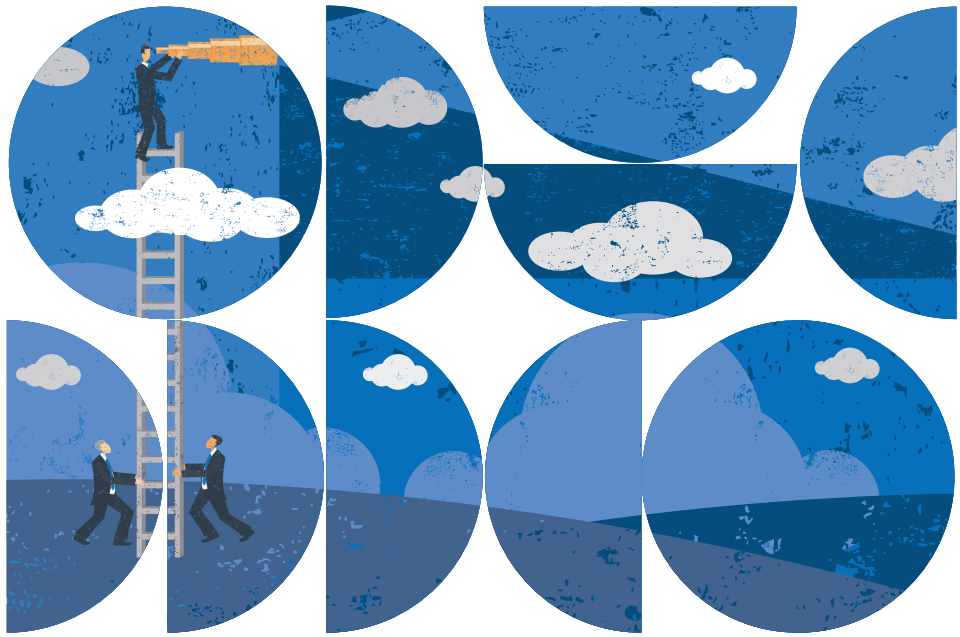
EAB

Delivering a **Differentiated Application** Process

Redesigning Recruitment Interactions for the Needs of Underrepresented Applicants

Enrollment Management Forum

Blueprint for Enrolling a Diverse Student Body, Volume 4



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Enrollment Management Forum

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Blueprint for Enrolling a Diverse Student Body Overview

The Enrollment Management Forum presents the fourth installment in a four-part research series about how to identify, engage, and recruit students from underrepresented populations.

Enrollment Managers, Admissions Directors and Policy Committees, Presidents and senior administrators, and Chief Diversity Officers should use this research series to guide investments and strategies to achieve diversity goals.

1

Charting the Diversity Landscape: Delineating Worsening Inequities in Underrepresented Student Access to Higher Education

- Understand the current state of diversity and the challenges in enrolling students from underrepresented populations
- Recognize three forces intensifying pressure and competition to enroll a diverse class

2

Evolving College Access Programs: Scaling K-12 Interventions to Increase College Preparedness

- Expand beyond the traditional model for college access programs
- Prioritize interventions for school-wide and school-specific root cause problems
- Facilitate student self-correction with personalized progress reports

3

Supporting Parents of First-Generation Students: Engaging the Family in College Search

- Harness the parents of first-generation students as key influencers to college participation
- Provide opportunities for families to assess institutional fit
- Engage parents and build institutional affinity throughout the application process

4

Delivering a Differentiated Application Process: Redesigning Recruitment Interactions for the Needs of Underrepresented Applicants

- Address student concerns about affordability, ability, and fit
- Craft a process from pre-application to post-admittance that mitigates barriers
- Implement tailored interactions for underrepresented applicants

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Key Takeaways

Not All Qualified Underrepresented Students Enroll

- Many high-achieving underrepresented students do not enroll in college. Enrollment gaps by income and race present an opportunity to inflect campus diversity. In the near term, colleges and universities should enroll more of these qualified students to complement parallel efforts to expand the pool of admissible students outlined in the previous installments of this research series.
- Qualified underrepresented students are held back by three key concerns: they may doubt their ability to afford college, to be admitted and succeed academically once enrolled, and to fit in on campus. When these students attempt to apply and enroll, they may also encounter logistical barriers and receive insufficient support to navigate the lengthy and complex admission process.

Address Student Concerns About Affordability, Ability, and Fit

- High sticker prices and misunderstanding of financial aid may lead underrepresented students to miscalculate their net price. Students may underestimate their ability to succeed academically in college. Finally, they may doubt that they will integrate socially.
- To increase enrollment of underrepresented students, Enrollment Managers (EMs) must redesign communication to proactively address these three concerns.
  - **Practice 9: Proactive High-Performer Award Communications**—Notify high-achieving underrepresented students of their academic qualifications and scholarship potential early in the process.
  - **Practice 10: Social Proof Accelerants**—Create opportunities for underrepresented applicants (and their families) to interact with students and alumni of similar backgrounds.
  - **Practice 11: Shared Experience Video Campaign**—Use social media to convey the experiences of campus individuals from underrepresented backgrounds to prospective students.
  - **Practice 12: Community Outreach Ambassadors**—Train institutional staff to elevate informal community interactions into moments of prospect engagement.

Implement Tailored Interactions for Underrepresented Applicants

- Underrepresented students often lack preexisting knowledge of how to apply to college and may also lack adult support throughout the process to successfully complete applications.
- To enroll more underrepresented students, EMs need to eliminate process barriers and add touchpoints tailored to the needs of each underrepresented applicant.
  - **Practice 13: Smart Logic-Triggered Fee Waivers**—Redesign applications to automatically waive fees for low-income and first-generation applicants.
  - **Practice 14: Counselor Advising Improvement Portal**—Provide counselors with the information needed to help students complete applications.
  - **Practice 15: Population-Specific Admissions Concierge**—Match underrepresented applicants with dedicated admission counselors.
  - **Practice 16: Academic Program Application Rematching**—Recommend alternative majors to ensure admissible applicants are not rejected.
  - **Practice 17: Priority Yield Population Reevaluation**—Extend high-touch yield efforts to underrepresented students in the middle of the admit pool.

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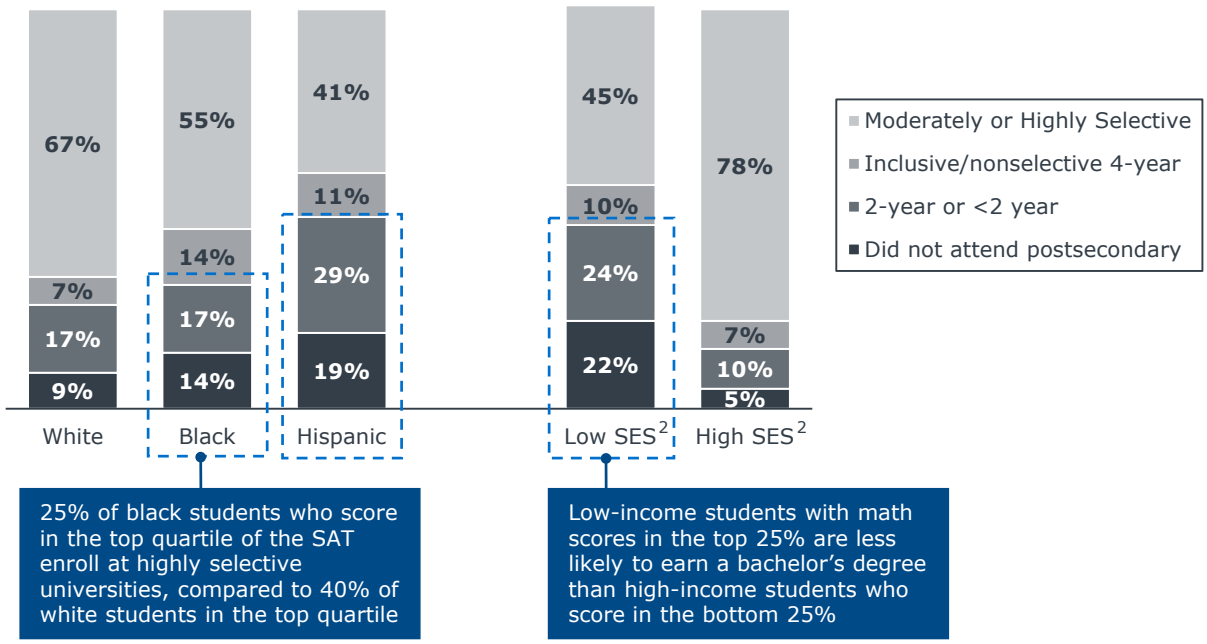
Even Qualified Candidates Fail to Enroll

