



ENROLLMENT

SURVEY

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Introduction

In recent years, changing student mindsets and behaviors have altered the college admissions landscape significantly.

Enrollment management has firmly shifted to a buyer's market. With a few career-specific exceptions, **colleges need enrollments more than students believe they need a college degree.**

One key theme to emerge this year was an increase in the number of colleges students are applying to. This increase, along with the uncertainty caused by FAFSA delays, indicates that students are taking a more comprehensive and exploratory approach to higher education.

Financial considerations remain critical, with many students growing more averse to application fees. At the same time, direct admissions programs have influenced student choices by streamlining the application process. Campus visits have rebounded in importance, and factors such as campus safety, student and faculty diversity and scholarship availability have risen in importance for prospective college students, underscoring their evolving priorities and challenges.





STUDENT MINDSETS:

*Strengths &
challenges*



Barriers to enrollment

53% of enrolling students

said unnecessary barriers led them to abandon applications for colleges they were interested in attending — or decide not to apply at all. The application was even more of a barrier for underrepresented minority students and first-gen students (57%)

MOST COMMON BARRIERS:

- ☀ *Application fees*
- ☀ *Too many additional requirements to submit the application*
- ☀ *Application length*



80% of enrolling students

reported having significant challenges with their enrollment.

Almost half of students said applying for financial aid was a barrier. The other most common challenges were narrowing down where to apply and keeping track of the differing deadlines.

Student Confidence

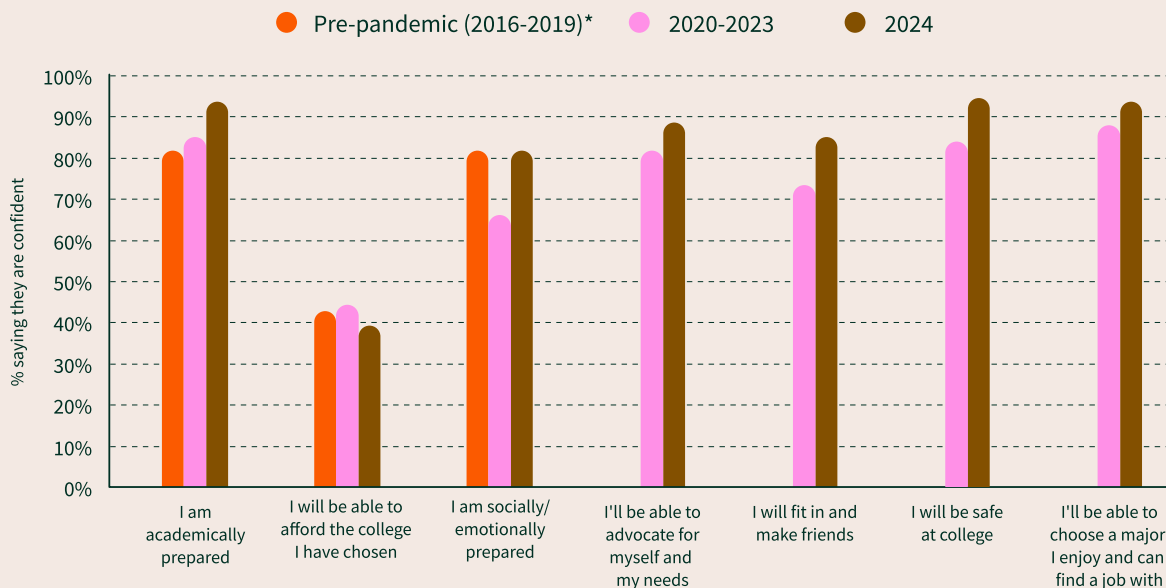
THE CLASS OF 2024 WAS MORE CONFIDENT THAN PRIOR YEARS' CLASSES IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

- ◆ Academic preparation
- ◆ Finding a major they love and could get a job with
- ◆ Safety in college
- ◆ Ability to advocate for themselves
- ◆ Making friends and fitting in
- ◆ Social and emotional preparation

While student confidence rose across the board, there was one exception. **Their confidence in affording college fell from 42% in 2023 to 39% this year.**

Only 32% of low-income students were confident in their ability to afford the college they had chosen and they were less confident if they planned to enroll at a public 4-year college.

