

**INSIDE**  
HIGHER ED

2020 Survey of

# College and University Admissions Officers

A SURVEY BY *INSIDE HIGHER ED* AND GALLUP

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# THE 2020 *INSIDE HIGHER ED* SURVEY OF COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS OFFICERS

A survey by Gallup and *Inside Higher Ed*



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# FOREWORD

This study addresses important questions about admissions and recruiting policies and procedures as perceived by college leaders grappling with these issues.

Among those questions:

- Did institutions meet their enrollment goals for the current academic year?
- How much did campus closures in spring affect recruiting?
- Do admissions directors expect their college's enrollment to be lower this fall than it was a year ago?
- Have colleges taken advantage of new rules that removed a ban on offering incentives to applicants to enroll in their college?
- Which undergraduate student populations are the focus of admissions recruitment efforts?
- How prepared were colleges and admissions offices to respond to the coronavirus pandemic?
- Were admissions directors key players in their college's development of instructional plans for the fall semester?
- How confident are admissions directors that their college's plan for fall instruction will remain in place throughout the fall semester?
- Did colleges relax their standardized test requirements for applicants this year, and do they expect their current approach to become permanent?

# METHODOLOGY

This report presents findings from a quantitative survey research study that Gallup conducted on behalf of *Inside Higher Ed*. Gallup sent invitations via email to admissions directors and enrollment managers and sent regular reminders throughout the Aug. 6-30, 2020, field period. Gallup collected 433 completed or partially completed web surveys, yielding an 8 percent response rate. Respondents represented 202 public institutions, 223 private institutions and eight institutions from the for-profit sector. As an incentive for participating, *Inside Higher Ed* donated \$5 to the Reach Higher initiative for each completed survey.

## Total Participation, by Sector

	All Institutions, by Sector				Public			Private Nonprofit		
	All	Public	Private Nonprofit	For-Profit*	Doctoral	Master's/ Bacc.	Assoc.	Doctoral/ Master's	Bacc.	Assoc.*
<b>Total N</b>	433	202	223	8	62	67	70	125	78	6

\*Data not reported for these groups due to small sample size

Note: System offices and specialized institutions are categorized by sector but not by highest degree offering. Consequently, in some tables, percentages for subgroups (e.g., private doctoral/master's and private baccalaureate) may appear inconsistent with the total for the entire group (e.g., all private institutions).

Some sectors do not have data reported due to small sample sizes. Sector groupings are determined based on the 2018 Carnegie Classification for the institution. Specialty colleges – namely, Bible colleges and seminaries with a Carnegie Classification of 24 – and institutions with an enrollment of fewer than 500 students were excluded from the sample.

Gallup education consultants developed the questionnaire in collaboration with Scott Jaschik and Doug Lederman from *Inside Higher Ed*.

