



WHITE PAPER

An Enrollment Leader's Guide to Diversity Strategy

Steps You Can Take Right Now to Start Identifying, Engaging,
and Enrolling More Underrepresented Students

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Enroll360

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Introduction

Crucial Context for Diversity Strategy

SECTION

1

A Point of Convergence for Multiple Enrollment Challenges

Growing scrutiny

Given our culture's growing (and long-overdue) focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice, the role that colleges play in fighting—or perpetuating—systemic racism and promoting social mobility is facing more scrutiny than ever before.

The related challenge for enrollment leaders is perhaps best summarized by the question so many report hearing from their presidents and boards: “Why are we not enrolling more underrepresented students?” This report aims to answer that question and to point a way forward for admission teams.

Intersecting challenges

The path ahead is far from simple. Recruitment of underrepresented students represents an intersection point of several serious challenges admission teams are currently facing, including understaffing, concerns over campus climate, reduced test-score availability, and a growing propensity among lower-income and first-gen students to enter the workforce directly after high school (a phenomenon sometimes called “nonconsumption”).

Why Recruiting Underrepresented Students Is Harder than Ever



Enrollment teams have been having an especially tough time filling multicultural-recruiter positions

Admission-office understaffing

Identifying, recruiting, and converting underrepresented students takes extra work; many admission offices, facing severe personnel shortages, don't have the necessary capacity

Reduced test-score availability

The pandemic-era drop in testing, especially pronounced among underrepresented students, has made the task of identifying them and predicting their likelihood to enroll and succeed more difficult

Nonconsumption

A hot job market and growing skepticism regarding the value of postsecondary education are causing reductions in college-going, particularly among underrepresented students

Political polarization

The nation's ongoing culture wars are pushing underrepresented students away from colleges/states they perceive as having a socially illiberal or otherwise hostile climate

Which Forms of Diversity Does This Report Address?

A general ambition

Colleges’ diversity aims are often talked about in the most general of terms, as a dedication to ensuring a maximally varied range of cultural backgrounds among members of the campus community.

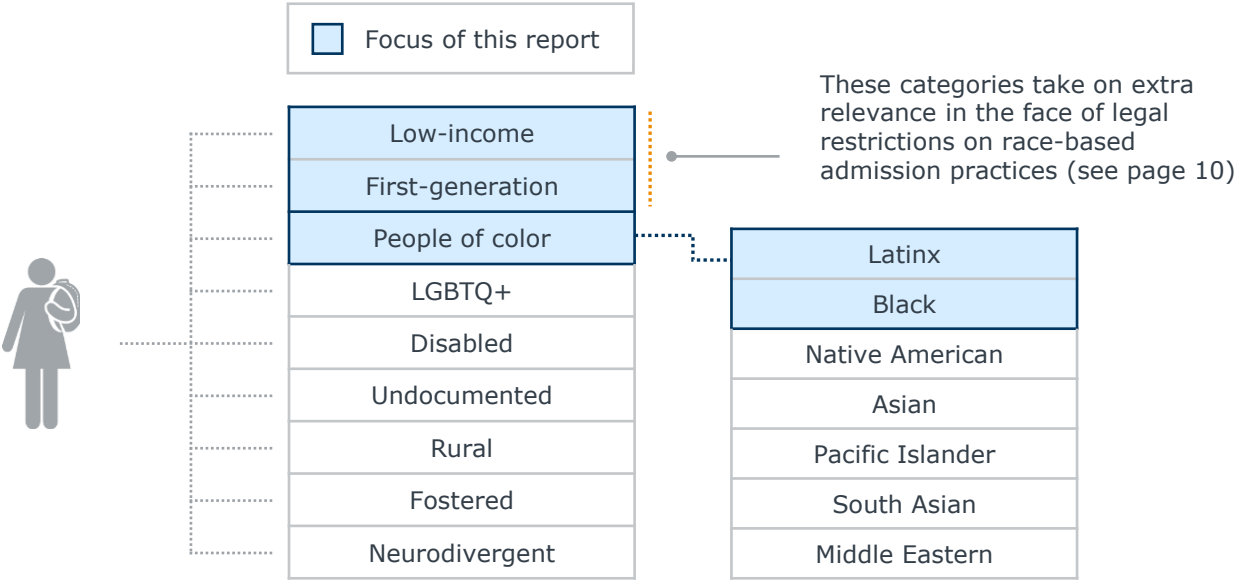
It is, however, difficult to make progress on diversity goals without more specifically identifying which student populations your efforts should focus on, and why.

