religiously-affiliated institutions felt somewhat less need to increase the enrollment of international students than those from public institutions (Table 3.15d).
- Those who worked at institutions with a lower admissions budget (below \$1M) expressed more need to increase enrollment of higher ability students (Table 3.15c).

Every admissions office needs to decide whether it will use standardized test scores and, if so, how. Table 27 (next page) summarizes respondents’ answers to a question about their standardized test policy and makes it clear that the vast majority still require standardized test scores (Q5g).

Table 27: Policy on Standardized Tests

Standardized Test Policy	Percent
Submission of standardized test scores is required	87.6%
Submission of standardized test scores is optional; when submitted, scores are typically used in making admissions decisions	7.4%
Submission of standardized test scores is optional; when submitted, scores are typically <u>not</u> used in making admissions decisions	2.4%
Standardized test scores play no role in undergraduate admissions decisions	2.0%
Not Reported	0.7%

- Respondents from private, non-religious institutions were less likely to say that test scores were required (although 75.5% still do say that) and more likely to say that submitting scores is optional and that scores if submitted are used (Table 3.26d).

In a related question, respondents were asked to rate the degree to which standardized writing test scores influence their admissions decisions, using a four-point scale. Table 28 demonstrates a wide range of responses, with almost one-third saying that writing scores have “No Influence” (scale point 1) and another third specifying “Moderate Influence” (scale point 3) (Q5h). With a mean score of 2.35, respondents clearly don’t place a high value on writing scores.

Table 28: Influence of Standardized Writing Scores on Admissions Decisions

	No Influence 1	Little Influence 2	Moderate Influence 3	Great Influence 4
mean	31.5%	19.2%	32.5%	16.8%

Recently the news has been full of announcements of changes in financial aid policy – moving away from student loans and toward more grant aid for middle income families. The trend started with elite institutions (that have the financial resources to implement these changes), and we asked our respondents how they had reacted (Q3d). Table 29 (next page) indicates that two-thirds of our respondents come from schools that have not considered modifying their financial aid policies in light of recent changes. However, 8% of the respondents report that their school has already made changes and another 10% are considering it.

Table 29: Financial Aid Policy Changes

Reaction to Financial Aid Policy Changes at Elite Schools	Percent
Yes, my school changed its financial aid policies as a result	8.0%
No, but my school <u>is considering</u> changing its financial aid policies as a result	10.0%
No, but my school <u>did consider</u> changing its financial aid policies as a result	6.1%
No, and my school <u>has not considered</u> changing its financial aid policies as a result	67.2%
Not sure	7.8%
Not Reported	0.9%

- Neither the school’s affiliation nor the size of its budget was related to its decisions on financial aid policy (Tables 3.20d and 3.20c, respectively).

Admissions officers may be subject to a variety of pressures to admit students for reasons not related to their academic ability. We asked respondents to evaluate the degree to which they were “heavily pressured” to admit a student for four different reasons. As indicated in Table 30, respondents report a generally low level of such pressure, especially with respect to students’ ability to pay (Q3b).

Table 30: Pressure to Admit Students Based on Non-Academic Criteria

Non-Academic Criterion	Percent
Student’s athletic ability	2.48
Alumni/donor preferences	2.29
Political reasons/connections	2.29
Student’s ability to pay	1.56

Scale: 1 = Never; 2 = Rarely; 3 = Occasionally; 4 = Frequently; 5 = Very Frequently

- While experiencing pressure to admit a student based on ability to pay almost never happens to respondents from public institutions, it happens a bit more often to those who work at each type of private institution. Public institution senior admissions/enrollment officers are a bit more subject to pressure to admit students for political reasons than private institution respondents are (Table 3.21d).
- Admissions/enrollment management officials in high budget institutions (more than \$1M budget) are more likely than others to report pressure to admit students based the student’s athletic ability, alumni/donor preferences, and political reasons/connections (Table 3.21c).

Another non-academic criterion that can influence the process of evaluating a student for admission is the perceived likelihood that the student will attend if admitted. Table 31 indicates that, on average, this factor is reported to play a minor role in admissions. However, for one-third of the respondents it is a moderately to highly important factor (Q3c).

Table 31: Impact of Perceived Likelihood of Attendance on Admissions Evaluation

mean	Not at All 1	Low Amount 2	Moderate Amount 3	High Amount 4	Very High Amount 5
2.10	33.6%	32.3%	24.9%	8.3%	0.9%

- Respondents from each type of private institution are more likely to report some impact of perceived likelihood of attendance than those who work at public institutions (Table 3.22d).

