

College Bound

ISSUES & TRENDS FOR THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS ADVISOR

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Admissions Watch

More Expected To Be Admitted Early

BECAUSE OF THE IMPACT of COVID-19 and the uncertainty that it casts on all aspects of college life, some experts are predicting more students will be admitted through Early Action and Early Decision this year.

“Colleges are really having to do a lot more guesswork than they’ve had to do in the past,” Nick Ducoff, CEO of the Boston-based Edmit, told the U. of Chicago’s *Chicago Business Journal*. “And that’s why we expect higher admissions rates, especially for Early Action and Early Decision this year than in years past.”

What about the impact of so many students who deferred admission this year? “What you’re finding is the schools are getting pretty innovative and finding ways to increase their class size to make up for the lost revenue in this past year.”

How else are early programs shaping up this year? “There’s not much available data yet... [However], it is being reported that the volume of early applications are down 10 percent and down 16 percent among lower-income families. This is really concerning because we’ve also seen a large decline in the number of FAFSA submissions.... That’s deeply troubling. I think what it really shows is more students are just opting out of four-year college altogether, or they are taking a wait and see approach. It’s hard to know conclusively which of those two it is, but I think it is a bit of both.”

And what are the long-term prospects? “I don’t think that this is the end of college. I think it’s the end of people going to college without really knowing why they’re going to college. I think students and families are going to really be looking more closely at cost, more closely

at outcomes and look more closely at value,” Ducoff told the magazine.

Georgia’s Early Class of 2025. The U. of Georgia received more than 20,500 Early Action applications for the Class of 2025, up from 17,000 last fall, in part because UGA accepts the Common Application. Georgia admitted more than 8,000 students from 45 states and the District of Columbia.

The middle 50 percent of admitted students reported a core GPA of 4.00-4.33 and had completed or were currently enrolled in a total of 8-13 AP, IB or dual enrollment courses. Students who received a deferral to Regular Decision are still given full consideration. The Regular Decision deadline is January 1, 2021.

“The large increase in Early Action applications was both challenging and exciting for our office,” said David Graves, interim senior executive director of admissions, “and the admissions team has worked incredibly hard over the past three months in reviewing these files.”

North Carolina’s Early Action. The U. of North Carolina at Chapel Hill received 31,940 Early Action applications for the Class of 2025, 10 percent more than last year.

“We’re humbled that so many outstanding students are considering Carolina. We’re also grateful that they have taken the time to apply under these extraordinary circumstances. We know the pandemic has impacted everyone’s life in one way or another,” said Steve Farmer, vice provost for enrollment and undergraduate admissions.

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Financial Matters

Biden to Cancel Student Debt? How to deal with student debt is one of the hot topics being debated by President-elect Joe Biden’s “Transition Team” and other “progressives” in Congress. Some like Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren and Democratic Senate leader, Charles Schumer of New York, favor unilateral presidential action to eliminate up to \$50,000 in debt per student on the new president’s first day in office. They argue that such an action is necessary to jump start the COVID-19 economy, according to the Huff Post.

But President-elect Biden recently said he favors bi-partisan legislation that would immediately forgive \$10,000 per student, and wipe out all student debt for those earning less than \$125,000 a year, or who attended public or Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

Currently, 45 million former students owe \$1.5 trillion in debt, with a median of \$17,000 per student, and median monthly repayment of \$200. Biden also made campaign promises to try to make public college tuition free for students in the same income category and to expand Pell Grants.

A YouGov poll conducted for Forbes Advisor found that 56 percent of respondents support a plan to forgive \$50,000 in federal student loans by executive order. The largest share of support, 23 percent, came from respondents who never had student loans.

But there will be political problems passing such legislation. Of those in the Forbes poll who support loan cancellation, 31 percent

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ADMITTED EARLY

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High school students still have time to apply to North Carolina through the regular application deadline of January 15.

U.Va. Early Apps Up. Early Action applications for the Class of 2025 at the U. of Virginia soared by 35 percent, while Early Decision applications jumped by 15 percent, according to *The Cavalier Daily*. U.Va. attracted 2,918 Early Decision applications and 28,884 Early Action apps. This year's deadline was November 1 for both programs. ED decisions will be released in mid-December, EA decisions in mid-February.

