

# College Bound

ISSUES & TRENDS FOR THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS ADVISOR

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## Admissions Watch

# COVID-19 Impacts the College Application Process

COVID-19 has disrupted every aspect of the college recruiting process. But rather than wither on the vine, many colleges are finding innovative ways to connect with potential students. Below is a roundup of applications to date. On page three you will find examples of how some colleges are meeting with success during pandemic.

**U. California Apps Up, Cal State Down.** Applications to the U. of California's nine undergraduate campuses jumped 15 percent over last year to a record 250,000 students. This included significant increases among California Latino and African American freshman applicants, according to UC data.

However, overall applications dipped by 5 percent at the 23 campuses in the California State U. system. Cal Poly San Luis Obispo did increase by 4 percent.

Meanwhile, in mid-January, the U. of California announced that it intends to return to primarily in-person instruction starting Fall 2021. "As the university continues to monitor the evolution of the pandemic, we are also carefully planning a safe return to in-person classes," said President Michael V. Drake, M.D., who made his decision after consulting with other UC chancellors.

**Colby Sets Record Amid Pandemic.** More than 15,700 students from around the world applied to Colby C.'s Class of 2025, 13 percent more than last year. That represents 200 percent growth since 2014. Applicants come from all 50 states and 150 countries.

Colby was among a small number of colleges and universities who educated students in-per-

son throughout the pandemic Fall 2020. The college instituted a robust testing program, extensive health and safety measures and "a spirit of collective responsibility."

**Colgate Hits All-Time Record.** By the closing deadline of January 15, Colgate U. had received 17,392 applications, "a 102.6 percent increase over the previous year," according to the university. Gary Ross, vice president, said that he expected to see some increases in applications this year due to a number of initiatives set in motion during the past two years, but to see an increase of greater than 100 percent was a shock.

**Georgetown Admits 10 Percent EA.** Georgetown U. in Washington D.C. received 8,710 Early Action applications for the Class of 2025, an increase of 19 percent over last year. It admitted 940 students or nearly 11 percent of its EA applicants. The enrollment target for the Class of 2025 is 1,600 students. Approximately 115 students who were admitted to the class of 2024 decided to defer enrollment.

Of the Early Action pool, only 7.34 percent of applicants who did not submit standardized test scores were admitted. Most applicants placed in the top 5 percent of their class, with mid-50 percent of ACT scores ranging from 33 to 35, mid-50 percent SAT verbal scores of 720 to 770 and mid-50 percent of SAT math scores from 730 to 790.

"No matter where in the U.S. you are or around the world, you know about Georgetown," Charles Deacon, dean of under-

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## Financial Matters

**COVID Relief Package.** Just before the December 2020 break, Congress passed and President Trump signed another COVID relief package of \$22 billion. It included substantial taxpayer funding for the Education Stabilization Fund. Provisions included increased Pell Grant awards and restoring Pell eligibility for incarcerated students. It also expanded the ability of employers to provide tax-free payments of up to \$5,250 for an employee's federal student loans, including those taken out prior to employment.

"This provision will help students pay down their debts faster and keep employers engaged and invested with what students need to be successful..." said former U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos.

In mid-January, these funds were distributed. Previously, the allocated money was based on credit hours. After Congress was lobbied by community colleges, the recent funds were distributed based on total count of students at the institution, whether they attend classes full or part-time.

"Community colleges serve roughly half of the nation's college-going population with the goal of making higher education more accessible and affordable for all," said Joe May, chancellor, Dallas C. "All students need reliable broadband access, laptops, course materials and other external supports provided by institutions," said Morna Foy, president, Wisconsin Technical College System in a podcast.

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## ADMISSIONS WATCH

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graduate admissions, told *The Hoya*. “I think that there was a large pool of people who may not have had that normal access, who went online and virtually to schools that they know about.” He added the early pool tends to be more of the ‘haves’ as opposed to the ‘have-nots.’ First-gen and low-income kids tend to apply later and so we don’t want to give away a disproportionate number of spaces early.”