Underrepresented High Achievers Enroll at Community College—or Not at All

Even the most qualified underrepresented students are more likely to enroll at less selective institutions and community colleges or to opt out of higher education altogether. Analysis of data from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 by the Education Trust found that high-achieving black and Hispanic students are less likely than similarly qualified white students to enroll at four-year institutions. This enrollment gap is even wider by income. While 85% of high-achieving, high-income students enrolled at a four-year institution, only 55% of high-achieving, low-income students enrolled at four-year institutions.

Race and Income Influence Enrollment Outcomes, Even for High Achievers

Postsecondary Enrollment by Institutional Selectivity of High-Achieving 10th Graders by Race and Income[1]



The first installment in this research series, **Charting the Diversity Landscape**, revealed that Caroline Hoxby and Christopher Avery's "undermatchers," or high-ability, low-income students who do not enroll at selective institutions, are a small pool of about 35,000 students. These "undermatchers" are also predominantly white. While similar to Hoxby and Avery's data set, the Educational Longitudinal Study contains a broader grouping of students. Furthermore, these data, as well as Hoxby and Avery's research, demonstrate that not all high-ability underrepresented students enroll in college or enroll at institutions of a selectivity matching their ability. Although colleges and universities will not fully solve current gaps in representation by exclusively enrolling more "undermatchers," there is still an opportunity to enroll more of these high-ability underrepresented students at four-year institutions.

1) Educational Longitudinal Study, outcomes of students who scored in the top quartile on a math and reading assessment in 10th grade (~65,000 underrepresented students).
2) Bottom and top quartile, respectively, of socioeconomic status index measuring family income, parental education, and parental occupational prestige.

Source: Theokas C and Bromberg M, "Falling Out of the Lead: Following High Achievers Through High School and Beyond," The Education Trust, April 2, 2014, https://edtrust.org/resource/falling-out-of-the-lead-following-high-achievers-through-high-school-and-beyond/; Nichols A and Evans-Bell D, "A Look at Black Student Success: Identifying Top- and Bottom-Performing Institutions," The Education Trust, March 1, 2017, https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/A-Look-at-Black-Student-Success.pdf; Kelly A, Dean KC, and Hochleitner T, "Staying on Target for College: How Innovation Can Improve the Pipeline to Higher Education," American Enterprise Institute, June 2014, "http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/-staying-on-target-for-college_093613307290.pdf; EAB interviews and analysis.

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Two Key Barriers for Underrepresented Applicants

Combination of Student Concerns and Process Barriers Limits Enrollment

Underrepresented students may fail to initially enter the enrollment process and/or do not make it through the process to the point of matriculation. There are two main reasons why high-achieving students from underrepresented backgrounds do not apply and enroll:

1. **Student Concerns:** Students are stymied by concerns about the affordability of higher education, their admissibility and academic ability, and social fit on campus. These three concerns may make enrolling at four-year colleges and universities seem like an unachievable goal.
2. **Process Barriers:** Even when these students attempt to apply and enroll, they may encounter procedural barriers and receive little support navigating the lengthy and complex admission and enrollment process.

Student Concerns

Three Concerns Depress Interest from Underrepresented Students

Affordability

Ability

Fit

Process Barriers

Each Admission Process Step Presents Another Obstacle

Take SAT/ACT

30%

Of low-income students **take SAT or ACT exams** (compared to 70% of high-income students)

29%

Of first-generation students **had not thought about taking the SAT/ACT** by 10th grade (compared to 14% of students with at least one parent with a bachelor's degree)

Submit Applications

84%

Of high-achieving students from families with incomes of <$20K fail to obtain **Common Application fee waivers**

60%

Of black students **did not complete applications** to a regional public university in the Midwest (compared to 19% of incomplete applications across all students)

Apply for Aid

3/10

High-achieving, low-income students **fail to complete the FAFSA**

33%

Of FAFSA non-filers are **Pell Grant-eligible**

55%

Of low-income students **file FAFSA after standard deadlines**[1]

Source: "True Merit: Ensuring Our Brightest Students Have Access to Our Best Colleges and Universities," Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, January 2016, http://www.jkcf.org/assets/1/7/JKCF_True_Merit_Report.pdf; Page L and Scott-Clayton J, "Improving college access in the United States: Barriers and policy responses," Economics of Education Review 51 (2016), 4-22., doi:10.1016/jeconedurev.2016.02.009; Klaslik D, "The College Application Gauntlet: The Obstacles Presented by the Steps to College Enrollment," The Maryland Equity Project, November 2013, https://education.umd.edu/sites/default/files/klasik_obstaclestocollegeenrollment_20131.pdf; EAB interviews and analysis.

1) Standard deadlines refer to April or later within the aid year.

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Delivering a Differentiated Application Process

Redesigning Recruitment Interactions for the Needs of Underrepresented Applicants

Underrepresented students require recognition of their concerns and additional support matched to their needs. EMs must alleviate student concerns and minimize the process barriers that undermine their enrollment. To enroll more high-achieving underrepresented students, EMs should:

1. **Address Student Concerns About Affordability, Ability, and Fit:** Redesign interactions to proactively address underrepresented students' concerns about affordability, ability, and fit.
    1. Pair proactive affordability communications with recognition of students' superior academic ability.
    2. Connect applicants (and their families) to students and alumni of similar backgrounds to demonstrate institutional fit.
2. **Implement Tailored Interactions for Underrepresented Applicants:** Minimize roadblocks and tailor the application process to the needs of each underrepresented applicant.
    1. Reduce barriers to apply by eliminating unnecessary steps and assisting students in the completion of necessary application process steps.
    2. Recommend alternative major options for students who are not admissible to highly competitive academic programs.
    3. Rethink which populations are high-priority during yield events.