Virginia has already received 17 percent more applications than the same time last year. Some 54 percent of the Early Decision applicants were from Virginia, while 72 percent Early Action applicants were out-of-state.

"We have hosted hundreds of virtual programming and events reaching tens of thousands of potential applicants," Wes Hester, a university spokesperson, told the paper. "We are also connecting U.Va. students, faculty and alumni with prospective students and their families."

Hester added that Virginia is also only one of two public universities in the nation that still meets 100 percent of demonstrated financial need for all undergraduate students, whether in-state or out-of-state, while making admissions decisions without consideration of the student's financial situation.

GAP YEAR TRENDS

Cornell Freshmen Take Gap Year. More than 120 first-year students at Cornell U. took a gap year, twice as many students as usually ask for deferments, Jonathan Burdick, vice provost for enrollment, told *The Cornell Daily Sun*. But he said those deferments would not impact the acceptance rate for the Class of 2025.

Cornell's total undergraduate enrollment reached about 14,743 students, 97 percent of the university's target. Cornell hit 99 percent of its total target enrollment for new first-year students. But the international student population dropped by 10.4 percent. The COVID-19 virus has cost Cornell \$45 million in losses. *The New York Times* estimated that nationwide the virus has cost colleges at least \$120 billion.

Harvard Deferrals. At least 340 students representing more than 20 percent of the Class of 2024 sought and received deferrals at Harvard C., according to *The Harvard Crimson*. In a typical year, only between 90 and 130 students defer.

Iowa Issues Gap Year Approvals. Last year, the U. of Iowa approved 13 gap year requests. In 2018, it approved 15 gap year requests. In

Medical School Apps Soar

The COVID-19 virus has made many students more aware of the heroic role of doctors, nurses and other medical staff. Perhaps that is what has driven a record number of applications to medical schools. For example, applications to Tulane U.'s School of Medicine drew 35 percent more applications than this time last year. Applications to Boston U.'s School of Medicine are up by 26 percent.

After leveling off for several years, the American Medical College Application Service which processes apps to most medical schools, reported that applications have increased nearly 17 percent overall. The increase should make competition much greater this year. ■

the fall of 2020, with the pandemic raging, that number rose to only 26 gap year approvals.

Iowa officials indicated that first-year enrollment this fall was slightly smaller than last year, "in line with previous efforts to shrink enrollment," according to the *Daily Iowan*.

ENROLLMENT TRENDS

Michigan Colleges See Decline. Total enrollment in Michigan colleges and universities fell by 3 percent this fall, in part due to fears of the COVID-19 virus, according to the *Detroit Free Press*, down 9,500 students from last fall.

Eastern Michigan U. enrolled 500 fewer students. Northern Michigan experienced a 5 percent drop in enrollment. Enrollment at the U. of Michigan was flat, although undergraduate enrollment rose slightly. Michigan State U. was down by about 900 students, or about 2 percent. Enrollment at the private Albion C. was up by 2 percent.

FINANCIAL MATTERS

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were Democrats and only 10 percent were Republicans. That means, unless Democrats win both January Senate special elections in Georgia that any progress on the issue likely will need to come through executive action.

Price Increases Slow. According to the College Board's "Trends in College Pricing and Student Aid" report, the average public, four-year, in-state tuition rates, and the average tuition rates at private, nonprofit four-year institutions posted their lowest percentage increases in 30 years, before adjusting for inflation. In 14 states, the average sticker price for two-year in-district college tuition rates froze.

In 2020-21, the average published in-district tuition and fees for C.C. is \$3,770, \$70 more than last year. The average public, four-year in-state rate is \$10,560, \$120 higher than last year. Out-of-state average tuition and fees reached \$27,020, \$250 more than last year. The average listed tuition and fees for private

Texas Enrolls Large Pell Cohort. The U. of Texas at Austin enrolled one of its largest classes of Pell Grant recipients, over 28 percent of the entering class. Overall, 22.4 percent of UT Austin undergraduates were awarded Pell Grants this year, compared to 21.3 percent last year. The Michael & Susan Dell Foundation has pledged \$100 million over 10 years to support Pell Grant-eligible students. Those with the greatest need received a scholarship of \$20,000 over their time in college.