Actionable specificity

This report focuses on low-income, first-generation, Black, and Latinx students, because these groups represent large numbers of individuals whose college-going rate is significantly lower than that of their peers, i.e., gains here can be expected to benefit the largest number of students.

Note that gains for these demographics need not come at the expense of the other important populations shown at right—far from it. Advances made in attracting and serving low-income, first-generation, Black, and Latinx students help you enroll students from other groups of interest as well.

A Tactical Focus on Large Student Populations with a High Degree of Underrepresentation



Legal Considerations for Underrepresented-Student Recruitment

A brake on diversity efforts

One important impediment to enrollment teams' diversity aims is the complexity of the associated legal landscape. In addition to the state-level bans some schools face, federal law makes the consideration of race and ethnicity in admissions tricky and onerous to implement—a situation that may worsen given pending Supreme Court rulings (see page 11).

Alternative options

Of particular importance given the legal context just described are practices that, while considered race/ethnicity-neutral (and therefore less subject to legal scrutiny), can nevertheless disproportionately increase enrollment of Black and Latinx students. These include approaches that focus recruitment outreach (as opposed to the conferring of benefits) preferentially on students from certain racial or ethnic backgrounds and ones that confer distinct benefit based on demographic characteristics other than race or ethnicity, such as socioeconomic or first-generation status.

A Key Distinction Under Existing Federal Law (Circa 2022)

Two Categories of Admissions Practices

Race/ethnicity-conscious approaches

- Confer distinct benefit based on the race/ethnicity of prospective students
- Subject to “strict-scrutiny” legal standards—institutions must demonstrate that their existing diversity is not sufficient and that race-neutral strategies (see below) are not enough to achieve the compelling educational benefits a diverse class brings

versus

Race/ethnicity-neutral approaches

- Do not confer distinct benefit based on the race/ethnicity of individual candidates
- Not subject to strict-scrutiny standards and are therefore legally less risky and easier to implement. They may, in practice, disproportionately increase enrollment of Black and Hispanic students.

The race/ethnicity-neutral category includes legally acceptable “race attentive” practices, such as recruitment-marketing outreach aimed at students of particular races or ethnicities and approaches focused on promoting enrollment of first-generation and low-income students.



Case study
UC Boulder

After changing the weightings used in its applicant-assessment rubric to emphasize the academic achievements of students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, University of Colorado Boulder saw a 20% increase in the percentage of students in its incoming classes who were from underserved racial/ethnic groups.



See the following [report](#) for in-depth discussion of points covered on this page:
The Playbook: Understanding the Role of Race Neutral Strategies in Advancing Higher Education Diversity Goals.

Source: Arthur Coleman, Jamie Lewis Keith, and Emily Webb, “[The Playbook: Understanding the Role of Race Neutral Strategies in Advancing Higher Education Diversity Goals \(2nd edition\)](#)”; EAB research and analysis.

A Supreme-Court Wildcard

An uncertain future

One factor poised to alter the legal landscape for race-conscious enrollment is the pair of pending Supreme Court cases described at right.

School-specific implications

How big an impact these cases will have on admission teams will depend on the specifics of the Court's decisions, which will likely not be made public until June 2023.

It will also depend on the particulars of individual schools' admission practices.

Institutions that currently rely on race-conscious approaches—primarily a subset of the nation's most selective institutions—have the greatest degree of potential exposure.

The picture appears less dire for the remainder of the nation's schools. While a ban on the consideration of race in admissions might, in theory, create heightened legal jeopardy for all colleges and universities—i.e., insofar as many students' applications include some indication of their race—judgments that would create the potential for widespread liability on this basis seem unlikely.