Address Student Concerns About Affordability, Ability, and Fit		Implement Tailored Interactions for Underrepresented Applicants		
Preempt Affordability and Ability Concerns	**Reinforce Fit Throughout the Application Process**	**Reduce Application Process Barriers**	**Identify Better-Fit Academic Programs**	**Rethink Priority Yield Populations**
Practice 9: Proactive High-Performer Award Communications	Practice 10: Social Proof Accelerants Practice 11: Shared Experience Video Campaign Practice 12: Community Outreach Ambassadors	Practice 13: Smart Logic-Triggered Fee Waivers Practice 14: Counselor Advising Improvement Portal Practice 15: Population-Specific Admissions Concierge	Practice 16: Academic Program Application Rematching	Practice 17: Priority Yield Population Reevaluation

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Addressing Student Concerns About Affordability, Ability, and Fit

1

- Practice 9: Proactive High-Performer Award Communications
- Practice 10: Social Proof Accelerants
- Practice 11: Shared Experience Video Campaign
- Practice 12: Community Outreach Ambassadors

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Affordability the Primary Barrier to Enrollment

Concerns About College Financing Paramount to Underrepresented Students

Black, Hispanic, and first-generation students are more likely to report "major" concerns about financing college than their white peers and peers whose parents have attended college. While high list prices may concern all student groups, students with less ability to pay may anchor to sticker price, especially when they possess limited understanding of financial aid or how to assess estimated costs.

Underrepresented Students Are More Concerned About Financing College

22% Of black students and

25% Of Hispanic students report "major" concerns about financing college (compared to 9% of white students)

25% Of first-generation students report "major" concerns about financing college (compared to 11% of students whose parents attended college)

> **Sticker Shock Scares Prospects from Entering the Funnel**
>
> "If you come from a family and a neighborhood where no one has gone to a fancy college…if you go on their website, **the first thing you're going to look for is the sticker price**. End of conversation."
>
> *Anthony W. Marx*
> *Former President of Amherst College*

But Likely to Anticipate Receiving Financial Support…

45% Of black students and

60% Of Hispanic students expect to receive merit aid (compared to 64% of white students)

…And Less Likely to Estimate Costs Prior to Applying

2% Of black and Hispanic students report that both they and their parents used net price calculators (compared to 12% of Asian students)

8% Of low-income[1] students report that both they and their parents used net price calculators (compared to 25% of high-income[2] students)

Compounding these concerns, underrepresented students may underestimate the financial support they will receive or be unaware of how to calculate those estimates. For example, black and Hispanic students are less likely to expect to receive merit aid. Black, Hispanic, and low-income students are also less likely to attempt to estimate costs with net price calculators.

Previous EAB research discusses how to promote cost transparency in financial aid communications and how to take advantage of the longer decision window of Early FAFSA to address these misperceptions among prospective students and families.

Source: Hesel R and Williams R, "Students and Parents Making Judgments about College Costs without Complete Information," Student Poll, vol. 8, 1, 2010, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5810fea5e58c62bd729121cc/t/58bf26562994ca368856b3b6/1488922199521/studentPOLL_V8.1_May2010.pdf; Eagan K, et al., "The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2016," Higher Education Research Institute, 2017, https://www.heri.ucla.edu/monographs/TheAmericanFreshman2016.pdf; Pérez-Peña R, "Generation Later, Poor Are Still Rare at Elite Colleges," *The New York Times*, August 26, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/26/education/despite-promises-little-progress-in-drawing-poor-to-elite-colleges.html; EAB interviews and analysis.

1) Families with annual incomes less than $40K.
2) Families with annual incomes of $100K and more.

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Aptitude Does Not Guarantee Student Self-Belief

College Dreams Often Dashed by Lack of Confidence in Academic Ability

Underrepresented students often discount their ability to be admitted to four-year colleges and universities and/or fear they will not succeed academically once enrolled. While all students may doubt their admissibility and academic ability, these concerns are more likely to impact students from underrepresented backgrounds, especially for students who attend K-12 schools where college attendance is not an expectation.

Common College-Related Stressors for High School Students…

n=1,512 students

80% Difficulty Making Ends Meet Financially

75% Pressure to Do Well Academically in Classroom

67% Unable to Afford a College Education or Find a Way to Pay

61% Unlikely to Be "Good Enough" to Enroll in College

51% Unprepared to Be Succeessful in Life After High School

…Have a More Extreme Impact on Historically Underrepresented Students

2x Hispanic students are twice as likely to **require academic remediation if students lack academic self-belief** (vs. comparable students)

20% Black students are 20 percent less likely to enroll in college **due to challenges with self-belief and self-confidence in their college enrollment** when compared to white peers

Self-doubt about academic ability and affordability concerns compound. A student who questions her future academic success at the state flagship, for example, may also hesitate to take on debt to finance her education. As prospective students make enrollment decisions largely based on their expected outcomes, students with ability concerns may view college enrollment as a risky financial investment that will not necessarily "pay off."

Source: "The State Of Our Nation's Youth 2016-2017," Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans, 2016, https://www.horatioalger.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/HA-2016-SONY-FINAL.pdf; Goyer et al., "Self-affirmation facilitates minority middle schoolers' progress along college trajectories," 2017, http://www.pnas.org/content/114/29/7594.full; EAB interviews and analysis.

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Investments to Address Affordability Alone Insufficient

Guaranteeing Aid for High-Achieving Underrepresented Students

In an effort to address affordability concerns, many colleges and universities have invested in formalized financial aid commitments. Institutions often frame these investments as "promise" or "guarantee" programs and named scholarships. While these commitments are not necessarily *new* dollars, they clarify and highlight the financial assistance that qualifying students can expect to receive. The programs listed below are only a sampling of the many need-based commitments that universities have made to ensure access for low-income students.

Affordability Commitments for Promising Underrepresented Students

Bucky's Tuition Promise

Granite Guarantee

U Promise

Buff Promise

Blue and Gold Opportunity Plan

Richmond In Reach

Baltimore Scholars Program

Century Scholars Program

Golden Promise

These commitments represent a step in the right direction, and colleges and universities should continue to make and expand these commitments. However, universities cannot assume that the investments alone will assuage underrepresented students' affordability concerns. Without early, clear communications, qualified low-income students may still not know these programs exist or that they qualify.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

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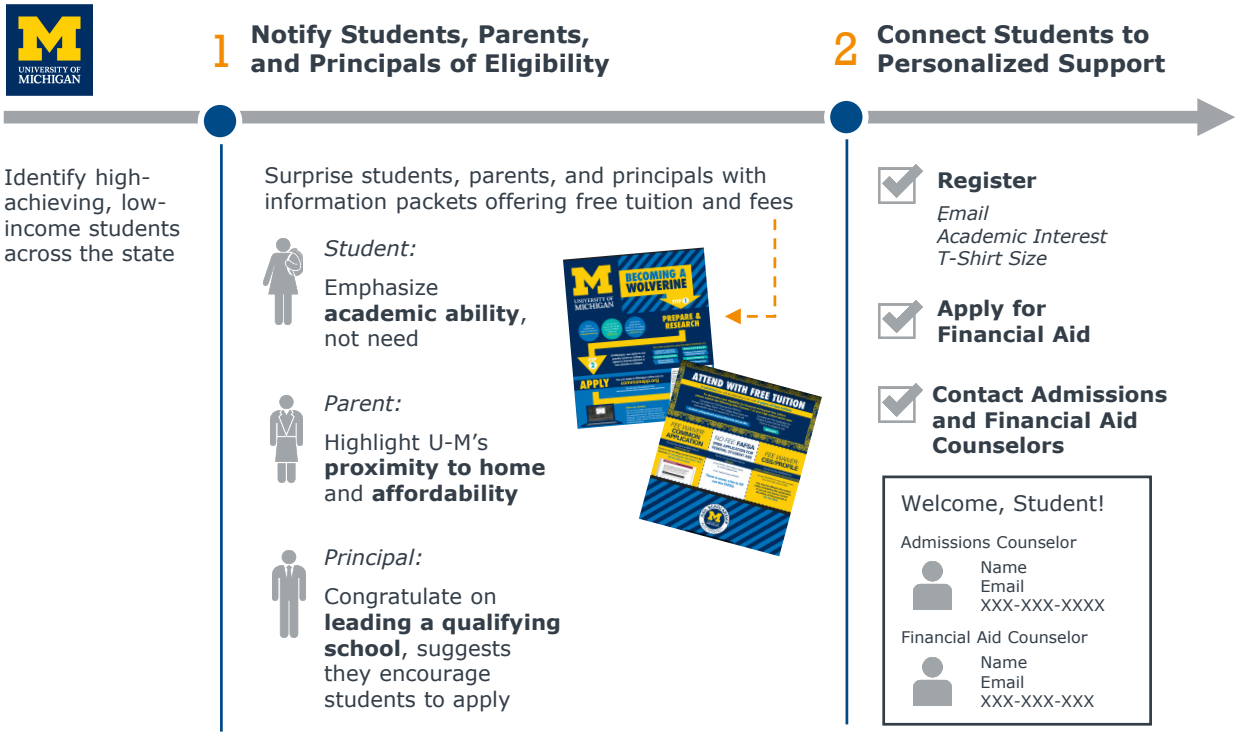
Combine Affordability and Ability Messaging