**Harvard’s New Record.** Harvard C. received more than 57,000 applications for the Class of 2025, a new record. Last year, 40,248 applied. The date on which Regular Admissions decisions are released will be delayed to April 6, according to the crimson.com.

**Maine Apps Down.** College applications among Maine high school students are down 13 percent to the UMaine System compared to the same time last year. As a result, the UMaine System, Finance Authority of Maine and the Maine Department of Education have launched the On Track for College program, a series of free virtual events to educate students about college life and connect them to admissions and financial aid experts.

“Our admissions counselors, financial aid experts and student ambassadors will be campaigning throughout the state over the next three months to make sure graduating seniors know their success matters at our universities,” said Dannel Mallory, UMaine System chancellor.

**MIT’s EA Pool Soars by 62 Percent.** The Massachusetts Institute of Technology received 15,036 Early Action applications to the Class of 2025 and offered admission to 719 or about 4.8 percent. Some 10,656 were deferred to be “reconsidered without prejudice” during the Regular Action admissions process, Chris Peterson, assistant director of admissions, told *The Tech*. A little over 20 percent were denied admission.

**NYU Tops 100,000 First-Year Applications.** New York University received 100,131 applications for first-year admission, a 20 percent increase over last year. NYU received more than 10 percent of all Common App applications. Some 95,308 of those applications were for NYU’s New York campus. The others were for entry into NYU’s Abu Dhabi and Shanghai programs. NYU also received 17,148 Early Decision applications for Fall 2021, a 14 percent increase over Fall 2020.

More than 25 percent of applicants are first-generation college-goers. More than 22 percent came from students in an under-represented minority groups. Some 22,000 of

## The Lost Class?

As *CB* reported last month, enrollment in all post-high school education programs declined almost 22 percent for the high school Class of 2020 from the previous year, and nearly 33 percent for students from “high poverty” schools. Some observers are calling the graduating high school Class of 2020, “The Lost Class.”

That may be too pessimistic. Over the past few decades, the U.S. education system has expanded and transformed to accommodate students of all ages and stages of their careers. The days of educating only “traditional students” who arrive straight out of high school are long gone. And if the vaccine takes hold, we will see a large recruiting effort by colleges and other concerned groups to reclaim those students who were “lost” for a year.

### Selective Schools are Experiencing Boom.

For example, following record early applications at many selective colleges, spring enrollment is looking up. For example, spring enrollment at the U. of North Carolina-Chapel Hill jumped by 7.3 percent. Duke U.’s spring registration numbers are returning to normal, after a 5 percent undergraduate dip in the fall. St. Augustine U. in Raleigh suffered a big loss when its president, Irving McPhail, died as a result of the virus. But its fall enrollment still increased by 5 percent.

### Students Had to Change Their Fall Plans.

According to the Georgetown U. Center on Education and the Workforce’s analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey of October 14-26, 2020, the pandemic caused 75 percent of households with incomes under \$50,000 to change their postsecondary plans.

That compares to 70 percent of households with incomes over \$100,000 in which a household member changed plans. In 42 percent of

applications came from international students, a 22 percent increase over last year.

“We are honored to have so many wonderfully talented, smart, ambitious, diverse young people seek to be part of our community,” said NYU President Andrew Hamilton. “And as we move forward in the process of assembling a freshman class, we will be highly attentive to the issues of access, equity and inclusion.”

**Tufts Tops 30,000.** Tuft U. in Massachusetts attracted 31,190 applications to the Class of 2025, a 35 percent increase over last year. This was the first year that U.S. minority students constituted a majority of domestic applicants, 51 percent, according to JT Duck, dean of admissions.

Duck attributed the application surge to a

households with incomes under \$25,000, a member canceled postsecondary plans, compared to 19 percent with household incomes over \$200,000.

Changes included where a student attended school or whether they remained at home to take virtual classes (39 percent of households where at least one student intended to take classes) or course loads or cancelled classes altogether (37 percent). Those taking certificate or associate degree programs were more likely to change.