Implications for Enrollment Teams of the Supreme Court's Ongoing Deliberations on Affirmative Action in Admissions

The cases in brief

On October 31, 2022 the Supreme Court heard arguments related to lawsuits that Students for Fair Admissions brought against Harvard College and the University of North Carolina, in connection with these institutions' race-conscious admissions practices. In 2014, lower courts ruled in the schools' favor, finding that their policies complied with Supreme Court precedents. SCOTUS' current deliberations are considering whether those precedents themselves should be overturned.

What will the future bring?

While the Court is widely expected to declare affirmative action unconstitutional, the practical implications of that decision for colleges and universities will not be understood until the details of the judgments are made known, most likely not before June 2023. Possible outcomes might include anything from incremental restrictions on currently widespread race-conscious practices to an outright ban of the consideration of race in admission decisions.

What should enrollment leaders do?

Until the particulars of the Court's judgments are known, admission teams will lack a firm basis for decisive action (or, even, for contingency planning). That said, there are things you can do to boost your odds of coming up with creative solutions to whatever new challenges the Court's decisions might present and to otherwise make sure you hit the ground running come June—for example:

- Familiarize yourself with the basic legal issues involved
- Inventory all the ways that race shows up in your current admission processes
- Study up on race-neutral alternatives to race-conscious admission practices
- Create cross-departmental working groups to facilitate your efforts
- Line up expert resources you may call upon when the time comes to act

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Understanding Underrepresented-Student Intersectionality

Overlapping characteristics

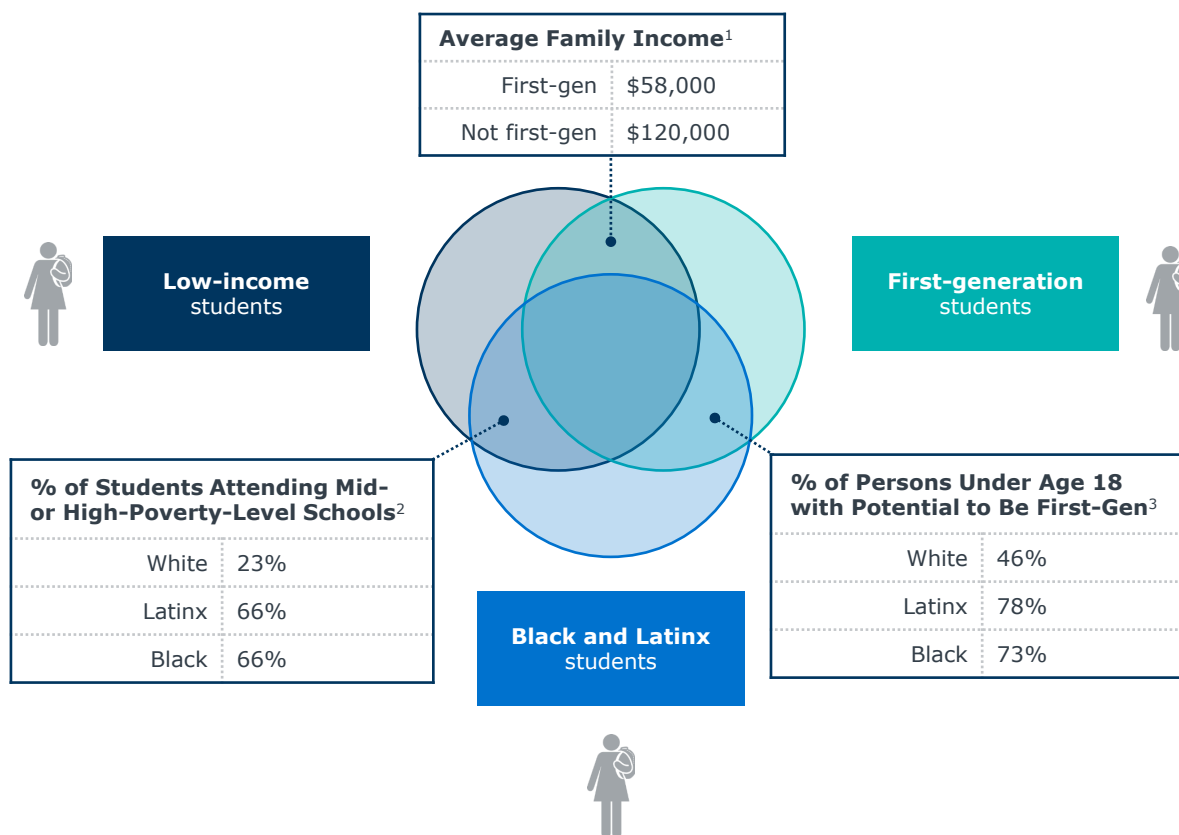
Articulating an actionable diversity strategy depends on having a clear understanding of which student populations it will focus on, and why.