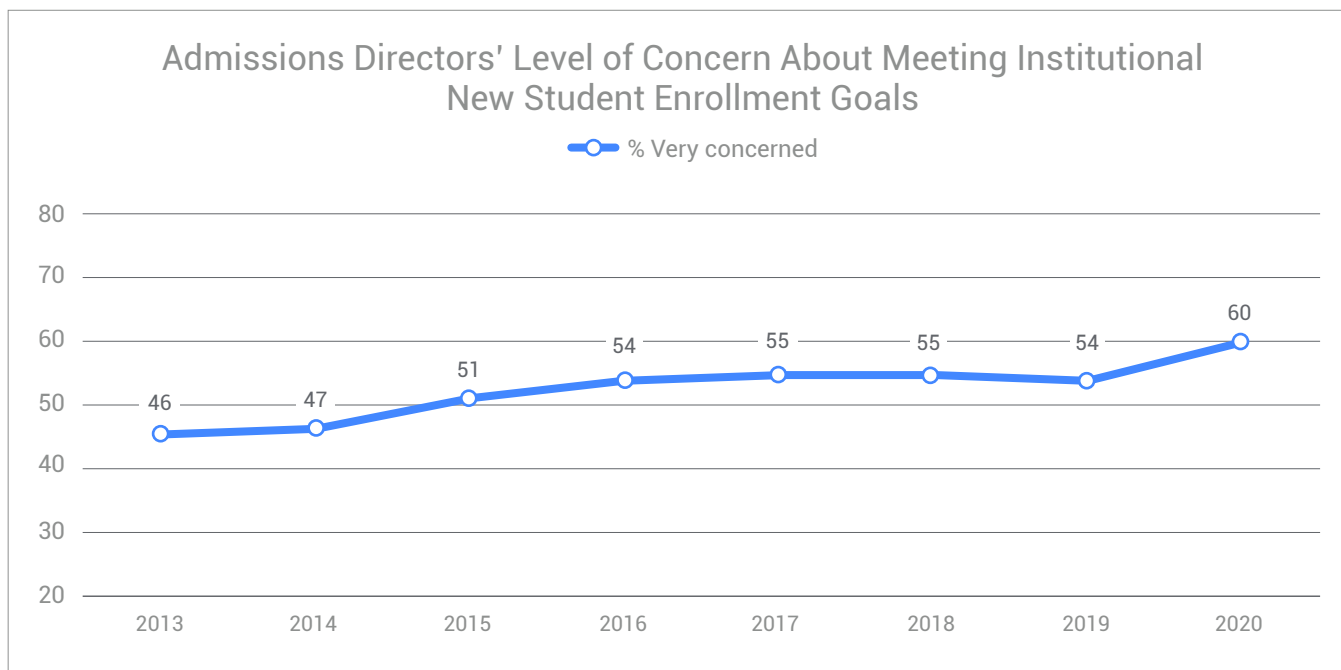
The survey is an attempted census of all admissions directors and enrollment managers using the most comprehensive sample information available. Each responding institution is represented only once in the results. If multiple respondents from the same institution completed the survey, the highest-ranking official's survey was retained.

Gallup statistically weighted data to correct for nonresponse, matching the obtained sample to targets for all U.S. colleges and universities from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) database. Gallup weighted the sample based on institutional control (public or private/nonprofit), four-year or two-year degree offerings, student enrollment, and geographical region. Therefore, the weighted sample results can be considered representative of the views of admissions directors and enrollment managers at colleges nationwide.

The following sections present the findings of the survey. In some cases, reported frequencies may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding. "Don't know" and "Refused" responses are excluded from the results unless otherwise indicated.

# STUDENT ENROLLMENT AND RECRUITING

Six in 10 admissions directors said they were very concerned about meeting their institution's new student enrollment goals this year, with another 30 percent moderately concerned. Since 2015, the percentage of admissions directors who were very concerned about meeting their college's goals has been above the majority level consistently, but this year's figure is the highest to date.



Community college admissions directors were most concerned about meeting enrollment goals, with 69 percent saying they were very concerned about doing so.

Admissions directors' higher level of concern is understandable given that only 26 percent say their college met its new student enrollment goals by May 1 – a drop from 37 percent a year ago and eight percentage points lower than the prior low of 34 percent in 2017.

An additional 11 percent of admissions directors achieved their enrollment goals by June 1, and 8 percent did so by July 1, leaving a majority, 56 percent, not having met the goals. That is slightly higher than a year ago, when 52 percent of admissions directors reported not meeting their college's enrollment goals before July 1.

Public doctoral university admissions directors were most likely to say their college met its goals, while community college admissions directors were least likely to do so.

# STUDENT ENROLLMENT AND RECRUITING (cont.)

	All Institutions, by Sector			Public			Private Nonprofit	
	All	Public	Private Nonprofit	Doctoral	Master's/ Bacc.	Assoc.	Doctoral/ Master's	Bacc.
<b>Thinking back, please indicate how concerned you were about meeting your institution's new student enrollment goals this year, that is, for the class enrolling in fall 2020:</b>								
% Very concerned	60	63	56	48	59	69	60	55
% Moderately concerned	30	27	34	42	30	21	35	34
% Not too concerned	8	8	8	10	9	8	6	7
% Not concerned at all	2	2	2	0	2	2	0	4
<b>Did your institution meet its new student enrollment goals this year prior to May 1, 2020? Did your institution meet its new student enrollment goals this year prior to June 1, 2020?*</b>								
<b>Did your institution meet its new student enrollment goals this year prior to July 1, 2020?*</b>								
% Yes, prior to May 1, 2020	26	27	25	36	28	23	20	28
% Yes, prior to June 1, 2020	11	9	13	19	8	5	15	9
% Yes, prior to July 1, 2020	8	7	9	5	6	8	13	8
% Not prior to July 1, 2020	56	58	52	39	58	64	52	56

