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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 2016 Admission Trends Survey indicate that the average number of applications increased for each group of prospective students between the Fall 2015 and Fall 2016 admission cycles. Applications from first-time freshmen increased by 7 percent, on average, and applications from prospective transfer students increased by 1 percent. Although applications from international students represented the smallest

proportion of all applications received, they increased by 13 percent from Fall 2015 to Fall 2016.¹ Applications for each group of prospective students also had increased from Fall 2014 to Fall 2015, by 6 percent, 4 percent, and 23 percent, respectively.

According to the Higher Education Research Institute's *The American Freshmen* report series, 35 percent of first-time freshmen had 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).

Application volume increases have created a growing burden on admission office staff who evaluate prospective students for admission. According to Admission Trends Survey (AD) results, the average

PERCENT CHANGE IN THE NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS BETWEEN FALL 2015 AND FALL 2016



Transfer
1%



First-time freshmen
7%



International
13%

¹ International percent change responses trimmed 5 percent due to extreme outliers.

number of applications for each admission office staff member (excluding administrative staff) is 854. 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 in 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.

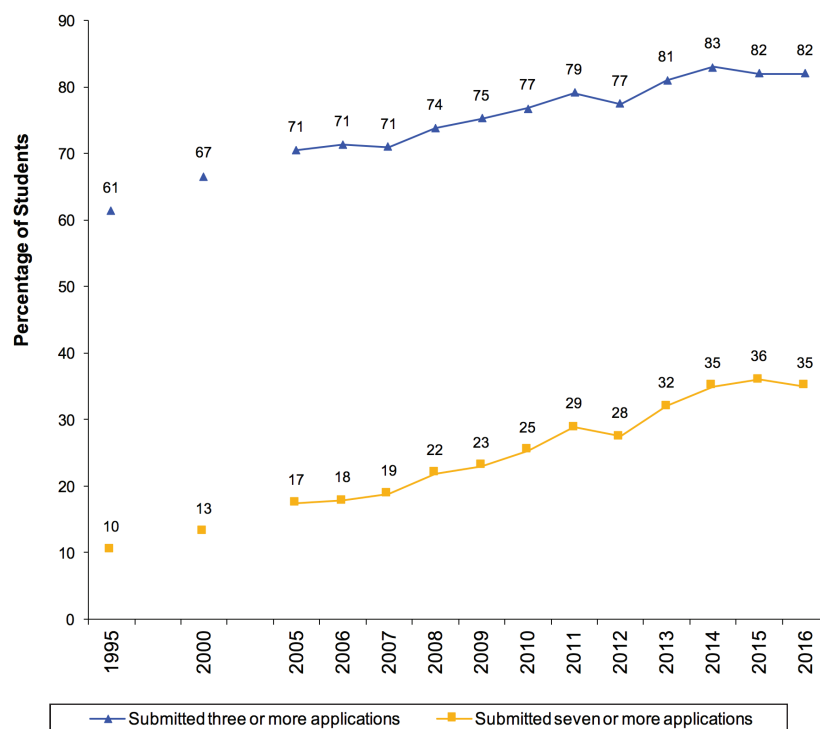
First-Time Freshmen

According to 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 nearly two-thirds (66.1 percent) for the Fall 2015 admission cycle. The rate edged up from 64.7 percent in Fall 2013, after reaching a low of 63.9 percent in Fall 2012—the year in which the total number of high school graduates reached a peak. For Fall 2015, the average acceptance rate at private institutions was about 5 percentage points lower than the average rate at public institutions (64.4 percent versus 69.5 percent).

The most selective four-year colleges—defined as those accepting less than half of all applicants—received 37 percent of all Fall 2015 applications, but enrolled only 22 percent of all first-time undergraduate students. Two-thirds of first-time, full-time freshmen (66 percent) were enrolled in institutions with selectivity rates between 50 percent and 85 percent (see Table 2).

For the Fall 2015 freshman class, the average yield rate among four-year colleges and universities was 35.1 percent, down from 36.2 percent in Fall 2014 and 35.7 percent in Fall 2013.

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, C. (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, C. (2016) *The American freshman: Fifty-Year trend, 1996–2015*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

TABLE 1. APPLICATIONS PER ADMISSION OFFICER,
FALL 2016

	N	Mean
All Survey Respondents	76	854
<i>Control</i>		
Public	28	1,472
Private	48	494
<i>Enrollment</i>		
Fewer than 3,000 students	32	317
3,000 to 9,999	33	693
10,000 or more	10	3,174
<i>Selectivity</i>		
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	14	2,011
50 to 70 percent	30	771
71 to 85 percent	22	460
More than 85 percent	10	353

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

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2016.

Transfer and International Students

Among 2016 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 66 percent). However, the yield for accepted transfer students was much higher (65 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 (55 percent) than both transfer and first-time freshmen students. The yield rate for international students was 32 percent, indicating they were only slightly more likely to enroll than accepted first-time freshmen applicants (see Table 3).

Application Fees

According to US Department of Education data, 80 percent of four-year, not-for-profit colleges had an application fee for the Fall 2015 admission cycle, which averaged \$44. Public colleges were more likely to report having application fees than privates (94 percent versus 74 percent), but no difference was found in the average fee amount. Larger enrollment sizes and lower selectivity rates were associated with higher average fees.

THE AVERAGE ACCEPTANCE RATE FOR FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN

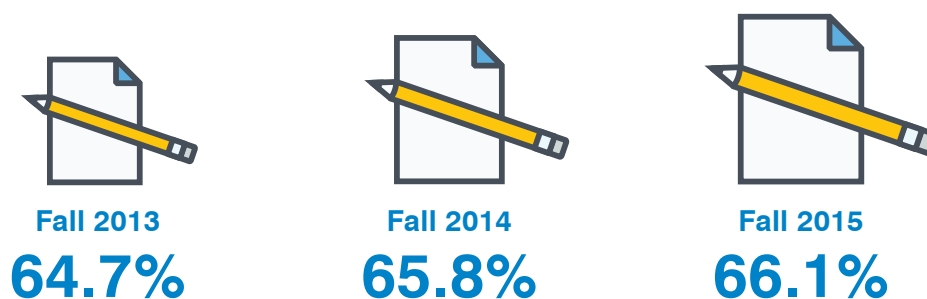


TABLE 2. APPLICATIONS AND ENROLLMENT, BY SELECTIVITY: FALL 2015

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	19.2%	11,924	36.7%	21.5%
50 to 70 percent	35.9	5,772	33.3	34.7
71 to 85 percent	28.7	5,032	23.2	31.1
More than 85 percent	16.3	2,589	6.8	12.8

N = 1,555

SOURCE: US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2015-16). *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 2016

Transfer	N	Mean
Transfer Selectivity Rate	382	62.1%
Overall Freshman Selectivity Rate for Institutions with Transfer Students	388	66.0%
Transfer Yield Rate	381	65.2%
Overall Yield Rate for Institutions with Transfer Students	389	27.6%
International	N	Mean
International Selectivity Rate	279	54.5%
Overall Freshman Selectivity Rate for Institutions with International Students	363	66.3%
International Yield Rate	279	31.7%
Overall Yield Rate for Institutions with International Students	363	27.7%

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2016.