One related consideration is the significant overlap that exists between different underrepresented groups, including Black, Latinx, first-generation, and low-income students.

Implications for action

While careless conflation of these demographic categories can perpetuate problematic stereotypes (“black students are poor”), thoughtful consideration of overlaps can suggest better ways of addressing under-enrollment for all populations involved. It can also lead us to ask important related questions, e.g., Would addressing financial barriers to college-going do more than any other type of intervention to increase college-going rates for Latinx students? Gauging the relative power of different interventions, for which an understanding of overlaps is key, is an important aim of this report.

Significant Overlap Between Three Main Categories of Underrepresented Students



1) Source: Startz.
 2) Source: National Equity Atlas.
 3) Source: Pell Institute and PennAHEAD.

Source: Dick Startz, “First-generation college students face unique challenges,” Brookings.edu; “School poverty: All youth should attend economically diverse, well-resourced schools,” National Equity Atlas; “Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States: 2021 Historical Trend Report,” The Pell Institute and PennAHEAD.

What Does ‘Underrepresented’ Actually Mean?

Low by what standard?

As implied on the preceding pages, a key concept in diversity strategy is that of underrepresentation—the extent to which the number of students you’re enrolling from any given demographic is lower than it should be.

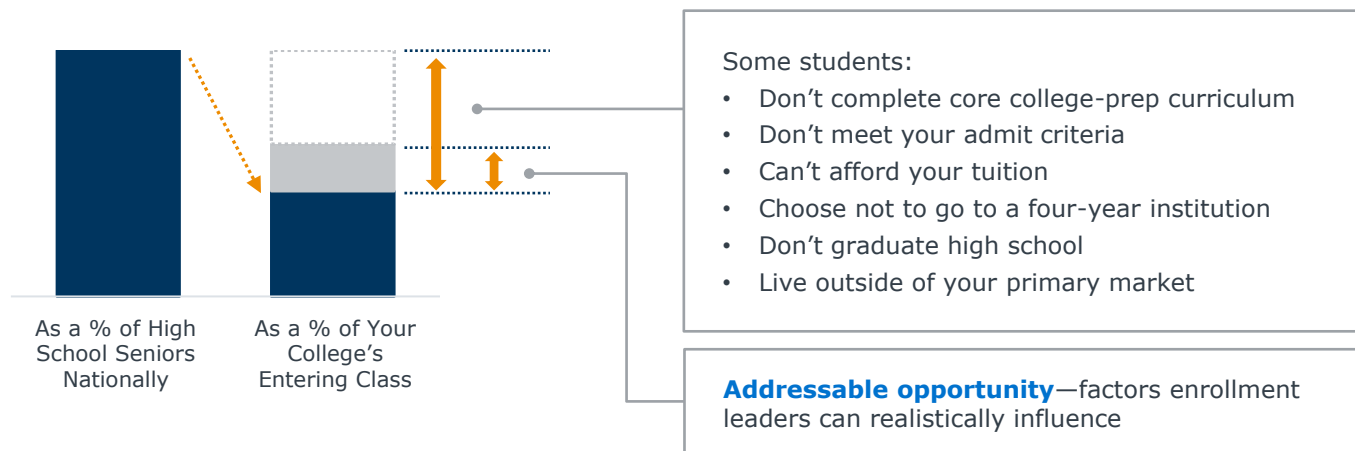
But it is not necessarily realistic to expect the number of students you’re enrolling from particular demographics to match their proportion in the overall population. Fewer high school students from certain groups may, for example, complete essential college preparatory courses.