Early Outreach Simultaneously Addresses Affordability and Ability Concerns

With the HAIL (High Achieving Involved Leader) scholarship, the **University of Michigan – Ann Arbor** committed to provide free tuition to high-achieving, low-income students in the state.[1] In particular, the University of Michigan hoped to increase enrollment of students from rural regions in the upper peninsula of Michigan that historically had not sent many students to Ann Arbor. Students from these communities assumed the university was unaffordable and that they would not be admitted. In some cases, students had never even heard of the University of Michigan. To increase enrollment of these students, EM leadership realized the university needed to inform students both that they were qualified to be admitted and that they would receive financial support.



The University of Michigan addressed these barriers by proactively reaching out to high-achieving, low-income students—as well as two top influencers on school choice, parents and high school principals—about the HAIL scholarship. EM staff used GPA and test score data from the state to target small towns and counties that they previously had not recruited from. Students received information packets communicating that the university encouraged them to apply because of their high ability and offering a full-tuition scholarship for four years upon their admission. Students' letters directed them to a personalized URL to register in the University of Michigan's system to receive a free T-shirt—also putting them into the EM office's prospect communication stream. The personalized website connected students to a point of contact in both the admission and financial aid offices to help them complete the remaining steps to apply.

1) HAIL guarantees a full-tuition scholarship for four years. Michigan selected recipients by creating a matrix of students at free and reduced-price lunch high schools that met certain GPA and score thresholds.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

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Affordability-Ability Marketing Entices Applicants

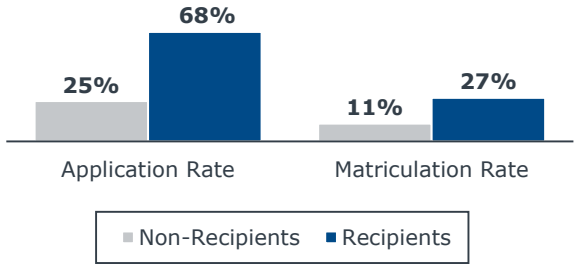
Early Outreach Generates Low-Income Application and Enrollment Growth

The University of Michigan found that targeted, early outreach about the HAIL scholarship generated more applications and enrollments from underrepresented students. Because Michigan conducted A-B testing with the HAIL packages, EM staff members were able to compare application and matriculation rates for HAIL packet recipients versus non-recipients across a few measures (race, urbanicity, and distance from the university). Overall, HAIL packet recipients were far more likely to apply than non-recipients (68% versus 25% application rate). HAIL packet recipients were also more likely to enroll than non-recipients (27% versus 11% matriculation rate).

University of Michigan's Experiment Reveals Effectiveness of Proactive Communication

- Divided high schools with scholarship qualifiers into two groups
- Students in one group received scholarship packets
- Recipient group **applied and matriculated at higher rates** than control group

Average Application and Matriculation Rates at Michigan High Schools, 2015-2016 Senior Class



> "We're pleased with the first-year enrollment numbers from this initiative. The data indicates that if we **remove barriers and provide high-achieving, low-income students with information and resources, they will apply and be accepted** to selective colleges and universities."
>
> *Kedra Ishop*
> *VP of Enrollment Management*

> "We want these high-achieving students to know **we look forward to assisting with their application submission and supporting them** throughout the admissions and enrollment process."
>
> *Erica Sanders*
> *Director of Undergraduate Admissions*

The University of Michigan repeated the HAIL outreach in 2016, and Michigan leadership observed similar trends in application and matriculation rates for packet recipients in the 2016-2017 senior class. Michigan leadership credits the clarity of information included in the HAIL packets and the September distribution, which still allowed time to submit applications, for helping convince students to apply and enroll.[1] The involvement of parents and principals was also important in prompting students to apply; in focus groups, some HAIL recipients reported that their families and school staff encouraged them to attend the University of Michigan after receiving their own HAIL notifications.

The success of the HAIL outreach also inspired the Go Blue Guarantee campaign. The Go Blue Guarantee is a last-dollar scholarship that applies to tuition and fees for four years for in-state residents with family incomes of $65K or less.

Source: "HAIL Scholarship Program" report provided by University of Michigan; Allen J, "U-M attracts 262 HAIL Scholarship recipients to campus in first year," *The University Record,* October 17, 2016, https://record.umich.edu/articles/u-m-attracts-262-hail-scholarship-recipients-campus-first-year; Fitzgerald R, "U-Michigan will test new approach to reaching high-achieving, low-income students," Aug 26, 2015, http://ns.umich.edu/new/releases/23079-u-michigan-will-test-new-approach-to-reaching-high-achieving-low-income-students; EAB interviews and analysis.

1) The HAIL communication packet won two awards from the Public Relations Society of America, the Bronze Anvil award for tactical excellence in print publications and direct mail.

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Fit Matters

Students and Parents Seek Social Proof to Feel at Ease with Enrollment Decisions

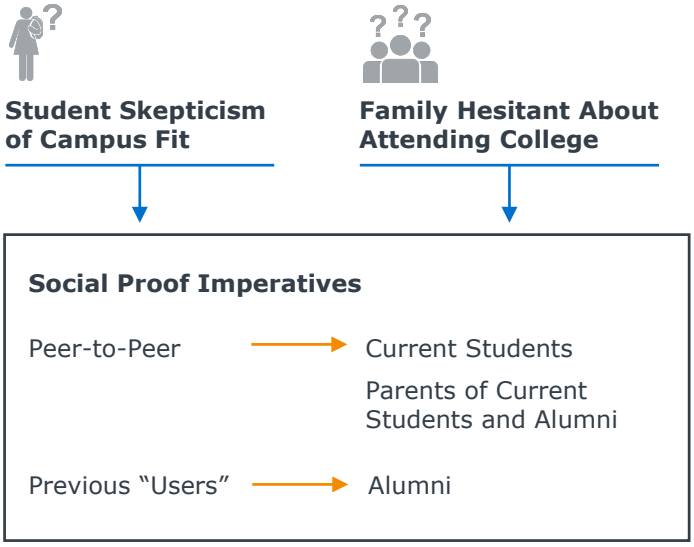
Like all people making major decisions, prospective students seek validation from others about their enrollment decisions. Researchers have termed this phenomenon "social proof" to define the concept that people make decisions by what others—peers, large groups of people, experts, and previous users—think is correct.

