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CHAPTER 1 COLLEGE APPLICATIONS

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

Application Volume

Results of the 2017–18 Admission Trends Survey indicate that the average number of applications increased for each group of prospective students between the Fall 2016 and Fall 2017 admission cycles.

Applications from first-time freshmen increased by 4 percent, on average, and applications from prospective transfer students increased by 3 percent. The percent increase in applications was greater

at private institutions than publics for both first-time freshmen and transfer students.¹

Although applications from international students represented the smallest proportion of all applications received, they increased by 8 percent from Fall 2016 to Fall 2017.² Applications for each group of prospective students also had increased from Fall 2015 to Fall 2016, by 7 percent, 1 percent, and 10 percent, respectively.

According to the Higher Education Research Institute's *The American Freshmen* report series, 35 percent of first-time freshmen applied to seven or more colleges during the Fall 2016 admission cycle, after reaching a peak of 36 percent in Fall 2015. Since Fall 2013, more than 80 percent of first-time freshmen have applied to at least three colleges each year (see Figure 1).

PERCENT CHANGE IN THE NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS BETWEEN FALL 2016 AND FALL 2017



Transfer
3%



First-time freshmen
4%



International
8%

¹ Independent t-tests indicated there were significant differences in percent change in applicants and control for both freshman ($t(454) = .466, p < .01$); and transfer students ($t(321) = 1.1, p < .01$).

² International percent change responses trimmed 5 percent due to extreme outliers.

Application volume increases have created a growing burden on admission office staff who evaluate prospective students for admission. According to Admission Trends Survey results, the average number of applications for each admission office staff member (excluding administrative staff) for the Fall 2017 admission cycle was 791 for public institutions and 426 for privates. The number of applications per admission officer

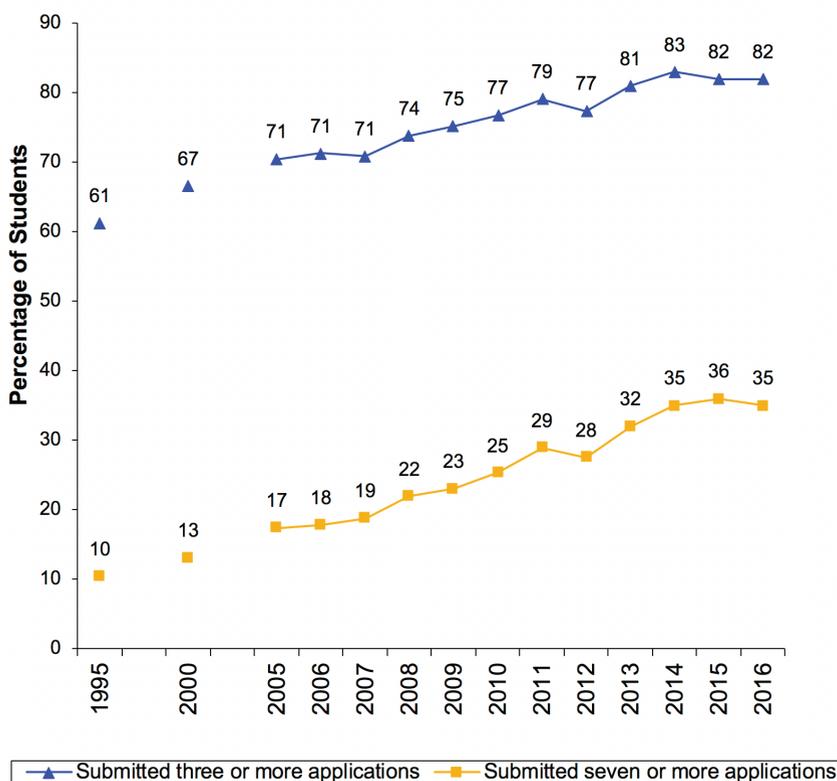
increases with both applicant selectivity rates and enrollment size (see Table 1).

Acceptance and Yield Rates

The acceptance rate for a college or university is defined as the percentage of applicants who are offered admission. Institutions with lower acceptance rates are considered more highly selective, meaning a smaller number of applicants are admitted. The selectivity of US postsecondary

institutions range from acceptance rates of fewer than 10 percent to more than 90 percent of applicants. An institution's yield rate is defined as the percentage of admitted students who ultimately enroll at the institution, after considering other admission offers. Although yield rates may have little relevance to prospective students, accurately predicting yield is critical to colleges looking to avoid either over- or under-enrollment.

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



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

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

First-Time Freshmen

According to the most recent data collected by the US Department of Education, the national average acceptance rate for first-time freshmen across all four-year institutions in the US was 65.4 percent, after increasing steadily from a low of 63.9 percent in Fall 2012 to 66.1 percent in Fall 2015. For Fall 2016, the average acceptance rate at private institutions was about 6 percentage points lower than the average rate at public institutions (63.5 percent versus 69.1 percent).