Addressable opportunity

That said, some portion of the gap is undeniably under enrollment leaders’ control. A powerful demonstration of this was the significant bump in underrepresented-student enrollment that many schools saw with the transition to test-optional admissions.

Focusing on this addressable portion of enrollment shortfalls, rather than necessarily striving for strict parity across populations, will be the right call for most institutions.

Underrepresented Students¹



A Gap Analysis from the University of California System

% Contribution of Several Factors to the Gap Between Students of Color as a Percentage of High School Seniors and as a Percentage of UC In-State Admits



75% of the gap is attributable to factors other than UC schools’ admit decisions.

1) Illustrative example; not based on actual data specific to any particular student demographic.
2) "A-G" requirements are a specified set of high school courses considered mandatory preparation for admission to the UC system.

Source: EAB research and analysis; University of California Academic Senate, "Report of the UC Academic Council Standardized Testing Task Force (STTF)," January 2020.

Parsing Diversity Goals

Clarity of purpose

As already discussed, a key element of your diversity strategy is the student groups you're choosing to focus on. That should, in turn, depend on your institution's broader aims.

Colleges and universities pursue diversity initiatives for any number of reasons—sometimes without a clearly articulated purpose in mind. Getting a better lock on the motivation for your efforts will help you figure out which interventions are most likely to advance your aims.

Intentional action

Some common goals of diversity strategy are illustrated at right.

Note that they are not mutually exclusive—the same approaches you use to promote social mobility can, for example, lead to enrollment growth. But the distinctions are important. Your institution will likely pursue a different set of strategies if your primary aim is, say, anti-racism versus growing enrollment.

Multiple Overlapping but Distinct Objectives

How Do Potential Diversity Goals Intersect with Your Mission?



Fighting a legacy of structural racism

"To help correct our nation's legacy of structural racism, we are committed to maximizing the number of Black students getting a high-quality college education."¹



Promoting social mobility

"We are committed to helping more low-income students earn a college degree; this makes the most of every student's potential, with downstream benefits to individuals and their communities."



Elevating your institution's value proposition

"Maximal diversity of every kind—race, ethnicity, SES, gender identity, women in STEM fields, etc.—enriches the learning experience for all our students and is a core element of our value proposition."



Growing/sustaining enrollment

"The core student demographics we have traditionally served are shrinking; our survival depends on more effectively recruiting types of students we have not historically enrolled in large numbers."

1) Note that past Supreme Court rulings have deemed goals framed in these terms not to be a valid justification for race-conscious admission practices; in the Court's opinion, legally defensible reasons to consider race in admissions are limited to ones based on promoting diversity as an "educational good."

Varied Views from Different School Segments

Segment-specificity

Aims of diversity strategy naturally differ across school segments, with some objectives being a more obvious match with one type of school versus another.

Distinct objectives

For example, access-oriented schools are often already serving a high proportion of low-income, first-generation, Latinx, and Black students, i.e., these groups are less likely to be underrepresented at such institutions. The challenge facing these colleges is more commonly one of ensuring student success—a goal that many struggle to deliver on, given their characteristically tight budgets and the fact that they tend to enroll more underprepared students than do other schools.

For the large number of somewhat selective private regional colleges nationwide, the key challenge is usually one of making an education at their institution affordable for underrepresented students. To the extent that they are not enrolling more of them, excessive financial aid gapping is often a main reason.

Diversity-Related Challenges, Capabilities, and Aims Vary Considerably by Institution Type

Four-Year Institutions



Highly selective colleges

Can afford to generously fund underrepresented students due to their pricing power and large endowments but struggle to find underrepresented students with the right level of academic preparedness.



Selective private colleges

Cannot afford to give low-income students enough institutional funding to make cost of attendance manageable. Unable to review most applicants closely, due to lean staffing and capacity constraints. Sometimes lack the resources needed to support low-income and first-generation students after they enroll.



Selective public colleges

Large institution size and resource constraints limit ability to closely evaluate applicants, which can lead to strong candidates from underrepresented groups being overlooked. Sometimes lack the resources needed to support low-income and first-generation students after they enroll.