Seeing Is Believing

Percentage of prospective students who say they don't trust university websites and seek validation from an external source

"One in five students are minorities on our campus, but prospects and their parents won't believe it until they interact with people like them."

VP, Enrollment Management
Private Research University



In the context of enrollment, students require proof from their peers (other students) and previous "users" (alumni) that an institution will be a good fit for them. This desire is more important for students who do not fit the profile of other currently enrolled students. Especially with renewed focus on student activism, underrepresented students and their parents may question which institutions will make for welcoming places to enroll. Engaging with peers (other underrepresented students) and previous "users" (alumni of underrepresented backgrounds) about their experiences can ease these concerns.

Source: "The Student Customer Journey," Learning Places, 2015, http://www.slideshare.net/LearningPlaces/student-customer-journey; EAB interviews and analysis.

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Connect with Students and Alumni for Social Proof

Enhancing a Common Admission Practice for an Underrepresented Audience

While student ambassador programs and alumni events are common recruiting tactics, enrollment teams should consider how to increase the impact of these programs for underrepresented students. By harnessing the power of peer-to-peer (prospective students with current students, parents with parents) and previous "user" connections (prospective students with alumni), EMs and the admission staff can demonstrate the community fit that underrepresented applicants should find on campus.

Common Practice to Involve Students and Alumni	Practices to Boost Social Proof *Peer-to-Peer and Previous "User" Connections*
Students Attend On-Campus Events Current students attend on-campus recruitment events	**Leveraging Student Connections** UW pays ambassadors to **visit high schools while already home on breaks**.
Ad Hoc Language Accommodation Communication with non-English speakers at recruiting events limited by language abilities of admissions staff	**Bridging Language Gaps** Bilingual student interns join admissions counselors on high school visits. Interns present in Spanish to **communicate directly with Spanish-speaking parents**.
Unstructured Alumni Involvement All alumni invited to general admitted student receptions	**Intentional Matching** Undergraduate Admissions coordinates with Black Alumni Organization to match alumni with admitted students first by **location** and then by **intended major**. Alumni **meet one-on-one** with students and host recruitment events in their local area.
Parent Peers Overlooked Students—but not parents—connected with undergraduate and alumni peers	**Connecting Parents to Parents** EM office partners with Alumni Association to invite young alumni (<5 years) and **parents of alumni** to attend or host receptions.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

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Use Digital Platforms to Demonstrate Campus Fit

San Jose State's First-Generation College Student Support Campaign

Applicants can also connect with peers and current "users" electronically. Not all students will be able to attend on-campus events or events in their communities, and prospective students are increasingly looking for digital means to access information. To reach first-generation prospects online, **San Jose State University (SJSU)** asked students, faculty, staff, and alumni to share their own experiences as first-generation college students. SJSU staff use social media to share the videos with both prospective and current students.

"I Relate" Video Testimonial Campaign Highlights

SJSU SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

IMAGE CREDIT: YOUTUBE.

- **Students, faculty, staff, and alumni** share their own experiences as first-generation college students
- Videos feature personal accounts of **challenges faced and resources and support systems** used to address them
- Shared with prospective and current students **largely through social media**
- **Stories collected and shared on an ongoing basis** with a few new videos released each month

The individuals featured in the videos are prompted to talk specifically about how they have felt at different times throughout their college experience, resources they accessed to overcome obstacles, and how they have ultimately been successful. The individual videos were compiled into a 30-minute video of powerful testimonials and messages of support. The online campaign allows prospective students to hear authentic experiences from current students, faculty, staff, and alumni and also builds an inclusive culture for first-generation students once they get to campus.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

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Train Staff Members to Become Informal Recruiters

Wayne State Uses Unofficial Interactions to Expand Community Reach

Colleges and universities should not overlook the informal conversations that faculty and staff likely have with individuals in their social networks about the university. While these interactions may not seem like recruitment moments, EMs should capitalize on existing community relationships to increase engagement with local underrepresented students. University faculty and staff who have established connections with the surrounding communities, such as sports teams and churches, can articulate the value of college and explain admission policies in an informal and less daunting manner.

1 Recruit

Solicit volunteers from Wayne State Insider Program

2017 Insider Program Graduate

Dear Friend,

In a chaotic world overcrowded with advertising from every angle, **a personal recommendation has power**. Hearing from you quickly cuts through the clutter. We are asking you to put in a good word for the institution…

2 Train

Teach 17 ambassadors how to engage their personal networks and equip with outreach materials

90-minute training: Admission and Financial Aid 101

Ambassador Toolkit:

- 17-slide presentation on Wayne State, financial aid, and applications
- FAQ on scholarships
- Inquiry cards
- Table banner

3 Deploy

Employ ambassadors based on their preferred activities and EM need

Engage with their communities, from Scout troops to churches

Provide surge capacity for EM events (e.g., alumni panels, open houses)

Wayne State University created an ambassador program to harness these informal connections as formalized recruitment opportunities and also to ensure individuals were not accidentally providing misinformation to potential applicants. The director of admission identified faculty, staff, and students who were conducting community outreach independently. These individuals attended a 90-minute training session on admission and financial aid processes. Ambassadors then received a toolkit of presentation materials to more formally—and accurately—talk about Wayne State in their communities. Ambassadors continue to engage with individuals in their communities and also attend EM-hosted events that need additional support.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

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Implementing Tailored Interactions for Underrepresented Applicants

2

- Practice 13: Smart Logic-Triggered Fee Waivers
- Practice 14: Counselor Advising Improvement Portal
- Practice 15: Population-Specific Admissions Concierge
- Practice 16: Academic Program Application Rematching
- Practice 17: Priority Yield Population Reevaluation

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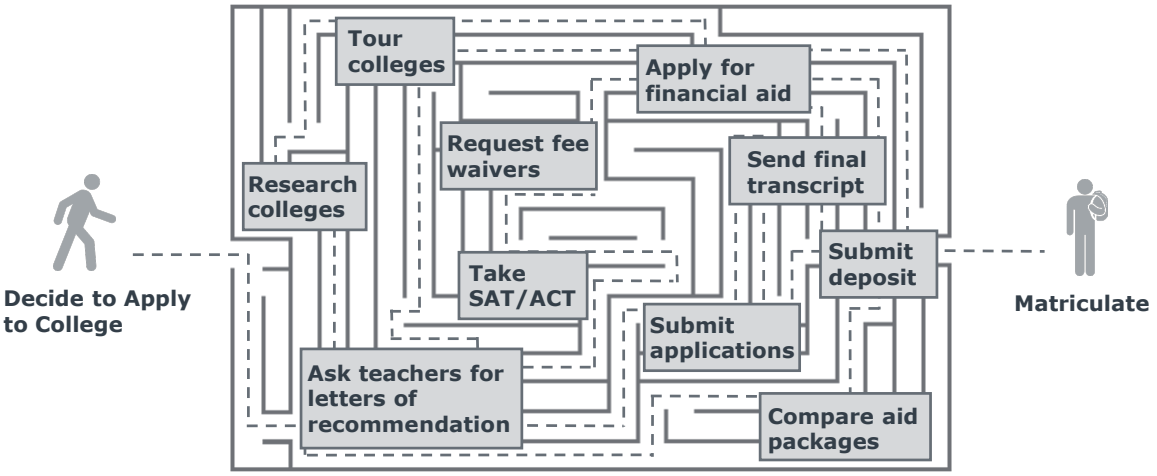
Complex Application Experience a Turnoff

Process Labyrinth Limits Application Volume

The application process consists of a gauntlet of paperwork, deadlines, and high-stakes decisions, all of which have to be done on a tightly choreographed schedule. While traditional, advantaged students often know how to navigate this process, or have help to do so, most underrepresented students do not possess this knowledge or support. As a result, underrepresented students are less likely to complete a number of key process steps, such as the potential roadblocks mentioned on page 7: taking the SAT/ACT, completing applications, and submitting FAFSAs.