Finally, 50 percent of college bound students said they think, “Higher education is a bad deal now that it has moved online.” Some 77 percent said they have changed their plans about applying to college since the pandemic. About a third plan to apply closer to home, 29 percent were applying to schools with lower tuition and 26 percent were applying to schools with clear COVID protocols to keep students safe.

### Students Still Worry About College.

A survey of 1,008 current and prospective college students about attitudes concerning the COVID-19 crisis, conducted by New America, Third Way and Global Strategy Group also reported on the top concerns of students in December. About 86 percent were concerned about “catching the virus and spreading it,” up from 84 percent in August.

Economic concerns ranked second. About 71 percent of the surveyed students worried they won’t be able to pay non-education related bills. About 69 percent of the college students say they will struggle to pay their education bills, compared to 60 percent in August.

Trust in higher education institutions was also a top issue. About 51 percent questioned how the leadership of their institution handled the crisis. About 57 percent of college students were worried that “higher education is not worth the cost to students anymore.” ■

reimagined admissions process that included optional standardized test results, the intense use of digital tools and the fact that Tufts is committed to meeting 100 percent of student demonstrated financial need.

**Law School Apps Surge.** Applications to law schools are up 32 percent this year according to the Law School Admission Council, reversing a recent trend. The average applicant is sending out applications to six schools this year, up from five in recent years. Some are calling the renewed interest in law school the “RBG” effect, noting the influence of recently deceased Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. But critics cautioned that law schools are still admitting more students than there are legal jobs. ■

# New Recruiting Tactics

**Reaching More Students.** “Virtually every aspect of how prospective students engage with the college search process changed, as did every aspect of how admissions offices connect with students,” said JT Duck, dean of admissions at Tufts U. “We took the opportunity to craft playful and engaging email and social media communications, and spent more time communicating with high school guidance counselors via emails and webinars.

He added, “This allowed us to reach more students than we would have through our traditional recruitment efforts, nearly doubling the number of prospective students with whom we communicated this fall.”

**New Counseling Initiative.** While enrollment numbers were not above normal at CSU, it launched a system-wide freshman counseling initiative (Matador Advising HUB) to get more students to graduate in four years by giving them intensive advice and direction during their first year. Some counselors will focus solely on freshmen and try to solve their entry problems early on and strongly urge them to take a full-course load of 15 credit hours a semester. At some campuses, the intense counseling lasts into the sophomore year.

**Digital Outreach.** Amid the pandemic, Colby made a wholesale change to its admissions process, with greater emphasis on digital outreach that included hundreds of virtual visits by admissions staff to high schools and community-based organizations and virtual events showcasing Colby’s advantages. Colby continues to meet the demonstrated financial need of all students without loans.

**Sponsoring 1,000 Virtual Events.** Colgate U. sought prospective students early in the search process, moved to a pilot test-optional policy, introduced a No Loan Initiative for families with income below \$125,000. It received national publicity of how it handled in-person learning during the pandemic and launched a new partnership with Questbridge. Colgate also hosted 1,000 virtual events last fall, met with 7,000 prospective students through virtual engagements and sponsored 120 webinars on topics ranging from financial aid to food. The upshot: More applications from students of color, students from the Southeast and international students.

**Data Analytics Impact Higher Ed.** The U. of Novi Sad in Serbia sees three areas where data analytics will help higher education. 1) Admission tracking, by collecting data on web visits, applicants and enrollees to tailor their recruiting strategy; 2) Enrollment optimization, by deciding what courses students really want, and devising new programs to meet needs; 3) Academic advising, by helping students succeed.

**Enhanced Advising.** Each year, millions of students, who have spent great effort and money to enroll, end up leaving college without

a degree, putting them in a double bind of no degree and often, substantial debt.

For over two decades, MDRC, an educational research organization, has partnered with many community colleges to find ways to “enhance” advising. Here are some of its conclusions on what works based on its research.