RESPONDENTS' VIEWS OF INDUSTRY TRENDS

“Helicopter parents,” “stealth applicants” – these are two of the more commonly cited trends in undergraduate admissions. We asked people about the degree to which five different possible trends had increased, decreased, or stayed the same over the last 10 years in their own institution. Table 32 indicates that the proportions of lower and middle class students are increasing slightly, if at all, in respondents’ schools. The other three trends are reported to be increasing, especially parental involvement (Q4c).

Table 32: Ratings of Trends in Admissions Over the Last 10 Years

Trend Over Last 10 Years	Average Rating
Parental involvement in students’ assessment and choice of schools	4.39
Stealth applications (i.e., applications from students who have no traceable prior contact with the school)	4.15
Prospective student stress and anxiety about the admissions process	3.93
The proportion of economically lower class students attending your school	3.33
The proportion of economically middle class students attending your school	3.21

Scale: 1 = Decreased Greatly; 2 = Decreased Somewhat; 3 = Neither Increased nor Decreased; 4 = Increased Somewhat; 5 = Increased Greatly

- Respondents from private institutions are more likely to perceive increases in stealth applications than those from public institutions, while those who work at public institutions are more likely to see some modest increase in the number of middle class students at their institution (Table 3.24d).
- Respondents from institutions with large admissions budgets (\$1M or more) are more likely to see increases in prospective student stress and anxiety (Table 3.24c).

This survey afforded us the opportunity to assess admissions/enrollment management officials’ attitudes toward some of the “hot” topics of the day. Table 33 (next page) shows that the average rating for most of the issues we asked about is near the midpoint. However, early application/admissions programs, the impact of college rankings, and, especially, the use of private admissions consultants by prospective parents and students, are all viewed on the negative side of neutral. Relatively speaking, merit aid is viewed more positively than the other trends are (Q4b).

Table 33: Attitudes toward Various Admissions Issues

Admissions Issue	Average Rating
The use of merit aid to shape incoming undergraduate classes	3.54
The use of standardized test scores (e.g., SAT, ACT) in undergraduate admissions	3.30
The call for independent organizations to compile unranked measures of college quality	3.04
The use of early application/admission programs in undergraduate admissions	2.76
The impact that college rankings have had on the undergraduate admissions practices at your school	2.42
The use of private admissions consultants by prospective students and parents	2.32

Scale: 1 = Very Negative; 2 = Somewhat Negative; 3 = Neither Positive nor Negative; 4 = Somewhat Positive; 5 = Very Positive

- Respondents from private non-religious schools had (on average) a neutral view on the use of early application/admission programs, while the other two groups tended toward a negative view. Respondents from private schools with a religious affiliation had a more positive view of merit aid than the other two groups. Finally, respondents from private non-religious schools were neutral (on average) about standardized tests while the other two groups were mildly positive in their views (Table 3.23d).
- The size of the institution’s admissions budget had no apparent effect on respondents’ views about these issues.

It is safe to say that “merit aid,” as variously understood and practiced, is one of the more contentious issues in higher education admissions today. For that reason we chose to explore it in more depth. We reclassified the attitude scale into “negative/neutral” (scale points 1, 2, and 3) and “positive” (scale points 4 and 5) and then examined the relationships with other variables. Table 34 (next page) contains a summary of what we found. Each statement below refers to those whose attitude toward merit aid is positive, relative to those whose attitude is negative or neutral.

Table 34: Summary of Findings on Positive Attitudes toward Merit Aid

Item Content and Finding
Spend more time developing marketing materials and analyzing recruitment assessment data (Table 3.8f)
More likely to engage both athletic coaches and faculty members in recruitment efforts (Table 3.12)
More likely to report that a marketing plan to parents is either in place or in development, and less likely to say that they are not developing a plan (Table 3.13f)
Not surprisingly, more likely to say that they need to enroll more high quality students (Table 3.15f), as merit aid is one of the strategies typically used to bring about this result
More likely to utilize both enrollment/admissions consultants and marketing/research consultants (Table 3.16f) and to spend a higher (though still quite small) percentage of their budget on enrollment/admissions consultants (Table 3.17f)
More positive about the use of standardized tests in admissions and less negative about the impact of college rankings and the use of private admissions counselors by students and parents (Table 3.23f)
More likely to feel that there has been at least some increase of middle class students enrolled at their institution (Table 3.24f)
More likely to be at a private, religiously-affiliated institution (Table 3.26f)
More likely to be at an institution with lower SAT Critical Reading and Writing scores (Table 3.29f)
More likely to be at a smaller institution with a higher discount rate although the average cost of attendance for the institutions of the two groups is nearly identical (Table 3.30f)

Taken together, these findings paint a picture of institutions that work hard to make their enrollment goals by, as is the case with a number of the religiously-affiliated institutions, marketing, systematically analyzing recruitment data, engaging various constituencies in the recruitment process, and seeking assistance from consultants. In general these are institutions that are addressing a perceived need to improve their academic profile.