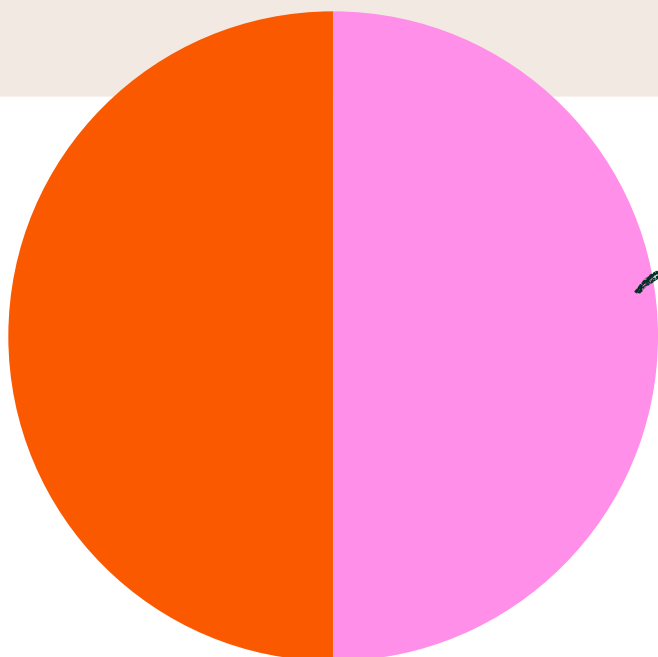
STUDENT CONFIDENCE



Hot topics and news headlines

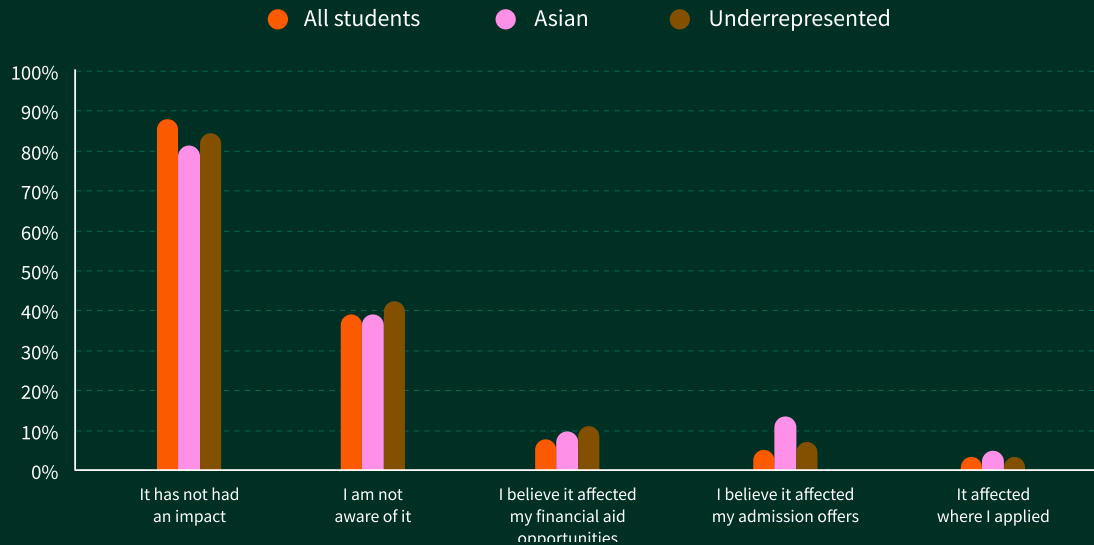
Hot topics in the news **didn't weigh as heavily on students** as on professionals. Only **9% of students** said politics influenced their enrollment decision and **3% of students** said their parents' politics affected their choice.

“As a racial minority, I did not want to attend a school in a conservative state.”



There was an even split in the frequency of parents wanting their children to avoid a state because of state politics and wanting to avoid particular institutions because of their perceived political views.

IMPACT OF THE SCOTUS RULING ON RACE IN ADMISSIONS



88% of students said the SCOTUS decision had no impact on them.

The SCOTUS decision on the use of race in recruitment and admissions decisions still weighs heavily on campus leaders, but 88% of students said it had no impact on them and 39% said they were unaware of it.

Even underrepresented minority students largely said they were unaffected by the decision, as far as they knew (84%). Similar to their peers, 42% were unaware of the decision.

Only 4% of students reported that news of college closures affected their perception or decision. For students whose decisions were impacted, most often it was because a college they were strongly considering closed.

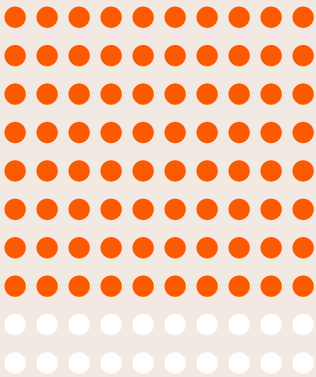


Protests and activism

80%

of students

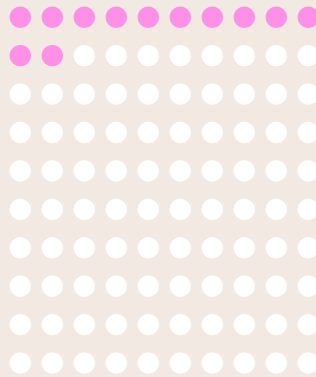
said campus protests didn't affect their decision.



12%

of students

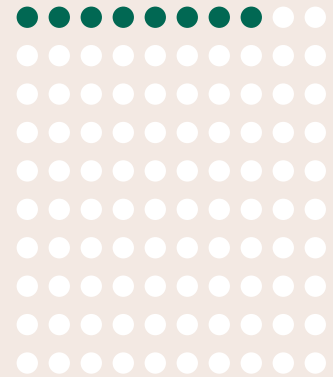
said they chose a college to avoid protests.



8%

of students

chose a college because of protests and activism.



“At admitted students day at [College], protestors totally took over the presentations at the private event and their security did **NOTHING** to stop them. Although I was accepted to [College’s] neuroscience program, I turned them down. Two weeks later the protestors pretty much took over the campus. **I made the right choice!**”

Students care a great deal about their experience and the culture of their college



54%

of students

said a college's name recognition (brand) was an important factor in their decision. In fact, 10% said it was one of the most important factors.

It was most important to students at private schools, from households earning \$150,000+ per year and those who selected large colleges.

★ RELIGIOUS LIFE

Interest in religious life opportunities on campus remained a notable storyline for the class of 2024 with almost one-third of students saying that it factored into their decision.

★ SAFETY

Safety was the top campus consideration for students this year with 86% saying campus safety influenced their decision and 83% saying the same about the town/community safety.

★ ARTS AND CULTURE

51% of students said that arts and culture on campus factored into their decision while only 35% said that athletics experiences (as either a participant or fan) did.

★ PROXIMITY TO HOME

Staying close to home was more important to low-income students, first-gen students and students attending urban high schools.

Campus diversity, HBCUs, HSIs and today's students

60%

of students

said they were influenced by diverse student bodies and 64% said the same about diverse faculty and staff.

77%

of African American or Black students

considered a Historically Black College or University this year.

56%

of Hispanic or Latinx students

considered a Hispanic Serving Institution.

Diverse student bodies were important to half of white students, 72% of underrepresented minority students and 73% of Asian students.

Diverse faculty and staff were important to 48% of white students, 67% of Asian students and 68% of underrepresented minority students.