The most selective four-year colleges—defined as those accepting less than half of all applicants—received 36 percent of all Fall 2016 applications but enrolled only 21 percent of first-time undergraduate students. Nearly two-thirds of first-time, full-time freshmen (68 percent) were enrolled in institutions with selectivity rates between 50 percent and 85 percent (see Table 2).

For the Fall 2016 freshman class, the average yield rate among four-year colleges and universities was 33.6 percent, down from 35.1 percent in Fall 2015 and 36.2 percent in Fall 2014.

TABLE 1. APPLICATIONS PER ADMISSION OFFICER, FALL 2017

	N	Mean
<i>Control</i>		
Public	53	791
Private	100	426
<i>Enrollment</i>		
Fewer than 3,000 students	77	296
3,000 to 9,999	43	670
10,000 or more	30	1,016
<i>Selectivity</i>		
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	25	915
50 to 70 percent	64	534
71 to 85 percent	51	429
More than 85 percent	12	435

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

NOTE: Independent *t*-tests and one-way ANOVAs indicated there were significant differences in the application to admission officer ratio by: control ($t(151) = 4.9, p < .001$); enrollment ($F(2, 147) = 51.6, p < .001$), and acceptance rate ($F(3, 148) = 7.3, p < .001$).

Pearson correlation applications per admission officer and: enrollment $.588, p < .01$; acceptance rate $-.313, p < .01$. What about control *t*-test?

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2017–18.

Transfer and International Students

Among 2017–18 Admission Trends Survey respondents that

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

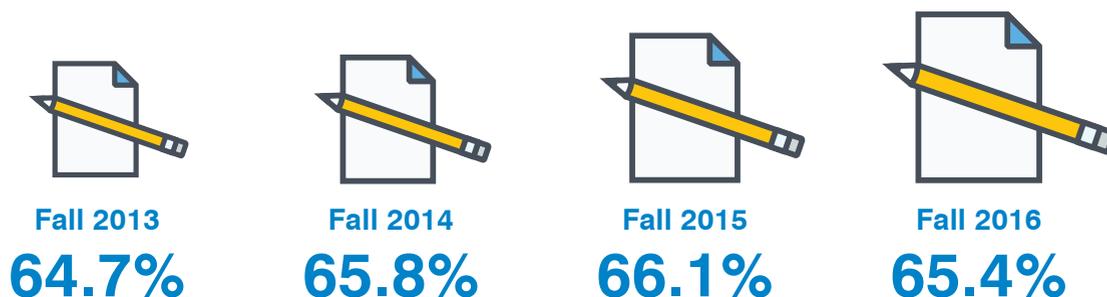
population (62 percent compared to 65 percent). However, the yield for accepted transfer students was much higher (54 percent compared to 28 percent).

A similar analysis of institutions that accept international students showed that first-time international students are accepted at a lower rate (52 percent) than both transfer students and first-time freshmen. The yield rate for international students was 30 percent, indicating they were only slightly more likely to enroll than accepted first-time freshmen applicants (see Table 3).

Application Fees

Results of the Admission Trends Survey indicate that 74 percent of four-year, not-for-profit colleges had an application fee for the Fall 2017 admission cycle, which averaged \$49. Public colleges were more likely to report having an application fee than privates (94 percent versus 62 percent), but no difference was found in the average fee amount.³ Larger enrollment sizes and lower selectivity rates were associated with higher average fees.⁴

THE AVERAGE ACCEPTANCE RATE FOR FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN



³ Chi-squared test control and application fee ($X^2(1) = 47.6, p < .001$; $\phi = .351, p < .001$).

⁴ Pearson correlations for application fee amount and: enrollment ($.218$), acceptance rate ($-.433$), $p < .01$.

TABLE 2. APPLICATIONS AND ENROLLMENT, BY SELECTIVITY: FALL 2016

Selectivity	National share of institutions	Average number of applications per institution	National share of applications	National share of full-time, first-time degree seeking undergraduates
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	19.5%	11,969	36.0%	20.9%
50 to 70 percent	36.6	5,936	33.4	35.6
71 to 85 percent	27.7	5,648	24.1	32.0
More than 85 percent	16.2	2,635	6.6	11.5

N = 1,596

SOURCE: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2016–17). *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Data Center*. Washington, DC: NCES. [Includes Title-IV participating, four-year public and private not-for-profit, degree-granting (primarily baccalaureate) institutions in the US that enroll first-time freshman and are not open admission.]

TABLE 3. KEY STATISTICS FOR TRANSFER AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADMISSION:
FALL 2017

Transfer	N	Mean
Transfer Selectivity Rate	364	61.7%
Overall Freshman Selectivity Rate for Institutions with Transfer Students	353	64.7%
Transfer Yield Rate	363	53.5%
Overall Yield Rate for Institutions with Transfer Students	331	27.7%
International	N	Mean
International Selectivity Rate	263	51.7%
Overall Freshman Selectivity Rate for Institutions with International Students	341	64.5%
International Yield Rate	263	30.4%
Overall Yield Rate for Institutions with International Students	321	27.8%

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2017–18.