In 2011-12, 28 percent of all UT Austin students received Pell Grants, the school's peak level. Nationally, applications for financial aid declined by 4.8 percent this year, according to the National College Attainment Network.

DePaul Hits Target. DePaul U. in Chicago, the nation's largest Catholic U., enrolled 21,889 students this fall, 99.3 percent of its target number. Freshman enrollment this fall totals 2,796 students, up from 2,627 last year. DePaul went mostly online starting with fall classes. Both Loyola U. Chicago and Marquette U. reported smaller freshman classes.

Middlebury's Class of 2024. Middlebury C. in Vermont welcomed 553 first-year students to campus this fall, while 49 chose to study remotely. Sixty students, about twice the normal number of new students, deferred their first year. Middlebury anticipates a February class much larger than the normal 100 new students.

The acceptance rate for the Class of 2024 was 24 percent, up from a low of 15.8 percent a few years ago. Its yield fell by 9 percent from last year to 32 percent. Students of color make up about 30 percent of the Class of 2024. And about 18 percent receive Pell Grants. ■

nonprofit four-year colleges was \$37,650, an increase of \$700 above last year.

Connecticut Puts Free Tuition Program On Hold. The U. of Connecticut announced that it has paused its free tuition program, Connecticut Commitment, due to budget concerns amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The program aimed at low-income students is only one-year-old. "Pausing the program is the hardest decision I've had to make since arriving here," President Thomas Katsouleas told his Board of Trustees.

Grinnell Eliminates Loans. Grinnell C. in Iowa announced it will eliminate student loans in financial aid packages and replace them with scholarships. "We are engaging in this initiative because we believe that education benefits not just individuals but communities and, in that, benefit is a crucial engine of democracy," said President Anne F. Harris. "Grinnell is deeply committed to preserving access to the transformative experience of a liberal arts education." ■

Recruiting in The Age of COVID

Common Applications Decline. As of November 2, the Common Application has been requested by 8 percent fewer students compared to last year. Some 60 percent of its 921 members have reported application declines. Colleges and universities in the Northeast and Midwest experienced the largest declines, each down by 14 percent.

Colleges in the West have experienced a 10 percent increase compared to last year. Public four-year institutions have experienced an 11 percent drop off. Private four-year institutions have seen a 5 percent decrease. However, Historically Black Colleges and Universities are up by 2.4 percent

First-generation students and those eligible for application fee waivers were down by 16 percent. Colleges that are not requiring test scores are attracting more first-year applications. By this time last year, 57 percent of applicants had submitted at least one application by November 2, and 37 percent of all applications were submitted by this time.

Student Concerns. A late October survey of 3,000 high school students by Eduventures, a research organization based in Boston, revealed that 61 percent have concerns about applying to college during the pandemic.

One student replied, "Applying to college during a pandemic feels almost like an American Ninja Warrior Course, there are so many obstacles that get in the way of discovering the college for you, in addition to senior year and other activities."

These students' top regret was not being able to visit campus. Other concerns included not knowing how admissions will work this year and more difficulty in reaching counselors. "Underserved students" registered greater concerns than others. Students also appreciate communications from colleges about how they are handling the virus. Over communication topped "being left in the dark."

Testing Pullback Hurts Admissions Targeting. Many colleges rely upon the self-reporting data that students fill out when they sit for standardized tests such as the ACT and SAT. Since many test dates have been disrupted by the pandemic, colleges cannot buy that data to target the students that they normally recruit. Some colleges are buying data that is less reliable for their purposes, leading to casting a broader net. Others are not replacing the old data, according to a survey by the National Association for College Admissions Counseling.

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

Kent State Goes to the Drive-In. "The first week in October, Portage County went red," Kent State U. admissions director Mark Ledoux told Channel 5 in Cleveland, "the health commissioner said we can't do tours anymore. So, we were just trying to think of a way that we could still get families and students information... during the college search process."