A Maze of Pitfalls for the Uninitiated



> You need a person to pay attention to these students and manage their care. They are the least privileged, the least savvy, and they don't know what it means to be a highly competitive candidate or the process for applying to a university."
>
> *Leykia Nulan, Assistant Provost for Diversity*
> *University of Massachusetts Amherst*

Even admissible underrepresented students who successfully apply may not ultimately enroll because they are rejected from their preferred academic programs or overlooked from receiving support post-admission. As "the least privileged and least savvy" students, these populations often fail to navigate the enrollment process without assistance tailored to their needs. To ensure that underrepresented students successfully apply and enroll, EMs must redesign the application process to reduce barriers for these students, recommend alternative major options for students who are not admissible to the most highly competitive academic programs, and rethink which populations are high-priority during yield events.

Source: "True Merit: Ensuring Our Brightest Students Have Access to Our Best Colleges and Universities," Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, January 2016, http://www.jkcf.org/assets/1/7/JKCF_True_Merit_Report.pdf; Page L and Scott-Clayton J, "Improving college access in the United States: Barriers and policy responses," Economics of Education Review 51 (2016), 4-22., doi:10.1016/jeconedurev.2016.02.009; EAB interviews and analysis.

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Qualified Students Don't Always Request Fee Waivers

Well-Intentioned Application Fee Waivers Add Steps and Stigma

The process to request application fee waivers is one such procedural barrier that reduces application volume from underrepresented students. While most institutions offer application fee waivers, underrepresented students may be unable or unwilling to complete the steps to request a waiver. Burdensome steps include needing high school counselors to verify their requests, uploading unique codes or electronic copies of the waivers, and even mailing hard copies to universities.

Tedious Process to Waive Application Fees

- Low-income applicants initially dissuaded by high application fees

$25–90 Range of application fees

- Aspiring applicants further limited by multistep process to submit fee waivers, including verification by high school counselor
- Low-income applicants may feel ashamed of need to ask for financial assistance

Not All Qualifying Low-Income Students Submit Fee Waivers…

35% Of high-ability, low-income students do not request application fee waivers

…Because Low-Income Students Are Unaware of Eligibility

71% Not submitting waivers who assumed they would not qualify

17% Not submitting waivers who did not know fees could be waived

Compounding these logistical steps, students may be limited by the psychological stigma of needing to ask for help. Students who use College Board or NACAC waivers, for example, must indicate their reason for needing additional waivers when submitting the Common Application.[1]

The result is that not all qualifying low-income students request fee waivers. According to the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, over one-third of high-ability, low-income students do not apply for fee waivers. The primary reasons are that students assume they will not qualify for waivers (71%) or do not know that fees could be waived in the first place (17%).

1) The Coalition Application provides automatic fee waivers.

Source: Glynn J, "Opening Doors," Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, August 2017, https://www.jkcf.org/assets/1/7/JKCF_Opening_Doors.pdf?utm_campaign=Opening_Doors&utm_source=all; EAB interviews and analysis.

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Automate Application Fee Waivers

Removing the 'Ask' Increases Applications from First-Generation Students

Both **Trinity College** and **Bowdoin College** wanted to simplify the fee waiver request process. Enrollment leaders at both colleges requested that Common Application add a question at the start of the application that asks students about their first-generation status. If students report they are first-generation, the application never populates the payment page, so students never need to request fee waivers. As these students would have qualified for fee waivers, the removal of the payment page eliminates a process step. In the year after instituting the fee-free application, both colleges saw growth in applications and acceptances from first-generation and/or low-income students.

Trinity College/Bowdoin College Automatic Fee Waiver Process

- Requested that Common App add a question for students to indicate first-gen status
- After checking this box, no additional paperwork required and students never see payment page
- Uses first-gen as a proxy—also captures first-gen college students who are not low-income

More First-Gen Applicants, More First-Gen Students Enrolled in First Year

- **9%** Growth in first-gen and low-income applicants to Bowdoin College
- **10%** Percentage point increase in share of applicant pool that was first-gen at Trinity College
- **38%** Increase in enrolling first-gen students at Trinity College

Other Process Barriers for Consideration

- **Allow Self-Reported Information:** Students input academic record and test scores in application. Matriculating students send official documents for confirmation.
- **Waive CCS Profile and Noncustodial Agreements:** Request tax forms instead.
- **Reduce Financial Aid Jargon:** Online tool calculates language complexity based on number of words per sentence and the number of syllables per word.

Source: Jaschik S, "Success With Free-Fee Applications," *Inside Higher Ed,* May 8, 2017, "https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2017/05/08/colleges-see-success-attracting-more-low-income-students-dropping; EAB interviews and analysis.

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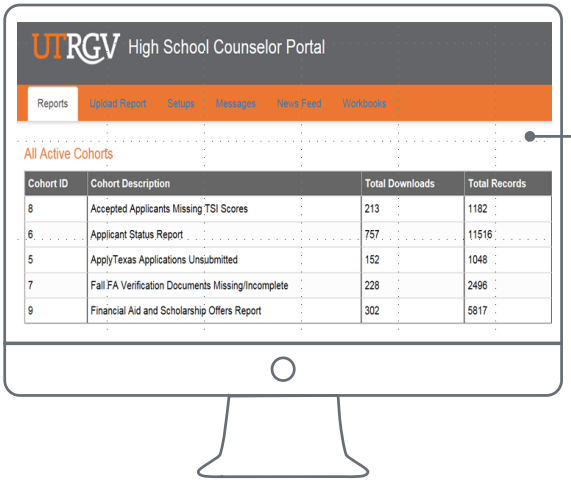
Nudge Counselors to Nudge Students to Apply

Prompt High School Counselors to Intervene with Applicants

Because students commonly fail to submit FAFSAs and applications, many institutions offer FAFSA and application drives at high schools in the local community. While the **University of Texas—Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV)**'s drives helped attendees complete FAFSAs and applications, EM leadership felt they could expand reach through high school counselors. Just as portals help high school counselors ensure their students are prepared for college (see **Evolving College Access Programs**), EMs can harness counselors' support on application completion through electronic platforms that directly update counselors on their students' status.