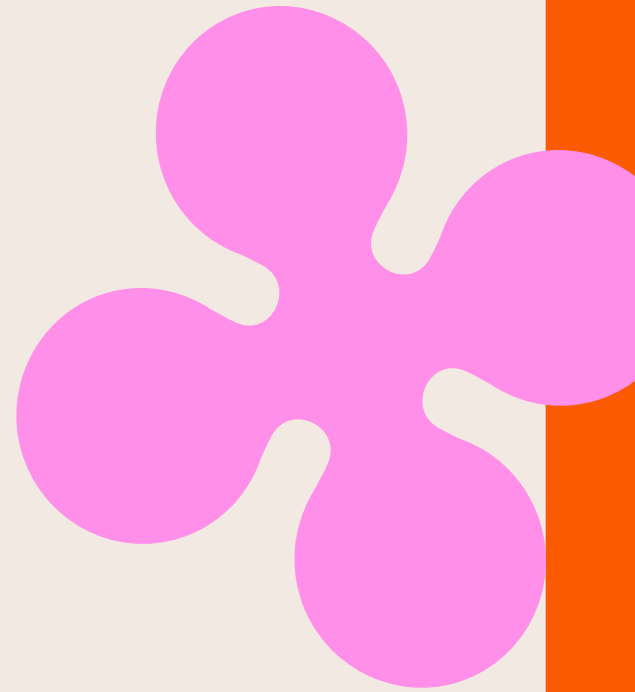
24% of African American or Black students said they are enrolling at an HBCU.

9% of Hispanic or Latinx students indicated that they were enrolling at an HSI.



THE STATE OF THE FUNNEL

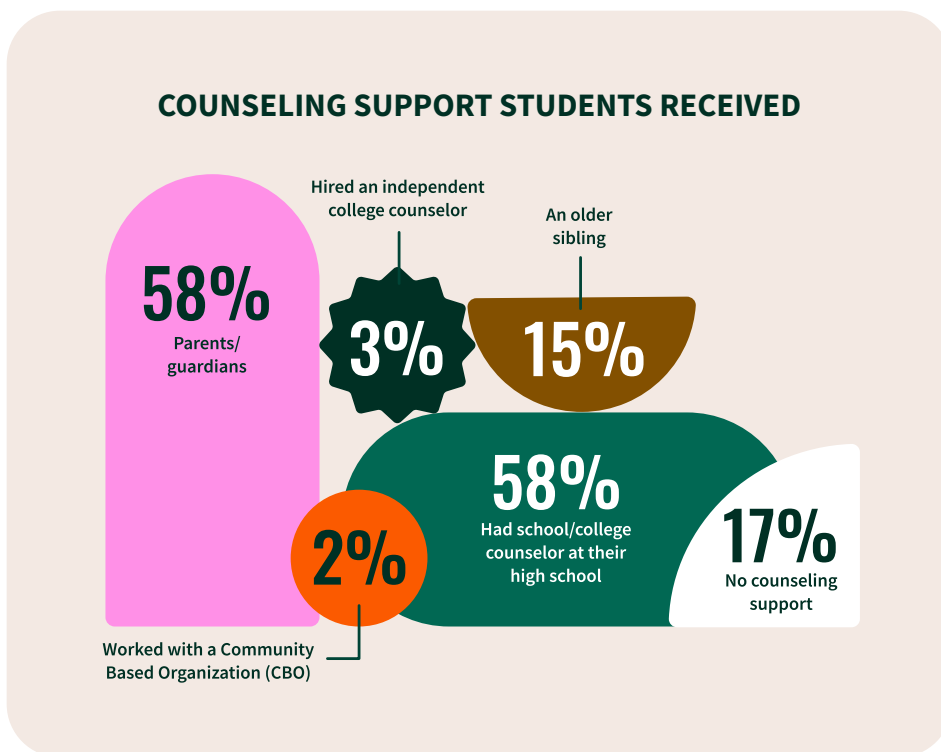
in 2024



Awareness and engagement

Parents/guardians and school or college counselors remained the most utilized counseling resources.

Each was used by 58% of students for college guidance.



AI IN THE COLLEGE SEARCH

Only 2% of students said that AI tools were helpful in their search.

If you focus time and resources on removing barriers and building affinity instead, you'll see much greater impact.

37% of students reported that they met with a college rep who visited their high school and 30% of students attended a college fair, but **the majority did neither.**

Only 8% of students said they used AI tools in their college search and only 2% said they were helpful.



91% of students filled out an inquiry form to learn more about a college and 42% inquired at five or more colleges.