\*Asked of those whose institution did not meet its new student enrollment goals prior to May 1, 2020

\*\*Asked of those whose institution did not meet its new student enrollment goals prior to June 1, 2020

Nearly eight in 10 admissions directors say that campus closures this spring hurt their college's recruiting either a great deal (38 percent) or a moderate amount (41 percent). Nine in 10 community college admissions directors said their recruiting was hurt a great deal (47 percent) or a moderate amount (44 percent) by campus closures.

Some colleges attempted to offer incentives to prospective students to encourage them to enroll after certain dates – a tactic formerly banned by the National Association for College Admission Counseling. Twenty-three percent of admissions directors say their college offered incentives to prospective students, with the practice more common at private than public colleges.

Amid this year's recruiting and enrollment challenges, just 15 percent of admissions directors expect their undergraduate enrollment to be higher than it was a year ago, while 24 percent expect it to be the same. Six in 10 admissions directors expect enrollment at their college to be down, with one in four expecting a decline of at least 10 percent.

Asked to look ahead to the next admissions cycle, 28 percent of admissions directors expect their college to admit students they probably would not have admitted in prior years. This includes roughly four in 10 admissions directors at four-year public colleges.



## STUDENT ENROLLMENT AND RECRUITING (cont.)

	All Institutions, by Sector			Public			Private Nonprofit	
	All	Public	Private Nonprofit	Doctoral	Master's/ Bacc.	Assoc.	Doctoral/ Master's	Bacc.
<b>How much did campus closures in the spring hurt your college in recruiting?</b>								
% A great deal	38	41	34	28	37	47	32	39
% A moderate amount	41	43	39	47	40	44	44	36
% Not much	17	13	23	22	21	7	21	21
% Not at all	4	3	4	3	2	3	4	3
<b>Last year, the national association for college admissions counseling changed its ethics code to no longer ban the offering of incentives to enroll after certain dates. Has your college taken advantage of these new rules?</b>								
% Yes	23	18	29	22	33	6	32	27
% No	77	82	71	78	67	94	68	73
<b>Do you expect undergraduate enrollment at your college in the fall of 2020 to be – ? Do you expect undergraduate enrollment at your college in the fall of 2020 to be – ?*</b>								
% Higher than in the fall of 2019	15	9	23	15	16	4	20	26
% The same as in the fall of 2019	24	25	24	37	29	19	21	26
% Less than 5% lower than in the fall of 2019	14	14	15	20	10	14	16	16
% 5% to less than 10% lower than in the fall of 2019	21	22	19	23	25	21	25	14
% 10% to less than 15% lower than in the fall of 2019	15	18	12	5	18	22	13	9
% More than 15% lower than in the fall of 2019	10	11	7	0	3	17	5	9
<b>Looking ahead, in the coming admissions cycle, do you expect your college to admit students it probably would not have admitted in prior years?</b>								
% Yes	28	29	24	39	41	19	30	20
% No	72	71	76	61	59	81	70	80

\* Follow-up question asked of those who expected enrollment to be lower than in the fall of 2019. Combined results are reported.

# FOCUS OF UNDERGRADUATE RECRUITMENT

The pandemic has altered colleges' focus on certain prospective student populations. Since last year, the percentage of admissions directors who strongly agree or agree their college is very likely to focus undergraduate recruiting on online students has increased by 11 points, from 51 percent to 62 percent. The current figure is the highest measured to date and is 21 points higher than when the item was first asked in 2015.

There have been seven- or eight-point increases in the percentages of admissions directors who say their college will put greater emphasis on recruiting first-generation college students, students older than 24, part-time undergraduates and minority students.