The Most Common Public Misconceptions about College Admissions Today

Respondents were asked, “What is the most common public misconception that you encounter about the undergraduate admissions process?” Out of the 461 respondents, 345 provided a response to this question, and we grouped their replies into categories as specified below.

Lack of understanding of the Admissions Process and Requirements

Almost one-third (32.2%, N = 111) of responses were classified in this category. The misunderstandings include how the process works, the actual level of selectivity of most colleges, the importance of various admission evaluation criteria, etc.

Admission is strictly based on SAT's. Being a recruited athlete gets you automatically admitted.

I think that applicants feel like they are being judged so they must include all activities, rather than focus on their hopes, goals, and dreams about college.

if you apply early you will get accepted. If you are accepted the school will meet your need

I'm an Alum, thus my son or daughter gains automatic admission

That academic qualifications shouldn't be taken into consideration to the extent it is. There is a sense of entitlement to higher education that ignores the relevance of academic background and achievement.

that our decision to reject a student is because the student isn't qualified; we actually reject a lot of students who could do the work; many people think we should take everyone whom we deem admissible

There is a misconception that extracurricular activities and outside experiences will compensate for a poor academic record. Students need to understand that course selection and grades are most important, and standardized test scores play an important role as well in the admission decision.

That the process is complicated and it's hard to get into universities. That may be true for highly selective institutions but for the vast majority of higher education institutions across this country, the process is straight forward and the criteria for admission are clearly stated.

the public seems to know only of highly selective institutions or 'open admission' institutions. they are not knowledgeable of the process at the majority of the institutions that are moderately selective.

College is not Affordable

This group of 62 replies (18.0%) focuses on the costs of college and the widespread misunderstanding of the actual costs of college attendance.

A private school is not affordable, so we shouldn't even apply

cost of private higher education; value of a liberal arts education

Sticker price vs. actual price paid

That the media's (mis-)representation of independent higher education is true across the sector...that we are too expensive and too hard to gain admission, so they ought to go to the cheaper public institution (not knowing the cost after aid can make us very affordable and competitive). And that the FAFSA isn't worth the time and trouble, since only poor people qualify for anything.

Assumption that College is Harder to get into than it Actually Is

Comments under this category (52 replies, 15.1%) focus on the misguided assumption that all colleges and universities are extremely selective.

1. That you have to have a high GPA to get accepted to college. 2. That there is a long wait at all schools between when you apply and when you hear about your decision.

Good students cannot get into a school that is right for them.

I think the media and the public focus too much on a very few, elite, ultra selective, ultra rich schools. This ignores that fact that that is not where the majority of students ultimately enroll (or even apply).

It is most frustrating that all assumptions about the process that the press/media personnel reports as being the state of the industry today are applicable only to fewer than 30 institutions in the country compared to the reality of the other 3600 institutions. They have created a totally false state of frenzy and panic among students and parents in a world in which there are so many outstanding colleges and universities from which to choose - most better than the name brands for most undergraduates.

That it's impossible to get in. That everyone is as selective as the Ivies and that we take joy in denying students admission.

Misunderstanding Financial Aid

The 33 responses (9.6% of the total) classified under financial aid focus on two or three main ideas: students expect their financial need to be met; they think that awards can be negotiated; and they expect awards to be the same across schools to which they are admitted.

Confusion regarding merit versus need based aid

Many parents and students assume that financial aid is the same everywhere. i.e. a student qualified for a 50% scholarship at one school should get the same percentage at another.

Most people believe financial aid is just extra money schools have; rather, it is funds that would be used to enhance the educational experience were it not being used in financial aid to provide access to students.

That colleges are sitting on a hoard of cash and if we chose, we could charge no tuition. Thanks a lot Harvard, Stanford, Yale and the few others.