Equip High School Counselors to Encourage Application Completion



Portal Prods Counselor Behavior

Allow for Self-Service: Monitor students' application status

Track Students: Track pipeline progression of applications to UTRGV

Provide Continuous Updates: Receive a weekly report listing their students' missing documents

Flag Students for Intervention: Direct counselors to help at-risk students

Request Ground Support: Use portal to request FAFSA and application drives

UTRGV's Portal Management

- Invest one month up-front to create portal in-house
- Provide annual portal training to counselors
- Reallocate UTRGV staff time spent on application and counselor follow-up for more complex tasks

The UTRGV portal provides counselors with students' application information in an accessible, user-friendly platform. The portal tracks students' completion of key application steps and submission of required documents, flagging any missing documents. It updates twice a week with new information. The portal also allows counselors to request in-person support from UTRGV, such as FAFSA and application drives and campus tours. By shifting information to a self-service platform, UTRGV significantly shortened the time to respond to requests from counselors about the status of their students' applications.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

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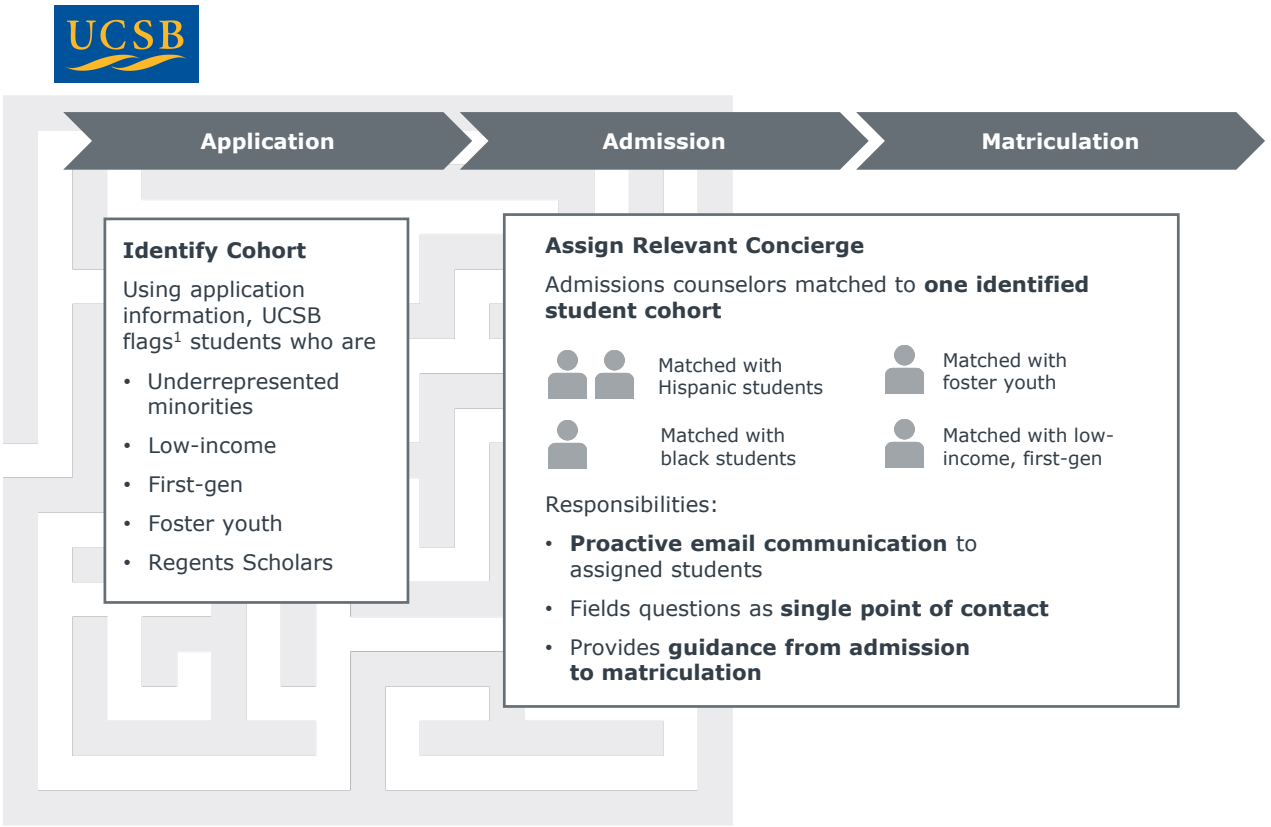
Guide Students Through Matriculation Process

A Concierge Approach from Admission to Matriculation

Even after underrepresented students apply, they may face continuing issues to complete the remaining steps to matriculate. Underrepresented students often view the university as one entity and may not distinguish the functions of different offices, causing their questions to go unasked and/or unanswered. Simultaneously, universities with high applicant volume may lack the staff capacity to provide personalized follow-up to each applicant. As a result, colleges and universities commonly send all admitted students the same communications. This standardization fails to account for students who could still use extra support.



To provide a personalized touch for certain key applicant groups, including underrepresented minority, low-income, and first-generation students, the **University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB)** matches one or two admission counselors to each student cohort. Dedicated concierges email their assigned students with their photos and contact information. Admitted students can then direct all questions to their concierge, who triages their requests and, if necessary, connects them to staff in other offices (e.g., financial aid, housing). While the concierge outreach is time-intensive, UCSB leadership observes that students who are assigned concierges engage more frequently with the admission office.

Additionally, this concierge model can be applied to any desired student population, including nontraditional students, student veterans, and adult learners. UCSB applies this extra touch both for students who need the most help and for the highest academic achievers, the Regents Scholars.

1) Because the state of California bans race considerations in admission decision, UCSB makes these assignments after the point of admission.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

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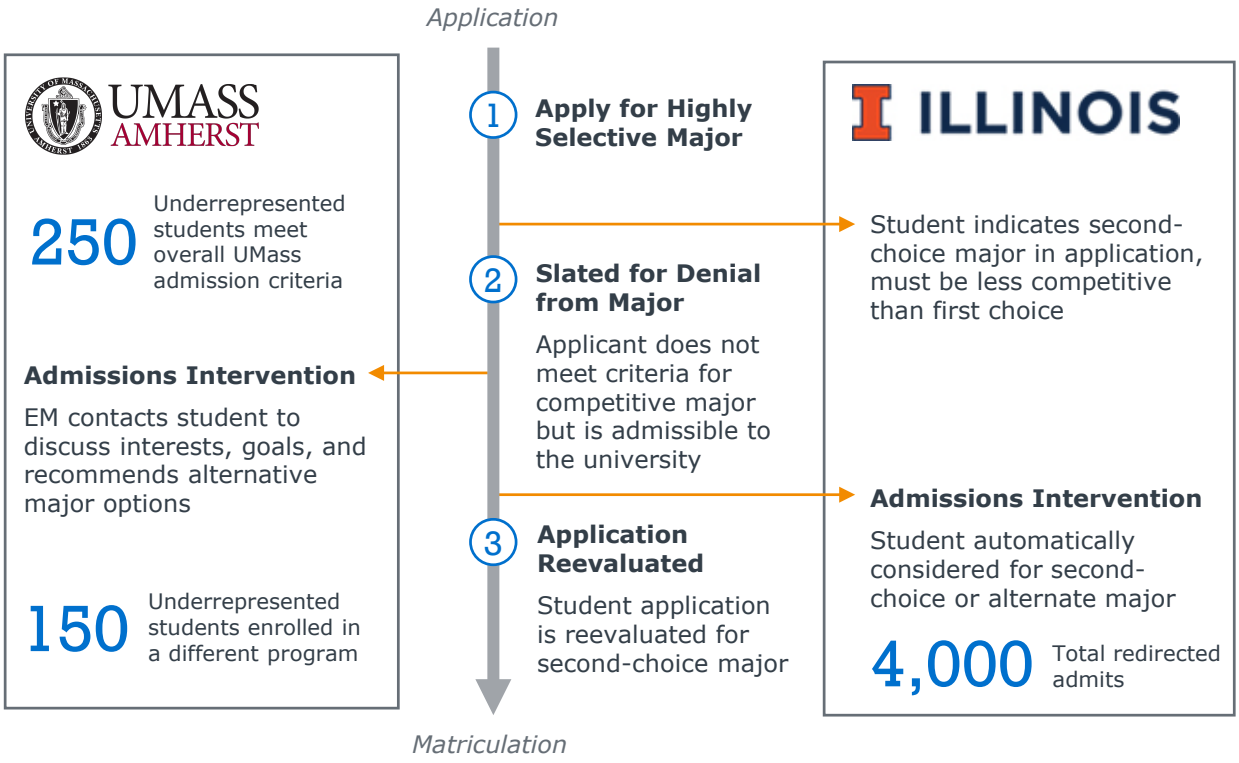
Rematch Applicants Rejected from In-Demand Programs

Post-Application Intervention Redirects Students to Another Major of Interest

While some students may know that certain academic programs are more competitive than others, this is not a distinction that all underrepresented students will make. Students who are unaware of the varying competitiveness across academic programs may unknowingly apply for highly competitive ones. A student may decide to apply as a nursing major, for example, because of a desire to become a medical professional without knowing that nursing is a highly competitive program for admission. Rather than rejecting students who meet all other qualifications for admission, colleges and universities should consider them for other academic programs.