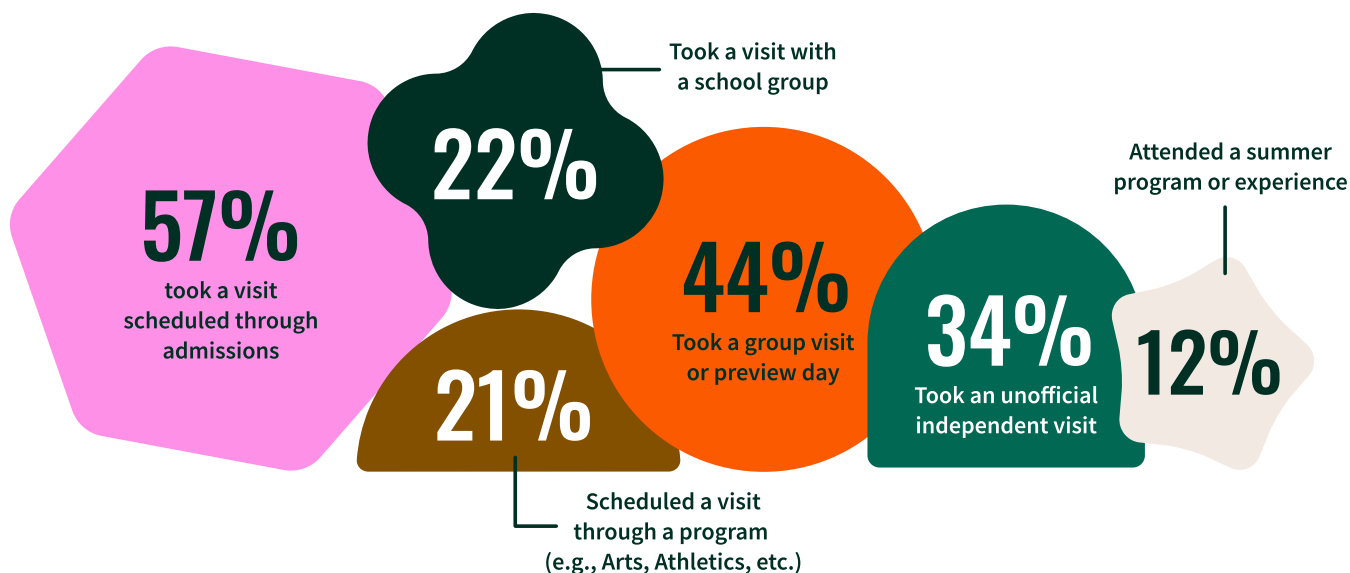
NUMBER OF INQUIRY FORMS FILLED OUT

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
0	16%	19%	28%	13%	9%
1	14%	12%	12%	10%	13%
2	11%	11%	14%	14%	12%
3	12%	13%	13%	11%	14%
4	9%	8%	8%	9%	10%
5+	38%	37%	25%	42%	42%

Campus visits: the quick facts

- Campus visits have rebounded, but have **still not reached pre-pandemic levels.**
- **89% of students visited a campus prior to enrolling** and 21% visited more than five.
- Two-thirds of respondents took an individual visit scheduled through admissions and **84% of those students said it influenced their decision.**
- Fewer students (54%) attended a group visit day, but **82% found it influential.**
- Only 28% scheduled a visit through athletics or arts programs but **76% found it influential.**
- 16% of students attended summer programs and **73% found them influential.**
- **High school group visits to campuses were the least influential** with 32% having taken one and 69% saying that it influenced their decision.
- 83% of students who took a visit said they are **enrolling at the college that offered the best visit experience.**

CAMPUS VISIT EXPERIENCE





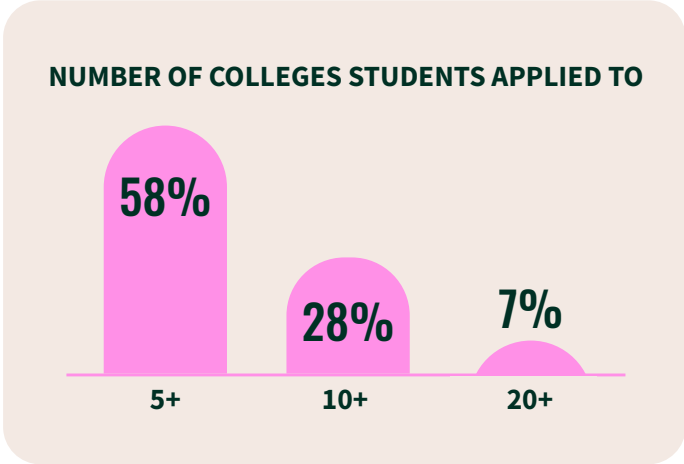
NUMBER OF COLLEGE VISITS TAKEN

	PRE-PANDEMIC (2016-2019 AVG)	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
0	6%	15%	28%	19%	12%	11%
1	15%	18%	21%	22%	20%	20%
2	20%	20%	19%	21%	21%	21%
3	19%	16%	13%	15%	14%	17%
4	12%	9%	6%	8%	10%	10%
5+	29%	22%	12%	15%	22%	21%

The application process

Students applied to an average of **eight** colleges this year.

Twice as many as they applied to in 2019.



“The college application process can be unpredictable, even with strong grades and test scores. Applying to a few more schools increases my odds of getting into a program that excites me.”

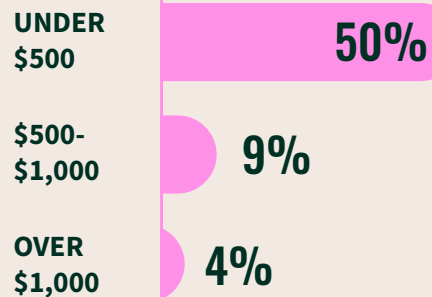
NUMBER OF COLLEGES APPLIED TO

	PRE-PANDEMIC (2016-2019 AVG)	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
DIRECT ADMISSIONS ONLY					0.01%	1%
1	14%	15%	11%	11%	12%	11%
2	12%	12%	10%	10%	10%	11%
3	13%	12%	11%	10%	9%	8%
4	11%	10%	9%	10%	9%	10%
5+	51%	51%	59%	59%	60%	59%
10+	18%	19%	25%	26%	28%	28%

37% of students — and over half of first-generation students — chose not to apply to colleges that had an application fee.



WHAT STUDENTS SPENT ON APPLICATION FEES



APPLICATIONS BY SCHOOL TYPE

	STUDENTS APPLYING	AVG APPS TO THIS TYPE OF INSTITUTION
2-YEAR COMMUNITY COLLEGE	38%	4
2-YEAR CAREER OR TECHNICAL COLLEGE	12%	1
4-YEAR PUBLIC	63%	5
4-YEAR PRIVATE	62%	4
4-YEAR FOR-PROFIT	16%	3
ONLY 2-YEAR	10%	4
ONLY 4-YEAR	58%	7

Acceptance trends show lower yield

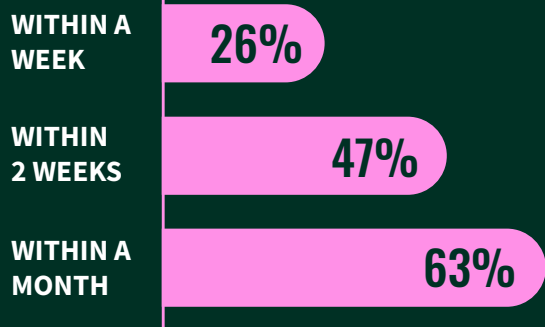
THEN

NOW

In 2020, 20% of students reported being accepted to one college and 8% to 10 or more.

