

Executive Summary

Highlights from the *2019 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 2019 report also includes information about applications from international and transfer students.

College Applications

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

- **Growth in Application Volume Continues:** Between the Fall 2017 and Fall 2018 admission cycles, the number of applications from first-time freshmen increased 6 percent and international student applications increased by 7 percent. Transfer applications were up 2 percent overall, but public colleges experienced an average 1.7 percent decline in transfer applications while private colleges had a 4.7 percent increase.

- **Colleges Accept Two-Thirds of First-Time Freshmen Applicants, on Average:**

The percentage of applicants offered admission at four-year colleges and universities in the United States—referred to as the average selectivity rate—was 66.7 percent for Fall 2017. The national average acceptance rate has increased from a low of 63.9 percent in Fall 2012.

- **Average Yield Rate for First-Time Freshmen Holds Steady After Long Decline:**

The average yield rate for Fall 2017 was nearly identical to Fall 2016 (33.7 percent and 33.6 percent, respectively). Over the past decade the average yield rate has steadily declined from 48 percent in Fall 2007.

- **Transfer Acceptance Rate Slightly Lower than Freshmen Rate; Yield Much Higher:**

Among institutions that enroll transfer students, average selectivity for Fall 2018 was 61 percent, compared to 66 percent for first-time freshmen. However, more than half (52 percent) of transfer applicants who were admitted ultimately enrolled, compared to only 27 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 Fall 2018 admit rate for this population (52 percent) was lower than the rate for both transfer and first-time freshmen students. The average yield rate for international students was 29 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.

- **Top Recruitment Strategies:**

Colleges employ a broad range of strategies when recruiting high school students. Sending email, maintaining institutional websites, and hosting campus visits were the primary means by which colleges recruited first-time freshmen for the Fall 2018 admission cycle. Four other factors—high school visits, direct mail, and outreach to both parents and high school counselors—were each rated as considerably important by at least 50 percent of colleges.

- **Early Decision and Early Action Activity Increases:** Between Fall 2017 and Fall 2018, colleges reported an average increase of 11 percent in the number of Early Decision applicants and 10 percent in ED admits. The number of Early Action applications increased by 10 percent and the number of students accepted through EA increased by 9 percent.
- **Wait List Activity Increases; Likelihood of Wait List Acceptance Remains Low:** For the Fall 2018 admission cycle, 43 percent of institutions reported using a wait list. From Fall 2017 to Fall 2018, the number of students offered a place on an admission wait list increased by 18 percent, on average. Institutions accepted an average of 20 percent of all students who chose to remain on wait lists.
- **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 overall high school GPA, grades in college preparatory courses, strength of curriculum, and admission test scores. Among the next most important factors were the essay, a student's demonstrated interest, counselor and teacher recommendations, class rank, and extracurricular activities.
- **Student Background Information:** Nearly one-third of colleges rated first-generation status as at least moderately important in first-time freshmen admission decisions. About one-quarter of colleges considered high school attended, race/ethnicity, and state or county of residence as either moderately or considerably important.
- **Student-to-Counselor Ratio:** According to US Department of Education data, in 2016–17 each public school counselor (including elementary and secondary) was responsible for 455 students, on average.
- **College Counseling Staff in Secondary Schools:** For the 2018–19 academic year, 29 percent of public schools reported employing at least one counselor (full- or part-time) whose exclusive responsibility was to provide college counseling, compared to 48 percent of private schools.
- **Time Available for College Counseling in Secondary Schools:** Some differences exist between the duties and activities of counselors employed at public schools versus those who work at private schools. On average, public school counselors spent 19 percent of their time on postsecondary counseling in 2018–19, while their private school counterparts spent 31 percent of their time on college counseling.

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.

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.