At the **University of Massachusetts Amherst**, about 250 underrepresented students met overall criteria for admission but were not competitive enough for admission to their selected majors. EM staff members reached out to these students to discuss their academic interests and recommend other academic programs in line with those interests. Ultimately, 150 students (60% of the list) enrolled in their second-choice academic programs.

The **University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign** automated the program rematching within the application itself. Applicants rank their top two major choices. The application forces students to select a second option less competitive than the first. Applicants can also indicate if they are open to consideration under "all other avenues of admission," which allows admission staff to redirect students to another program or to consider them as an undeclared major. While not instituted specifically to enroll more underrepresented students, the second consideration likely benefits these students, who may have lesser qualifications (e.g., test scores) than the overall applicant pool.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

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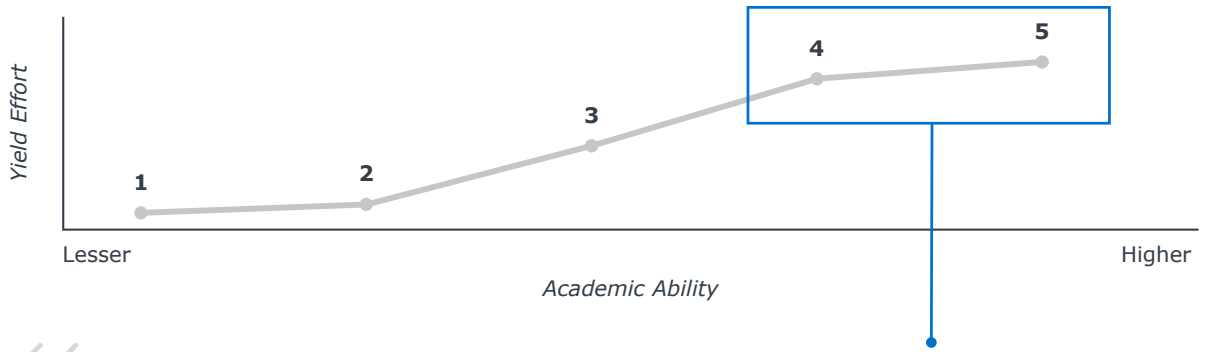
Extreme Competition for a Limited Pool of High Fliers

At the Expense of Other Admitted Students with Potential

With a limited number of underrepresented students at the top of the admit pool, competition among colleges and universities intensifies for the students who are most traditionally qualified. When looking at the distribution of test scores, for example, few minority and low-income students qualify for admission, especially at more selective institutions.[1] The dearth of highly qualified, underrepresented candidates may lead institutions to focus recruitment and yield efforts primarily on the highest achievers, leading some enrollment leaders to report that they seem to be engaged in an "arms race" to yield the small pool of most highly qualified students from underrepresented backgrounds.

Typical Yield Efforts Prioritize High Fliers

Representation of Yield Effort Against Admitted Student Academic Rating



"All of these elite institutions are dumping tons of scholarship money on the A and A-plus students. It's the A-minus and the B-plus and the B students that aren't getting anything… **[Elite institutions] are skimming off the top, and they will continue to skim off the top and take the top-notch students**, but they will have no impact on the economics of these regions, because they don't have any scale."

F. King Alexander
President, Louisiana State University

The **University of Massachusetts (UMass) Amherst** had largely been applying this strategy to its applicant pool. Despite targeting the highest ability underrepresented students, UMass Amherst's yield was declining among these populations—and declining faster than the rate for all students. Rather than continuing to focus disproportionately on students at the very top of the applicant pool, who were also strong candidates at many elite institutions that were potentially offering more aid, UMass Amherst decided to instead focus on yielding "academic 3's." While these students fell in the middle of the applicant pool, they were still qualified candidates whom admission staff had identified for their potential to be successful at UMass Amherst.

Source: "University of Massachusetts Amherst Diversity Strategic Plan," March 30, 2015, https://www.umass.edu/diversity/sites/default/files/diversity_strategic_plan_2015.pdf; Seltzer R, "Looking for Low-Income Students," *InsideHigherEd*, December 13, 2016, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/12/13/effort-launches-boost-low-income-enrollment-top-colleges, EAB interviews and analysis.

1) Pages 8 and 9 of **Charting the Diversity Landscape** illustrate the SAT score distribution by race.

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Reprioritize Populations for High-Touch Yield Efforts

UMass Amherst Targets Time and Attention on 'Academic 3's'

To yield more "academic 3's," EM leadership instructed admission staff to dedicate more time to these students, including personalizing communication, following up directly about missing application components, and creating exclusive events. After analyzing Clearinghouse data of admitted "academic 3's" who had declined offers, EM staff noticed that these students were overwhelmingly from Boston and staying there for college. Realizing that UMass Amherst's prestige was ineffective messaging for these students, admission staff adjusted their conversations to focus on UMass Amherst's location, highlighting how the university is far enough from Boston to move away but still close enough to visit home frequently.

Common Practice	UMASS AMHERST
Unequal Attention: Admissions staff time monopolized by students at top of admit pool	**Refocus Attention on Middle of Pool:** Create targeted yield efforts for minority students in middle of admit pool (e.g., overnight programs)
Selectivity Sell: Admission staff use selectivity and flagship status to pitch institution	**Adjust Pitch:** Admission reps discuss advantages of moving away from home and avoid mentioning selectivity
Generic Emails: All admitted students receive same auto-generating emails	**Personalize Email Communication:** Individual emails to minority students about missing application pieces

Increases Yield of Minority Students and Quality of Admitted Student Pool

3% Increase in URM[1] yield from 2015-16 to 2016-17

Average Admitted Student Profile

	2016	2017
GPA	3.8	3.82
SAT	1220	1252
ACT	27.3	27.7

"It's a myth that you'd compromise on quality by focusing on the middle kids."

Leykia Nulan, Assistant Provost for Diversity

The increased focus on the "academic 3's" contributed to a small increase in the yield of underrepresented minority students from 2016 to 2017. It also did not come at the expense of the academic profile of UMass Amherst's entering class. On the contrary, the average admitted student profile increased slightly from 2016 to 2017.

1) UMass Amherst includes American Indian/Native Alaskan, black, Hispanic, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students in the calculation of "underrepresented minority."

Source: "University of Massachusetts Amherst Diversity Strategic Plan," March 30, 2015, https://www.umass.edu/diversity/sites/default/files/diversity_strategic_plan_2015.pdf; EAB interviews and analysis.

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Advisors to Our Work

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Advisors to Our Work

The Enrollment Management Forum is grateful to the individuals and organizations that shared their insights, analysis, and time with us. We would especially like to recognize the following individuals for being particularly generous with their time and expertise.

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