This year, 9% of students reported being accepted to one college and 22% to 10 or more.

WHEN STUDENTS RECEIVED AN ADMISSIONS DECISION



Over 90% of students who heard back within two weeks said they were happy with the timeliness.

The majority were happy as long as they heard back within a month.

NUMBER OF COLLEGE ACCEPTANCES

	PRE-PANDEMIC (2016-2019 AVG)	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
1	19%	20%	16%	17%	16%	9%
2	17%	16%	14%	14%	14%	14%
3	16%	15%	14%	14%	13%	10%
4	12%	12%	12%	12%	11%	12%
5+	34%	37%	44%	43%	45%	55%
10+	6%	8%	10%	11%	12%	22%

Student perceptions of direct admissions pathways

1%

1% of students did not apply to any colleges and were accepted solely through direct admissions programs.

22%

22% of students who received a direct admissions offer are enrolling at a college that offered them acceptance through the program, making them 57% more likely to yield based on the average number of acceptances.

73%

73% of students said the direct admissions experience was easy for them, another 23% said it varied by college.



DIRECT ADMISSIONS AWARENESS

- * 37% of students who received a direct admissions offer were **previously unaware** of the college that offered them acceptance, **but very interested after**.
- * 21% were aware of the college before receiving an offer and were **more interested after**.

DIRECT ADMISSIONS IMPACT

- * 71% of students who received a direct admissions offer said **eliminating the wait time for acceptance** was impactful.
- * 84% of students who received **upfront scholarship information** said receiving that information was impactful.



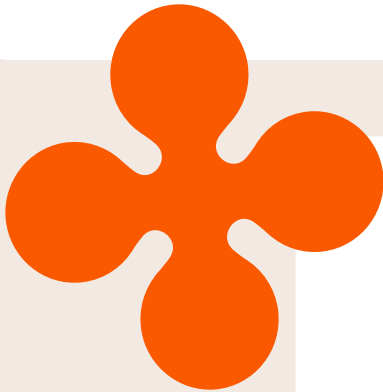
STUDENT DECISION- MAKING

is complicated



“I’m still waiting for a decision from [College] where I was placed on the waitlist.”

“I didn’t get enough financial aid from the colleges I got accepted to.”



“It’s June 10 and I’m still waiting for the financial offer.”

44% of students who were undecided were waiting on financial aid.

As of June 17, 5% of respondents said they hadn’t made a decision about where to enroll in the fall yet.

Of this these students, 30% were having difficulty making a final commitment and 10% were weighing whether to attend college at all.

Who is influencing students' decisions?

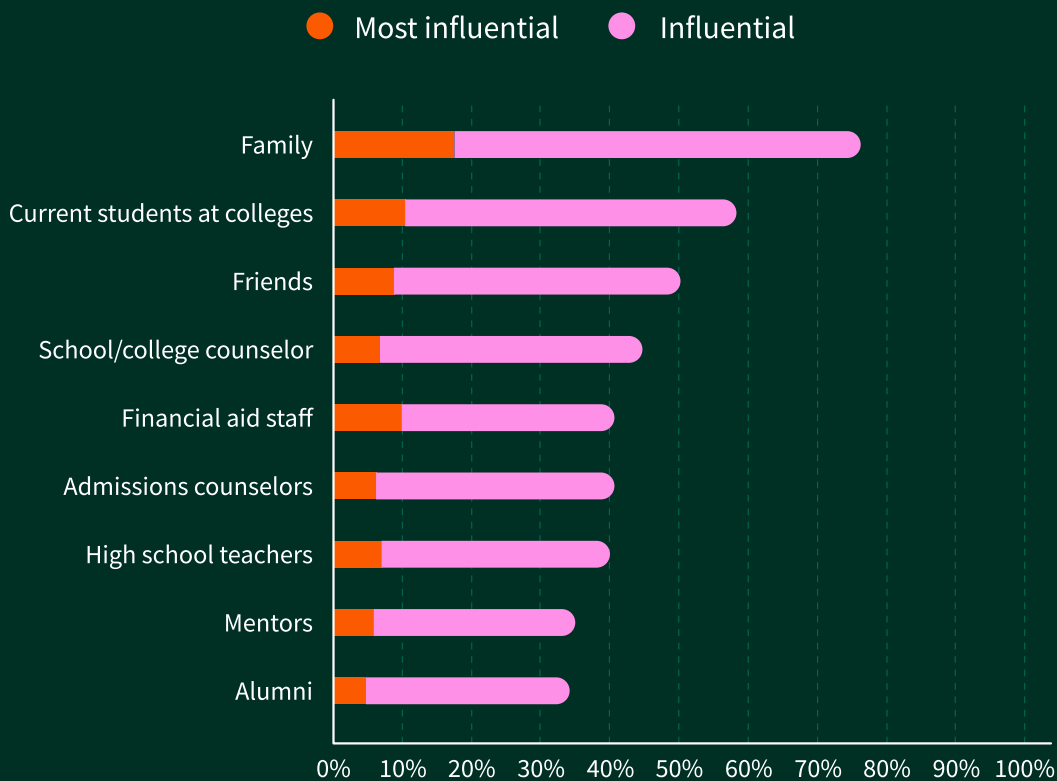
58% of students said their parents or guardians influenced their decision.



Another 18% said their parents or guardians were the most influential people in their decision-making.