That's when Ledoux and his staff came up with the bright idea of sending Kent State's admissions team to various drive-in-movie theaters around the state. That way families can watch, from the comfort of

their car, the admissions 101 presentation, hear from current students and take part in drive-up question sessions. One session near Cleveland drew 150 families.

"We take them right into the residence halls and the buildings on campus," Ledoux told a reporter.

Sacred Heart Students Sign Safety Pledge. Sacred Heart U. in Fairfield, Connecticut, the second-largest independent Catholic university in New England, is conducting on-campus classes, in part because students and faculty have signed the "Pioneer Promise," to protect themselves, their fellow students and their community.

SHU's Class of 2024, the largest in university history, is composed of 1,681 students who were selected from 12,080 applicants. The class includes 566 National Honor Society Students. The incoming new class has a GPA average of 3.55. Students arrived from 26 states and 15 countries, including 145 transfer students.

"Our undergraduate admissions committee worked tirelessly to identify students who not only achieved academic success, but also demonstrated leadership abilities in and out of the classroom," said Pam Pillo, executive director of undergraduate admissions. "We look for well-rounded students who will add to our door-holding campus culture."

IT'S A PROMISE

Milwaukee's "College Possible" Program. Milwaukee students who need help navigating the college admissions process have an organization to turn to for help, College Possible. The program offers coaches to help support low-income students in curriculum choice, strategies for ACT and SAT testing, writing college applications, applying for financial aid and getting into and graduating from college, Kellie J. Sigh, executive director, told Fox6Now.

College Possible works with more than 2,300 students each year, 93 percent of whom are first-generation students, and 15 high schools and numerous local colleges.

Ohio Admission Promise. Ohio U. in Athens offers admission to Ohio students who posted a 3.0 GPA in a strong college prep curriculum and apply by the extended deadline of January 15, 2021. The program includes a renewable grant of \$2,000.

Tulane's Louisiana Promise. Tulane U. in New Orleans has promised to meet all expenses of any student it admits from Louisiana. The Louisiana Promise will extend no-loan aid to all admitted Louisiana students whose families earn \$100,000 or less. Tulane also promised to reach out to Louisiana students early in their high school career to help them prepare with a new college prep center. Tulane is also offering 50 full pre-college summer program scholarships.

"If a Louisiana student's dream is to come to Tulane, we don't want financial concerns to be a barrier for them to become a part of the Tulane family," said Michael Fitts, president. ■

COUNSELOR'S BOOKSHELF

Even More Fantastic Failures: True Stories of People Who Changed the World Falling Down First by Luke Reynolds; Aladdin/Beyond Words; ISBN 10: 158-270-7341; \$21.99.

"Higher Ed Budgets for the Post-COVID Era: Now's Our Chance to Do This Right;" from Lumina Foundation and Bill & Melinda Gates foundation; 48-page policy report with

recommendations, priorities and framework for policymakers. See, <https://www.luminafoundation.org>.

Finding Work You Love by Kirk Snyder; Ten Speed Press/Penguin Random House; ISBN 978-1-9848-5667-8; \$24.99. ■

CURRICULUM CAPSULES

East Stroudsburg's Finance Program. East Stroudsburg U. in Pennsylvania now offers a B.S. in Finance. The degree will prepare students for jobs in both domestic and international corporations.

Loyola Maryland's Sustainability BA. Loyola U. Maryland's Sellinger School of Business and Management now offers a Bachelor of Business Administration degree in sustainability management. In addition to liberal arts and business foundation courses, sustainability management students take business management courses and courses addressing topics including poverty, human rights, justice and equality, the climate crisis, biodiversity and scarcity of natural resources.

"Our students will learn how to analyze complex, multifaceted and multidimensional global business environments and sustainability challenges and solve problems for the greater good," said Hung-bin Ding, a professor in the program.

Niagara's Guaranteed Internships. Niagara U. in New York conducts a Pathways Program, a four-step approach to career and professional development through experiential learning, resume preparation, mock interviewing and intern placement. Niagara offers students a \$1,500 stipend for an unpaid, credit internship.

Niagara has also designed a Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom Retention Scholarship to assist BIPOC (black or indigenous person of color) students complete their degrees.