That Financial [aid] is an entitlement and negotiable

That Financial Aid will cover everything

Anyone Can Get in to College

It might be surprising, since we have already seen that many people believe that college admission/attendance is impossible, that others think it is easy to get into college, or that everyone should be able to attend. State-supported schools seem particularly vulnerable to this misconception. These 30 responses account for 8.7% of the total.

State citizens are surprised that our institution (a state-support public university) actually denies admission to students within our state on the basis of academic credentials. I suppose they think any citizen of the state should be able to enroll, regardless of academic preparation

Higher education is a right, not a privilege, and the school should give me financial aid because I have a ton of consumer debt

Since we are a Christian college, the public perceives that we will be 'gracious' and admit anyone.

That all black colleges should be, if not already, open admissions

Because a student has a strong desire to attend an institution, it becomes an entitlement issue to the family. Rarely do they consider the College's need to admit according to their needs and who they want to be.

Because we have access for some high-risk freshmen, it is sometimes perceived that the overall selection process is not very competitive.

Other

Fifty-seven, or 16.5% of the answers to this question did not fit into the categories listed above. Some responses focus on the match between school and student and unrealistic expectations about name brand schools, but others address a wide range of issues.

Cost = Quality

It is the concept that attending the 'perfect' college is the only key to future success.

That a student's entire future hinges on getting into 'the right school.'

That friends and neighbors have accurate information.

The greatest misconception about admission is that the quality or rigor of the education provided by an institution necessarily corresponds to the 'competitiveness' of its admission process.

The message delivered by the college is accurate and honest.

There is an assumption that we are still gatekeepers, but the fact is, most of our time is spent on marketing and sales as we work to match students with our programs and offerings.

That it is all smoke and mirrors. The faculty believe if it is good enough students will come.

The Most Important Problem Facing College Admissions Today

The final open-ended question was, "What do you think is the most important problem facing college admissions today?" We received 394 replies from the 461 respondents.

Tuition Cost and Financial Aid

For one-third of the respondents (N = 133, 33.8%), affordability and cost issues were paramount.

Cost of college and decline of state assistance

Crazy tuition

How to help students with true financial need, without placing them in serious financial trouble with high interest loans and credit card debt. This is especially true for low-middle income students (FI of \$32,000 to \$48,000 USD)

Increasing cost of flagship schools makes them inaccessible to many students

The current credit market fiasco... how it will affect student loans.

There is much pressure to increase financial aid. This is possible at schools with large endowments, but is not possible at schools with lesser resources.

Too much attention paid to the worries of upper-middle-class suburban students.

want-based aid--the unwillingness of those with means to pay what they can afford

What are we going to do with undocumented students who have gone through the public K-12 system, but are not able to receive federal or state aid for college.

Student Demographics and their Preparation Level

Responses in these two categories combined totaled 72, or 18.3%. Of these, 30 or so addressed the issue of student readiness for college. Some responses combined the two concepts, recognizing that the profile of students is changing in a way that may have a negative impact on the overall level of student preparedness for college.

high school preparation, or lack thereof

Deteriorating academic quality in public high schools

ill-prepared prospective students (academically and financially)

Less [sic] students are interested in STEM disciplines.

Lack of student motivation and parents who are over involved.

Under preparedness of potential new students and how to address first generation potential new students and their families. The daunting reality of the demographics.

Demographics and affordability--they seem to be on a collision course.

Declining numbers of high school graduates and unethical admissions practices by some institutions resulting from increasing pressure to increase enrollment.

fierce competition over a shrinking traditional student market

We have too many students who are not prepared for college level courses in the core of writing, mathematics, and science.

Demographic and economic shifts that will change the profile of students applying to college. The traditional measures currently used will not sufficiently evaluate the skills and experience of this changing population of applicants.

Keeping up with Competition and Market Trends

Fifty-two responses (13.2%) addressed the competitive nature of the admissions market and the need to keep up with market trends.

Addressing the needs of both parents and students in the process; students are high tech; parents want high touch.

Admissions offices becoming too competitive, too concerned with rankings, and too concerned about keeping up with top-tier schools, therefore, forgetting about the importance of student 'fit' application arms race and slippery ways of counting applications--driven by pressure to rise in rankings

College messaging is too diluted. Every college has the same message and the kids are tired of the marketing machines that we have built.

diversity of educational options have changed the expectation that every student will spend four years at the same institution

Each institution is trying to outspend the other. It is a race to compete for students especially minorities.