1) Frequent and holistic advising. This includes not just academic advising, but helping students develop study habits, how to balance home, work and school demands, getting involved with extracurricular activities and campus life;

2) Creating smaller caseloads for counselors;

3) Proactive outreach, even when students are not responsive;

4) Offering incentives to meet with advisors, such as cash, book or transportation vouchers;

5) Continuing enhanced advising for as many semesters as possible;

6) Hiring more full-time advisors to whom students can relate.

See, [www.mdrc.org/publication/designing-enhanced-advising](http://www.mdrc.org/publication/designing-enhanced-advising).

**Integrated Planning and Advising for Student Success (iPass).** MDRC and the Community College Research Center partnered with three institutions (California State University, Fresno; Montgomery County C.C. in Pennsylvania and the U. of North Carolina at Charlotte) to study how iPASS enhances their existing advising practices.

The colleges saw an increase in communication with students, a small increase in the number of meetings between students and advisers, and at two of the three colleges, an increase in the proportion of students who, along with advisors, received early alerts if the student was struggling in a given course. However, the updated impact findings show the enhancements did not have positive effects on academic outcomes.

Mounting evidence suggests improving students’ academic outcomes requires more substantial changes to their college experiences. “Bringing new technology and using it to redesign advising is an interactive process, and it takes time. This effort should be viewed as one step in the process of achieving broader change.”

**IU’s Fall 2021 Orientation to Remain Virtual.** Orientations for Fall 2021 will look similar to last fall’s at Indiana University-Bloomington—fully virtual. The improved orientation will be at the student pace and occur via Zoom and Canvas, with modules for incoming students to complete on their own. They are required to complete these before their semester begins. Orientation will include sites around campus, academic advising and student loans. Ultimately, orientations will return to in-person, once the pandemic is resolved. IU Bloomington’s faculty council also voted to permanently end the school’s standardized testing requirement. ■

## COUNSELOR’S BOOKSHELF

**In-Personal Virtual Campus Tours.** LiveCampusToursbyNylie is a new venture that matches high school students with undergraduates of similar interest and background for live, customized, one-on-one treks across campus via smart phones.

The new service is the brainchild of a former *New York Times* travel columnist who began giving virtual tours during the pandemic and a recent grad and tour guide from the U. of Pittsburgh. They tested their idea last fall and are now expanding to more than 100 colleges

and universities. It employs thousands of the guides who “Bring prospective students the real scoop on life on campus.” See <https://livecampustours.com/about-nylie>.

*Unacceptable: Privilege, Deceit & the Making of the College Admissions Scandal* by Melissa Korn and Jennifer Levitz, published by Portfolio, ISBN-13: 978-0593087725, \$20.65. ■

## CURRICULUM CAPSULES

**Trinity Revamps Curriculum.** Beginning with the Class of 2025, students at Trinity C. in Connecticut will encounter a revised curriculum that will include “a broad variety of credit-bearing co-curricular experiences and a wellness program.” In addition to 32 core academic credits, the new requirement promoting personal well-being, students will take three additional credits known as “Trinity Plus,” that will allow students to earn “experiential certificates” aimed at preparing for success after graduation.

These include teaching assistantships, peer teaching and mentorships, internships outside the student’s major, summer fellowships, unpaid research with faculty members, paid summer research and other opportunities.

“The co-curriculars emphasize experiential and lifelong skills,” said Mitchell A. Polin, associate dean for curriculum. “They are ways to link what’s happening at Trinity with the world and a student’s professional aspirations.”

**New Education Models Emerging.** The pandemic has disrupted and changed many things, including higher education models. Many educators are thinking about new approaches to educating students and “consumers” of knowledge at a much reduced cost. The “business model” of universities is also

being disrupted at a time when costs and debt seem unsustainable.

For example, Anant Agarwal, who is credited with launching MOOCs (Massive Online Open Courses), and is founder and CEO of edX that educates students and faculty across the globe, many for free, thinks that in the future students will demand shorter courses and programs for specific skills, similar to certificate programs, without the arduous task of applying to attend.

He says quality education is accessible to anyone, anywhere with a computer and modem. It can be accessed throughout a learner’s life and whenever it’s necessary to master new skills or expanded current knowledge.