At the same time, there have been sharp declines in the percentages of admissions directors who report that their college will increase recruiting efforts on international students, down 14 points from last year, and out-of-state students, down eight points.

Expected recruiting emphasis on full-time undergraduates, full-pay students, veterans or military personnel, and students recruited with merit scholarships are essentially unchanged from a year ago.

## Changes in Likelihood That Colleges Will Increase Recruitment Efforts for Undergraduate Applicant Populations, 2019 to 2020

	2019 %	2020 %	Change pct. pts.
Online students	51	62	+11
First-generation college students	68	76	+8
Students older than 24	51	59	+8
Part-time undergraduates	39	46	+7
Minority students	77	84	+7
Transfer students	72	78	+6
Full-time undergraduates	80	81	+1
Full-pay students	44	45	+1
Veterans/military personnel	52	52	0
Students recruited with merit scholarships	50	49	-1
Out-of-state students	57	49	-8
International students	45	31	-14

## FOCUS OF UNDERGRADUATE RECRUITMENT (cont.)

Over all, admissions directors are most likely to agree they will increase their efforts to recruit minority students (84 percent), full-time undergraduates (81 percent) and transfer students (78 percent). International students were a lesser area of focus in 2019, along with full-pay students and part-time undergraduates, but now international students (31 percent) rank last by a significant margin.

The extent to which colleges plan to focus efforts on recruiting online students varies greatly by college type, with 79 percent of community college admissions directors agreeing their college is very likely to increase its focus on attracting online students, compared with 39 percent of private baccalaureate college admissions directors. A majority of admissions directors at four-year public colleges and private doctoral or master's colleges agree their institution is very likely to increase its efforts at attracting online students this year.

Compared with a year ago, the biggest increases in likelihood of recruiting online students are among community colleges (up 20 points) and public master's or baccalaureate colleges (up 17 points).

**Using a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement about undergraduate applicant populations.**

**This year (2020-2021) at my institution, I am very likely to increase my recruitment efforts for the following populations of undergraduate applicants to my institution:**

	All Institutions, by Sector			Public			Private Nonprofit	
	All	Public	Private Nonprofit	Doctoral	Master's/ Bacc.	Assoc.	Doctoral/ Master's	Bacc.
<b>Minority students</b>								
%5 Strongly agree	58	59	56	79	57	54	55	62
%4	26	24	28	12	27	26	29	25
%3	13	12	14	8	12	13	14	13
%2	2	2	1	2	3	1	2	0
%1 Strongly disagree	2	3	0	0	1	5	0	0
<b>Full-time undergraduates</b>								
%5 Strongly agree	60	55	67	72	63	46	68	71
%4	21	24	18	20	20	27	18	20
%3	16	16	14	6	15	20	14	10
%2	2	2	<1	0	2	3	0	0
%1 Strongly disagree	2	2	<1	2	0	4	1	0

# FOCUS OF UNDERGRADUATE RECRUITMENT (cont.)

	All Institutions, by Sector			Public			Private Nonprofit	
	All	Public	Private Nonprofit	Doctoral	Master's/ Bacc.	Assoc.	Doctoral/ Master's	Bacc.
<b>Transfer students</b>								
%5 Strongly agree	54	50	59	66	54	43	66	53
%4	24	25	23	20	26	26	21	30
%3	15	16	15	10	13	19	12	14
%2	4	5	2	4	6	5	1	1
%1 Strongly disagree	3	4	2	0	0	7	1	2
<b>First-generation college students</b>								
%5 Strongly agree	52	59	40	64	62	56	38	46
%4	24	22	29	15	22	24	28	27
%3	18	12	26	18	12	11	30	21
%2	4	3	4	2	3	3	4	6
%1 Strongly disagree	2	4	<1	2	1	5	0	0
<b>Online students</b>								
%5 Strongly agree	40	47	25	27	36	58	27	24
%4	22	24	20	31	27	21	24	15
%3	18	19	17	29	25	13	22	5
%2	7	6	10	7	9	5	11	10
%1 Strongly disagree	12	4	28	6	3	4	17	45
<b>Students older than 24</b>								
%5 Strongly agree	38	44	26	17	27	58	30	18
%4	21	25	16	23	27	24	21	9
%3	24	23	25	33	36	16	22	24
%2	9	4	18	18	6	0	16	23
%1 Strongly disagree	8	3	16	9	4	2	11	25
<b>Veterans/military personnel</b>								
%5 Strongly agree	24	28	16	21	22	32	20	13
%4	28	31	25	27	29	32	27	23
%3	34	34	35	43	42	29	31	36
%2	10	5	19	8	6	3	18	20
%1 Strongly disagree	4	3	5	2	2	3	4	8