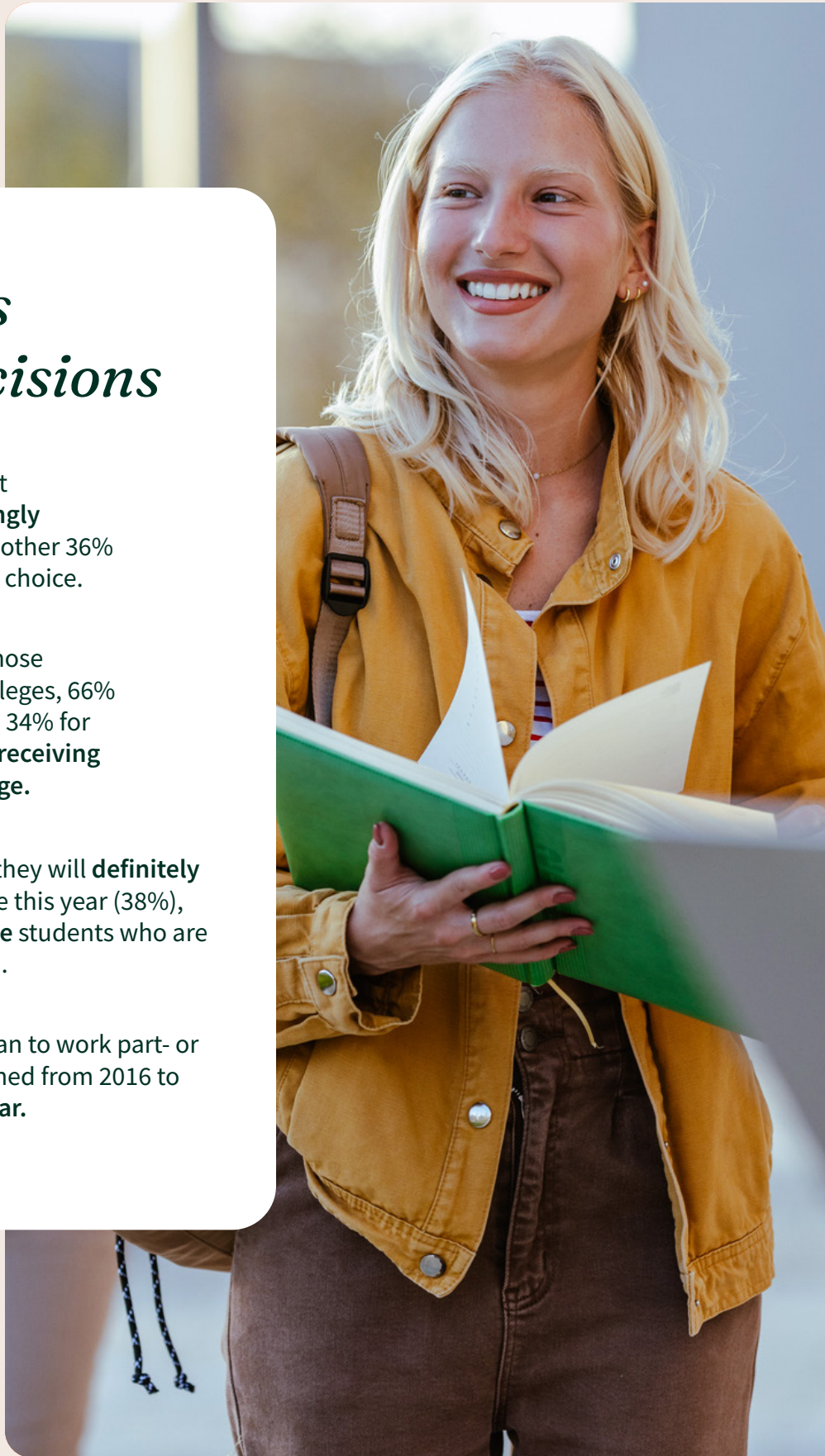


KEY INFLUENCERS IN ENROLLMENT DECISIONS

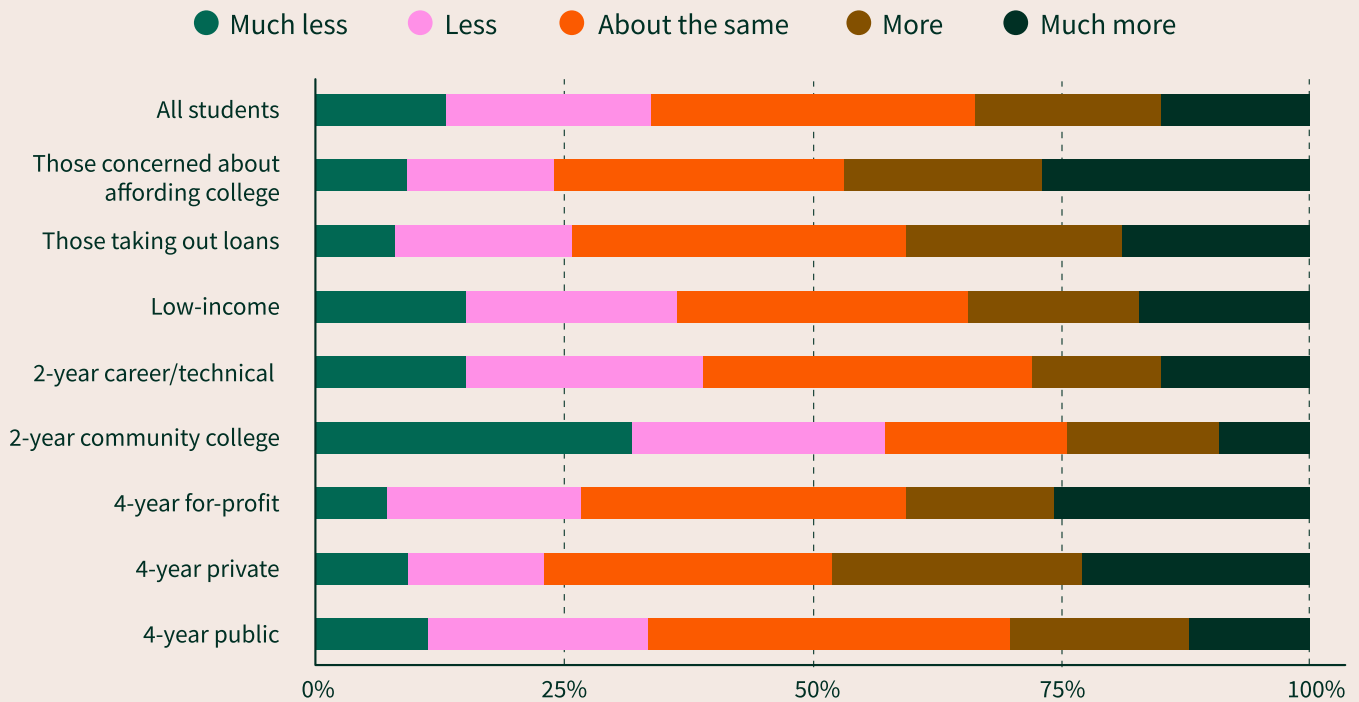


Cost and aid's impact on decisions

- 48% of students reported that **scholarship availability strongly influenced their decision**. Another 36% said that it factored into their choice.
- 69% of all students (89% of those enrolling at 4-year private colleges, 66% for 4-year public colleges and 34% for 2-year institutions) **reported receiving financial aid from their college**.
- More students reported that they will **definitely** be taking out loans for college this year (38%), but there was also an **increase** students who are undecided about loans (39%).
- The share of students who plan to work part- or full-time while enrolled declined from 2016 to 2023, but **rose to 78% this year**.



COST OF CHOSEN COLLEGE COMPARED TO OTHER OPTIONS



Breakdown

- * **34% of students chose a college that was less expensive than their other options and 34% chose a college that was more expensive than their other options.**