Implementing a multi-channel marketing strategy that addresses a diverse group of both traditional and nontraditional future students.

Multiple applications filed electronically, thus putting predictions out of balance for the office

Institutions responding to ratings for they often contradict the mission and vision of the institution by forcing the institution to make decisions that promote marketing over substance.

Pressure to improve metrics (e.g. applicant pool size) that don't directly correspond to an improved class

Public institutions cannot keep pace with advances in technology.

the current business model for pricing

The competition for students that is related to development of new facilities, high end residence halls, fitness centers...

Accessibility

Thirty-four (8.6%) responses focused on access, one way or another.

Access to higher education. State & Federal budgets are being cut and costs are rising making it more and more difficult for families to finance a college education.

gap between rich and poor students

The HUGE difference between accessible higher education and 'selective colleges' (which are the minority-yet they are the only ones anyone talks about) - it constantly reinforces the myth that 'getting into college' is difficult.

widening the pipeline so that a greater number of students from all backgrounds are prepared to be successful

We must demonstrate that Higher Education is equitable, accessible, attainable, and affordable.

Other

Finally, there were 103 (26.1%) replies that were not classified with the categories listed above. Several of these focused on forces that can distort the purposes of education.

Institutional ego/pride fueling ever growing efforts to maximize the institution without regard for society as a whole

The amount of money being spent recruiting students instead of teaching them.

The marketing of higher ed has created various levels of jadedness. Style can win out over substance.

Too many colleges are trying to brand themselves, remake themselves, push their profiles, etc, rather than developing the best possible programs and services for the students who naturally choose the institution.

There were several mentions of ethical pressure and ethical concerns or values in the work.

following NACAC fair practice

Operating in an ethical manner, not making false promises

Helping our younger counselors understand the professional ethics involved with this occupation. We aren't just recruiting students, we are assisting them in achieving their dreams.

Not keeping the student first

Creating expectations that are not fulfilled by the actual experience

Ensuring that we maintain ethical standards and stay focused on what's good for students at a time when competition and pressure are fierce

The job and the goals themselves are difficult and involve trade-offs and competing priorities.

finding qualified students who can afford to attend

finding students who fit and will graduate from your college

fitting the prospective applicants skills and abilities to the school and program that best fits with their abilities and their educational goals

Being expected to do more, to generate more applications, and to enroll more new students with existing resources.

Recruiting and retaining, and ultimately graduating engaged students.

There is acknowledgement that the process has become stressful for all involved.

Decreasing the high level of stress for prospective students and their families regarding the process, the selection, the decision, and the commitment. It undermines the student's choices and unnecessarily negatively affects all involved.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

We present here some of our first summary thoughts concerning what we have learned in this survey.

1. The senior level Admissions and Enrollment Management officers who responded to this survey are generally satisfied with their work: 80% say they are mostly or extremely satisfied). This level of satisfaction occurs even with long hours, competing agendas, and resources that are not keeping up with demand.
2. Those who are most satisfied are more likely to be involved in strategic planning and to regard at least some aspects of their planning as successful.
3. Perhaps equally interesting is what does *not* relate to satisfaction: institutional affiliation. This is despite the fact that private institutions with a religious affiliation generally have fewer resources (e.g., personal salary, overall budget) than other institutions do – and there is an overall small but positive relationship between satisfaction and both salary and admissions budget.
4. One particular institutional resource is important: more satisfied respondents report more satisfaction with the IT support that they receive.
5. The chief reported sources of job dissatisfaction center on unrealistic expectations and workload, and dysfunctional office organization.
6. Many respondents have recently started their current positions (i.e., 65% within the last 5 years).
7. Admissions/enrollment management offices still spend large proportions of their budget on printed materials (even though online is where the students are).
8. Institutions seem to be trying to combine “high touch” and “high tech” approaches to student recruitment.
9. There is surprisingly little engagement of alumni in student recruitment. However, we find that those who do engage alumni are more likely to be the most experienced in the profession. They also engage other constituent groups more, have a plan for marketing to parents, and use several forms of technology such as live webcams more. They are also more likely to be in private, non-religious institutions that are relatively rich in resources.
10. The integrity of the admissions process fares well in this research. For example, most report practicing need blind admissions, and they receive little pressure to admit students for non-academic reasons).
11. Our respondents indicate that the oft-repeated anecdotes about “helicopter parents,” stealth applications, and prospect stress/anxiety in the admissions process are paralleled by real increases in these trends at their own institutions.