# FOCUS OF UNDERGRADUATE RECRUITMENT (cont.)

	All Institutions, by Sector			Public			Private Nonprofit	
	All	Public	Private Nonprofit	Doctoral	Master's/ Bacc.	Assoc.	Doctoral/ Master's	Bacc.
<b>Students recruited with merit scholarships</b>								
%5 Strongly agree	30	24	37	24	28	21	40	36
%4	19	17	24	13	19	17	22	26
%3	32	35	29	42	33	34	30	26
%2	11	15	5	11	13	18	4	6
%1 Strongly disagree	8	9	5	10	7	10	4	5
<b>Out-of-state students</b>								
%5 Strongly agree	31	28	35	57	36	14	31	46
%4	18	14	26	18	19	10	28	24
%3	28	27	30	14	35	26	31	24
%2	13	17	7	7	7	26	8	3
%1 Strongly disagree	10	14	3	3	3	24	2	2
<b>Part-time undergraduates</b>								
%5 Strongly agree	28	38	11	8	29	49	15	4
%4	18	24	9	18	17	28	13	4
%3	23	22	26	25	36	15	32	21
%2	13	10	20	31	12	3	19	25
%1 Strongly disagree	17	7	33	18	7	5	21	45
<b>Full-pay students</b>								
%5 Strongly agree	28	29	27	29	29	28	25	33
%4	17	17	19	23	15	16	19	19
%3	34	29	41	38	39	22	41	37
%2	8	8	7	3	6	11	10	3
%1 Strongly disagree	12	17	6	7	10	23	5	8
<b>International students</b>								
%5 Strongly agree	17	16	18	21	15	14	16	21
%4	14	12	16	24	9	9	15	21
%3	30	27	33	31	28	26	32	33
%2	26	29	24	14	36	30	25	20
%1 Strongly disagree	13	16	9	9	13	21	12	5

# CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE AND FALL SEMESTER PLANNING

Admissions directors are more likely to indicate their institution – and their admissions office – was prepared than not prepared to respond to the coronavirus pandemic. Thirty-six percent say their college was very well-prepared or well-prepared, while 19 percent say it was not very prepared or not prepared at all. Close to half, 45 percent, say their college was somewhat prepared. Meanwhile, 45 percent say their admissions office was well-prepared, and 13 percent say it was not, with 41 percent saying it was somewhat prepared.

Private college admissions directors are more likely than those at public colleges to indicate their college was prepared.

	All Institutions, by Sector			Public			Private Nonprofit	
	All	Public	Private Nonprofit	Doctoral	Master's/ Bacc.	Assoc.	Doctoral/ Master's	Bacc.
<b>How prepared was your college to respond to the coronavirus pandemic?</b>								
% Very well-prepared	9	7	11	7	3	9	8	17
% Well-prepared	27	26	29	27	19	28	30	30
% Somewhat prepared	45	48	41	56	55	44	40	37
% Not very prepared	13	11	15	7	19	8	19	15
% Not prepared at all	6	8	3	3	4	11	3	1
% No	59	71	41	67	65	75	44	25
<b>How prepared was your admissions office to respond to the coronavirus pandemic?</b>								
% Very well-prepared	14	11	20	19	9	9	18	25
% Well-prepared	31	31	30	36	25	33	30	30
% Somewhat prepared	41	45	37	37	50	44	37	33
% Not very prepared	10	8	13	4	13	7	13	12
% Not prepared at all	3	5	1	3	3	6	2	0

As of the August field period, 55 percent of admissions directors said their college planned to have a hybrid system of in-person and remote learning for fall semester instruction. Most of the rest, 37 percent, said their college would be open with safety procedures for all students who want to come back. Eight percent said their instruction would be fully online, while less than 1 percent said their college would be open primarily to first-year students.