- * **47% of students who reportedly weren't confident in their ability to afford the college they selected also chose a college more expensive than their other options.**
- * **Only 17% of those who selected a community college were paying more than they would have at their other options while 48% of those who selected a 4-year private college did.**
- * **Two-thirds of students who said they were taking on \$30,000 or more in loans this year also chose a more expensive college.**

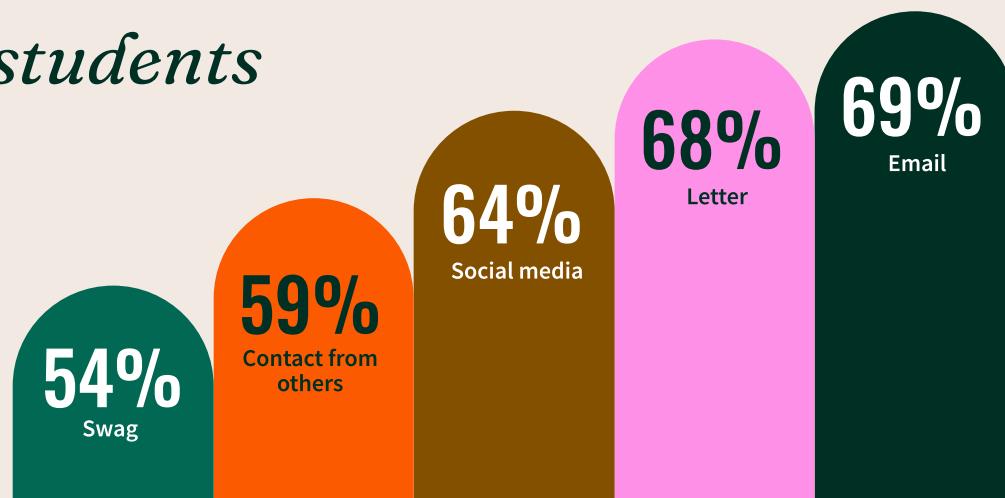


ENROLLMENT MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

need a refresh



Influence of marketing tactics and channels on students



The majority of students reported that emails, letters, social media, contact from people advocating for colleges and swag had a positive influence on their decision.

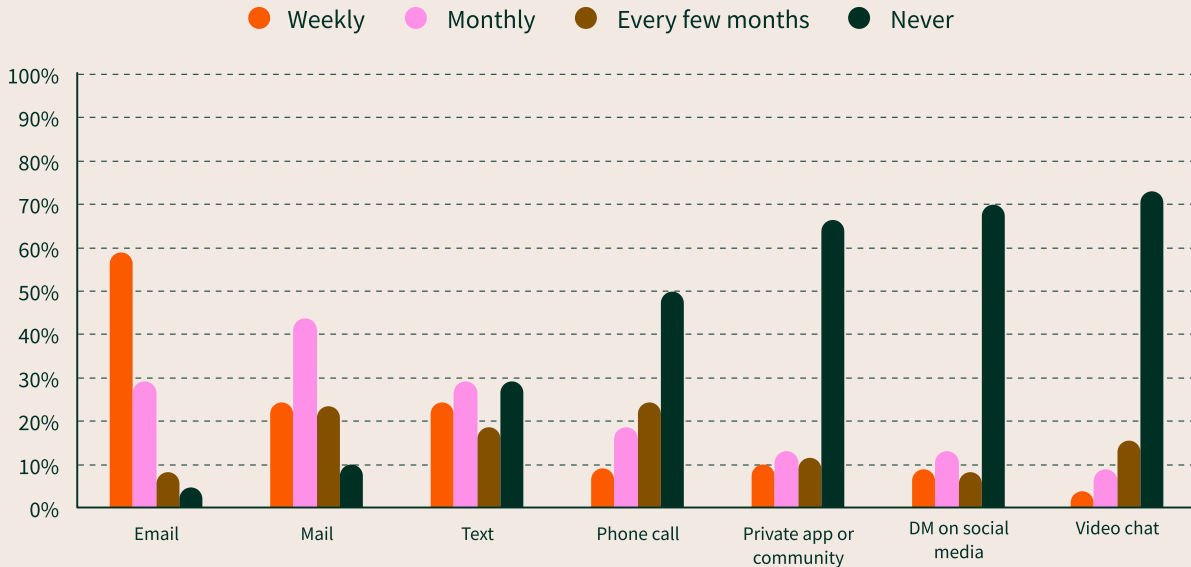
Only 12% of students used a chatbot in their search and just 32% of those who did said it was a positive influence.