“Higher education isn’t something you do once and then move on,” he says. Agarwal also predicts that courses do not need to be taught by local professors. Students can find top experts from around the world to share their knowledge. Students who attended courses like these will be judged by what they know and can do, their competence, rather than “where they went to school.”

This approach also includes “stackable certificates” that demonstrate increased levels of learning. edX grew from 81 million enrolled students around the world in 2019 to 110 million in 2020. ■

## FINANCIAL MATTERS

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**Continuing COVID Impacts.** Even as hope rises with administration of COVID vaccines, the economic impact on colleges and universities continues to be substantial. Many students, weary of Zoom classes and lack of social interaction, may be taking lower course loads this spring. Reduced revenue from unused residence halls and dining facilities continue to have budgetary consequences.

By some estimates, the pandemic has already cost colleges more than \$120 billion. As a result, colleges and universities are cutting programs, faculty and staff. For example, Ohio Wesleyan U. is cutting 18 majors.

The U. of California, Berkeley has temporarily halted admission to its Ph.D. programs in anthropology, sociology and art history. Alaska may have to merge some universities.

“We haven’t seen a budget crisis like this in a generation,” Robert Kelchen, a Seton Hall U. professor, told *The New York Times*. “There is nothing off limits at this point.”

**Higher Ed Budgets for the Post-COVID Era.** A new report from the Lumina foundation, “Higher Ed Budgets for the Post-COVID Era” concluded that, “The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the global and U.S. economy more profoundly than any other event since World War II.” ■

## NEWS YOU CAN USE

**PH.D. Attainment 2019.** “The Survey of Earned Doctorates, 2019” found that the number of doctorate recipients increased to 55,703, up 1 percent from 2018, but below the 3.2 percent average annual growth of recent years. The proportion of doctorates earned by temporary visa holders was 38 percent. The number of underrepresented minority doctorate recipients grew to 5,480.

Women earned more than half of the doctorates in the life sciences, psychology and social sciences, education, humanities and arts and other non-science and engineering fields. However, they earned about a third of the PhD’s in physical sciences and earth sciences and a quarter of them in engineering and in mathematics and computer sciences.

**Illinois Testing Keeps Positivity Rate Below 1 Percent.** The flagship U. of Illinois at Urbana Champaign used extensive and regular testing of a saliva-based test developed by its own scientists to keep the on-campus positivity rate last fall below 1 percent, after an

initial surge. Also critical was quickly isolating students who tested positive. Nearly 3,900 students tested positive, many at the beginning of the semester. Over 1,000 students were also disciplined for breaking protocol.

“We performed more than a million tests across campus throughout the fall semester,” Martin Burke, a chemistry professor and chair of the committee that developed the test told the *Chicago Sun-Times*. “Zero hospitalizations, no deaths, thank goodness, and classes open, research and businesses open, so we were really happy with the way it all played out.”

As a result of this success, other universities are reaching out to duplicate the program, including Notre Dame, the U. of Wisconsin and Northern Illinois U.

**Columbia Student COVID Demands.** More than 4,000 Columbia U. students in New York City signed a pledge to withhold spring tuition payments unless administrators cut tuition, fees, and room and board by at least 10 percent. They also wanted financial aid increased by 10

percent and made a number of demands related to public safety.

They also organized a Town Hall meeting that was attended by students from 75 colleges and universities in hopes of spreading the tuition reduction movement to other universities. Administrators countered with a 10 percent increase in financial aid. *CB* will keep you updated.

**More Test Optional.** Centre C. in Danville, Kentucky has joined the test-optional wave. Centre has committed to a three-year test-free run, something that it was considering before the pandemic. “It became crystal clear that this is exactly the right time to make this move that we’ve talked about making,” said Bob Nesmith, dean of admission and financial aid at Centre. “So it was a happy coincidence of internal thinking and external factors,” he told Kentucky.com. The U. of Kentucky also has adjusted awarding scholarships without standardized test scores based on high school GPAs. ■

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