Public colleges were more likely to say they would have a hybrid approach in the fall, while private colleges were more likely to say they would have an open campus.

Although most admissions directors (59 percent) indicated they were not key players in their college's decision on how to handle fall instruction, the vast majority (88 percent) said they agree with the decision their institution made.

About two-thirds of admissions directors are very (22 percent) or moderately (43 percent) confident their college's plan will remain in place for the entire fall semester. Admissions directors at colleges that will be open to in-person instruction are no less confident than their peers that their institution's plan will stay in place throughout the fall; 66 percent of those with fully in-person classes are confident.

# CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE AND FALL SEMESTER PLANNING (cont.)

	All Institutions, by Sector			Public			Private Nonprofit	
	All	Public	Private Nonprofit	Doctoral	Master's/ Bacc.	Assoc.	Doctoral/ Master's	Bacc.
<b>As of now, which of the following best describes your college's plans for the fall semester?</b>								
% Campus will be open with safety procedures in place for all students who want to come back	37	29	49	25	39	26	50	61
% Campus will mainly be open to freshmen	<1	0	1	0	0	0	2	1
% My college will employ a hybrid approach in which some students will be on campus and the rest will do remote learning/take online classes	55	67	35	72	55	71	36	21
% All students will do remote learning and take online classes	8	4	14	3	5	3	13	17
<b>Were you a key player in the decision on how and when your campus would open?</b>								
% Yes	41	29	59	33	35	25	56	75
% No	59	71	41	67	65	75	44	25
<b>Do you agree with the decision your college made on how it would handle instruction in the fall, or not?</b>								
% Yes	88	84	94	85	79	86	91	95
% No	12	16	6	15	21	14	9	5
<b>How confident are you that your college's plan will remain in place for the entire fall semester?</b>								
% Very confident	22	22	23	10	19	26	17	27
% Moderately confident	43	39	50	39	39	39	52	54
% Not very confident	24	26	20	34	22	26	22	16
% Not confident at all	10	13	7	16	20	9	8	3

# STANDARDIZED TESTING AND ADVANCED PLACEMENT

Stay-at-home orders during the coronavirus pandemic have led to the cancellation of standardized test administrations this year. As a result, many colleges that formerly required applicants to submit standardized test scores waived that requirement. Fifty-two percent of admissions directors say their college changed to a test-optional or test-blind application process this year, while 13 percent said their college still required applicants to submit test scores. Thirty-five percent indicated their college was already test-optional or test-blind before this year.

Most admissions directors whose college became test-optional or test-blind this year, 68 percent, expect their college to remain so permanently. More private college than public college admissions directors expect the change in testing requirements to remain in place.

The coronavirus also altered the way Advanced Placement (AP) tests are administered, with this year's test much shorter and taken fully online. Despite the change in format, only 7 percent of admissions directors say their college is changing the way it views AP test scores this year

<b>This year, many colleges decided to drop requirements that applicants submit ACT or SAT test scores, at least for a year.</b>								
	All Institutions, by Sector			Public			Private Nonprofit	
	All	Public	Private Nonprofit	Doctoral	Master's/ Bacc.	Assoc.	Doctoral/ Master's	Bacc.
<b>Did your college change to a test-optional or test-blind application this year?</b>								
% Yes	52	55	50	73	70	39	63	36
% No, we were test-optional or test-blind prior to this year	35	30	39	7	17	47	32	52
% No, we required applicants to submit ACT or SAT scores this year	13	15	11	21	13	15	5	13
<b>Do you expect your college to remain test-optional or test-blind permanently?*</b>								
% Yes	68	60	79	58	67	n/a	83	n/a
% No	32	40	21	42	33	n/a	17	n/a
<b>Is your college changing the way it views advanced placement (ap) test scores this year?</b>								
% Yes	7	7	7	10	6	6	4	14
% No	93	93	93	90	94	94	96	86

\*Asked of those who indicated their institution changed to being test-optional or test-blind this year (n=136)  
n/a=Not reported due to small sample size



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