While almost **two-thirds of students** received text messages, almost half of those students indicated that texts **did not** have a positive impact on their decision.



Outreach frequency

HIGHEST ACCEPTABLE FREQUENCY FOR OUTREACH



Most students were not open to outreach through a private app or community, DMs on social media or a video chat.

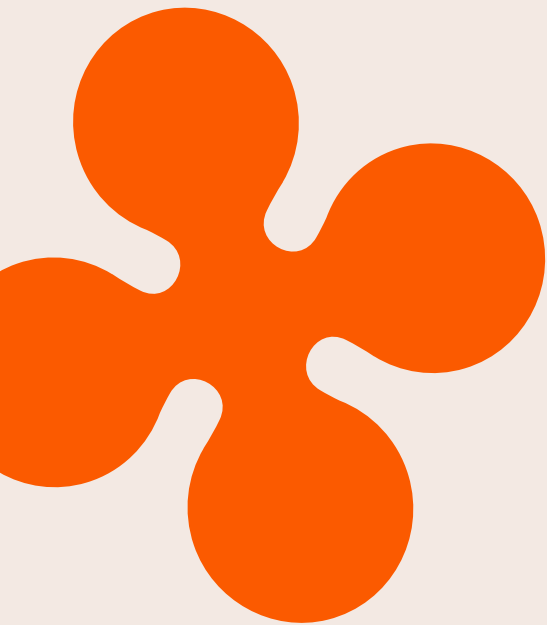
However, 59% of students were open to weekly emails and 50% to phone calls.

WHAT INFORMATION FROM COLLEGES STOOD OUT THE MOST?

- Student life
- Major/academic information
- Financial aid
- Study abroad
- Outreach from faculty
- Swag

Methodology and respondent demographics

This was our ninth year conducting the Niche Enrollment Survey. We received completed responses from 15,764 students.



Students who had not yet made their decision were disqualified since we wanted to focus on the process of making the enrollment decision.

The survey was sent to seniors who had registered on the Niche platform and it was also made available on the site for unregistered users and discoverable from searches. The survey was open from May 3, 2024 to June 17, 2024.

There was no significant change in the breakdown of respondents' race or ethnicity from prior years.

If a respondent identified as Asian or Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, we provided **additional options to gain further insight** into their ethnic identity.

These options are taken from guidance from the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center's "Everyone Deserves to Be Seen" policy brief. In the results below, any Asian ethnic group that represented at least 0.5% is shown while others are grouped as Asian - Other. **We provided over 30 choices for race and ethnicity**, so some will be grouped in charts for space.

RACE OR ETHNICITY

AFRICAN AMERICAN OR BLACK	15%
AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE	<1%
ASIAN - CHINESE	1%
ASIAN - FILIPINO	1%
ASIAN - INDIAN	1%
ASIAN - KOREAN	<1%
ASIAN - VIETNAMESE	1%
ASIAN - OTHER	2%
CAUCASIAN OR WHITE	30%
HISPANIC OR LATINX	13%
MIDDLE EASTERN OR NORTH AFRICAN	1%
MULTIRACIAL	11%
NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER	<1%
I DO NOT KNOW	1%
CHOSE NOT TO RESPOND	22%

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Household income quintiles from students were representative of the general U.S. population, with some students choosing not to respond and others not knowing their household income.

UNDER \$28,000	11%
\$28,000-\$54,999	14%
\$55,000-\$89,999	14%
\$90,000-\$150,000	15%
ABOVE \$150,000	8%
I DO NOT KNOW	16%
CHOSE NOT TO RESPOND	22%




PARENTS' EDUCATION LEVEL

Student reports of their parents' or guardians' education level varied in some places from the most recent [U.S. Census data](#). Compared to the census data, there were fewer students whose parents/guardians had a high school diploma as their highest degree, but others were similar with expected higher attainment for students who are more likely to be enrolling in college.

By giving students the ability to separate education levels for each parent, we can better understand how student behaviors might differ if only one parent has a college degree versus both.

When split this way, 27% of respondents were first-generation college students (neither parent had a college degree from any country), 19% were a progressing generation (one parent had a degree and another did not) and 30% had two parents with a college degree.

	PARENT/ GUARDIAN 1	PARENT/ GUARDIAN 2
LESS THAN A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA	5%	8%
HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA	13%	17%
SOME COLLEGE, NO DEGREE	9%	13%
ASSOCIATE DEGREE	7%	7%
BACHELOR'S DEGREE	23%	18%
MASTER'S DEGREE	19%	8%
DOCTORAL OR PROFESSIONAL DEGREE	6%	2%
DO NOT HAVE THIS PERSON	18%	5%
CHOSE NOT TO RESPOND	18%	23%



Well-deserved appreciation and your next steps

We'll be discussing these results in an upcoming webinar and we encourage you to stop by our booth at the NACAC, AACRAO SEM or AMA Higher Ed conferences in the fall of 2024 if you want to chat more about Niche data and insights.

This project could not be done without a team supporting the survey design, collection and visualization. Working with a team of people who are focused on making the information as accessible and valuable as possible ultimately in support of students is an incredible experience.



Thank you all!

Will Patch

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