Television Internships. The Television Academy Foundation sponsors 55 paid and

unpaid, in-person and virtual internships for undergraduates and graduate students. See, TelevisionAcademy.com/Internships. Deadline: January 19, 2021.

ONLINE LEARNING

Online Means Dissatisfied Students Move On To Another School. Since almost all higher ed learning has gone online, that means students, even instructors, can live anywhere while they learn or teach.

"Now that universities have made the transition to online education, it's more important than ever for them to maintain a welcoming online experience where students are satisfied with how much and the quality of what they're learning," Joshua Loufek, a senior at the U. of Central Florida, told *Fierce Education*.

"With this shift to e-learning, it's much more convenient than it was before for a dissatisfied student to apply to and then attend another university because they can continue living where they are. This means students unhappy with their current education can easily switch to the university most willing to cater to their needs and their student experience."

Online Enthusiasm. Some 45 percent of 4,000 faculty members recently surveyed by Tyton Partners found that they left the spring semester with a more favorable attitude toward online learning. On the other hand, it appears that many instructors and students struggled with the transition from in-class to online learning.

Other findings: 74 percent of faculty said increasing student engagement in their class is a priority, and 61 percent of faculty said that

keeping students engaged is the most challenging part of their transition to remote learning.

Faculty who made the transition successfully credited their institution with providing a centralized online learning unit, providing access to an instructional design staff and creating a peer-to-peer collaboration.

Who Is Teaching? Some 63 percent of K-12 teachers at 126 public and private schools who were surveyed by LawnStarter said that they are only teaching online. Only 14 percent are teaching in the classroom, while 23 percent are juggling a highbred of online and in-classroom teaching. Some 70 percent say they need more time to prep for online classes than for in-person teaching. However, more than 80 percent of teachers said that they have grown in their profession as a result of the changes caused by the pandemic.

441 Best Remote Experiences. A survey of thousands of students at 441 colleges and universities by TestMax, a maker of apps for the GRE and other tests, ranked their online experiences. The survey yielded surprising results. Number one, there appears to be an inverse relationship between tuition price and online quality.

Many of the top name universities were ranked near the bottom by their students on their satisfaction with online learning. For example, Harvard came in at number 251, with 60.9 percent of students saying the school was effective in providing online learning. However, some online universities and regional campuses ranked near the top. For example, among the 13 colleges with perfect ratings in all the survey's five categories were Sinclair C.C., Purdue Global U., Dallas Baptist U. and Indiana U. East and Northwest. ■

NEWS YOU CAN USE

ACT 2020 Average. The national average for ACT scores in 2020 was 20.7. However, the participation rate was only 52 percent this pandemic year. Fifteen states require 100 percent of graduating seniors to take the test, even if they don't intend to go to college. Obviously, students had problems meeting that requirement this year.

In 2019, Utah and Wisconsin tied for the highest average score among the "100 percent" states at 20.3. They were followed by Ohio and Nebraska at 20.0. Kentucky, Montana and Wyoming all posted averages of 19.8. Tennessee came in at 19.4, Arkansas at 19.3 and North Carolina at 19.0. Louisiana's average was 18.8.

California Voters Reject Affirmative Action. Proposition 16, which would have amended the California state constitution to allow public agencies, universities and community colleges to consider race, gender and ethnicity when making decisions on contracting, hiring and student admissions (and overturning Proposition 209 which was passed in 1996) was rejected by a vote of 56 to 44 percent.

"We won and the principle of equality has prevailed again," said Wenyuan Wu, executive director of Californians for Equal Rights.

Unreported Foreign Funding. A new U.S. Department of Education investigation and

report found "many large and well-resourced institutions of higher education have aggressively pursued and accepted foreign money" (\$6.5 billion), while failing to comply with reporting obligations.

Work Harder. "Relaxed restrictions on admissions and lower expectations are being used by many as a pass to do less (and rightfully so in many cases); but how much stronger will a candidate be who continues to demonstrate academic prowess and drive despite hardship? It's exactly what schools are looking for," says Matt Larriva, founder of Powerful Prep and an expert in test prep. ■

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