

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Highlights from the 2018 *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 2018 report also includes information about the recruitment and admission process for transfer and international students.

## College Applications

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

- **Growth in Application Volume Continues:** Between the Fall 2016 and Fall 2017 admission cycles, the number of applications from first-time freshmen increased 4 percent; applications from prospective transfer students increased by 3 percent; and international student applications increased by 8 percent, on average.
- **Colleges Accept Nearly Two-Thirds of First-Time Freshmen, 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

65.4 percent for Fall 2016.<sup>1</sup> The national average acceptance rate is down slightly after increasing steadily from a low of 63.9 percent in Fall 2012 to 66.1 percent in Fall 2015.

- **Decline in Average Yield Rate for First-Time Freshmen Continues:** The average yield rate for Fall 2016 (33.6 percent) is down from 35.1 percent in Fall 2015 and 36.2 percent in Fall 2014.
- **Transfer Acceptance Rate Slightly Lower than Freshmen Rate; Yield Much Higher:** Among institutions that enroll transfer students, average selectivity for Fall 2017 was 62 percent, compared to 65 percent for first-time freshmen. However, more than half (54 percent) of transfer applicants who were admitted ultimately enrolled, compared to only 28 percent of freshman admits.
- **International Student Acceptance Rate is Low; Yield Slightly Higher than First-Time Freshmen:** At institutions that enroll first-time international students, the Fall 2017 admit rate for this population (52 percent) was lower than both transfer and first-time freshmen students. The average yield rate for international students was 30 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:** Email and institutional websites are the primary means by which colleges recruit first-time freshmen, transfer students, and international students. However, colleges employ a broader range of strategies when recruiting domestic high school students. Four other factors were each rated as considerably important by at least 50 percent of colleges—hosting campus visits, outreach to parents and high school counselors, high school visits, and college fairs.
- **Early Decision (ED) and Early Action (EA) Activity Increases:** Between Fall 2016 and Fall 2017, colleges reported an average increase of 4 percent in the number of Early Decision applicants and 5 percent in ED admits. The number of Early Action applications increased by 9 percent and the number of students accepted through EA increased by 10 percent.

<sup>1</sup> Based on US Department of Education data. Fall 2016 is the most recent available.

- **Wait List Activity Increases; Likelihood of Wait List Acceptance Remains Low:** For the Fall 2017 admission cycle, 40 percent of institutions reported using a wait list. Institutions accepted an average of 25 percent of all students who chose to remain on wait lists. From Fall 2016 to Fall 2017, the number of students offered a place on an admission wait list increased by 12 percent, on average.

### Factors in Admission Decisions

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

- **Admission Offices Identify Grades, High School Curriculum, and Test Scores as Top Factors for First-Time Freshmen:** The top factors in the admission decision were: overall high school GPA, grades in college preparatory courses, admission test scores, and strength of curriculum. Among the next most important factors were the essay, a student's demonstrated interest, counselor and teacher recommendations, class rank, and extracurricular activities.
- **Top Factor for International Students is English Proficiency Exam Scores:** After English proficiency, the factors for admission decisions with international applicants are remarkably similar to those for domestic students, with one notable exception. A greater proportion of colleges rated the essay/writing sample as considerably important for international applicants, likely because of the additional confirmation of English skills that the essay provides.
- **For Transfer Admission Decisions, Grades Matter Most:** The only transfer admission decision factors rated considerably important by a substantial proportion of colleges were overall GPA at the student's prior postsecondary institution and average grades in transferrable courses.
- **College Counseling Staff:** For the 2017–18 academic year, 33 percent of public schools reported employing at least one counselor (full- or part-time) whose exclusive responsibility was to provide college counseling, compared to 68 percent of private schools.
- **Time Available for College Counseling:** 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 21 percent of their time on postsecondary counseling in 2017–18, while their private school counterparts spent 47 percent of their time on college counseling.

### College Counseling in Secondary Schools

Access to college information and counseling in school is a significant benefit to students in the college application process. For many students, particularly those in public schools, college counseling is limited at best. Counselors are few in number, often have large student caseloads, and have additional constraints on the amount of time they can dedicate to college counseling.

- **Student-to-Counselor Ratio:** According to US Department of Education data, in 2015-16 each public school counselor (including elementary and secondary) was responsible for 470 students, on average.