Least-selective colleges

Enroll many underprepared and financially stressed students and have correspondingly low graduation rates; primary challenges are courting students who are inclined to opt out of college entirely and improving student success for those who do enroll.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Sizing Expected Racial/Ethnic Demographic Shifts

Seeking growth demographics

One much-discussed rationale for recruiting more underrepresented students is that of preserving enrollment in the face of projected declines in college-going populations (aka the “demographic cliff”).

Underlying this argument is the fact that, while the overall number of college-goers nationally is projected to shrink, the numbers for some non-White demographics are expected to grow.

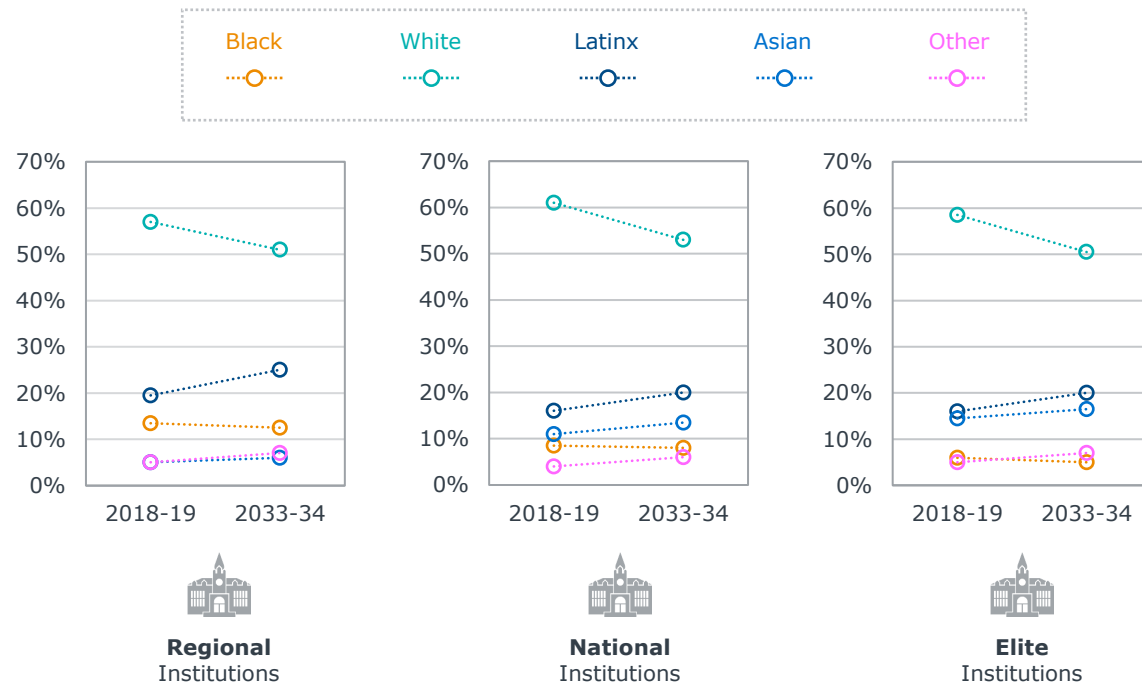
A persistent status quo

Can colleges make up shortfalls in total enrollment by doing a better job of recruiting students of color?

While some schools in markets with large Latinx populations have had success in this regard, the strategy holds less promise for colleges nationally. White students are expected to remain, by a wide margin, the largest proportion of college goers—so much so that the growth rates for other populations will almost certainly not be enough to make up the difference for most institutions.

Percentage of College Attenders by Race/Ethnicity

United States, 2018–19 vs. 2033–34, by School Segment (Four-Year Colleges)



Source: Grawe, Nathan D., *The Agile College: How Institutions Successfully Navigate Demographic Changes*, 2021; EAB analysis.

Latent Potential Tied to Socioeconomic Status

Breaking with history

As described on the preceding page, growth in Latinx and other non-White populations will not, on its own, be enough to make up for broader declines in key college-going demographics for many institutions.

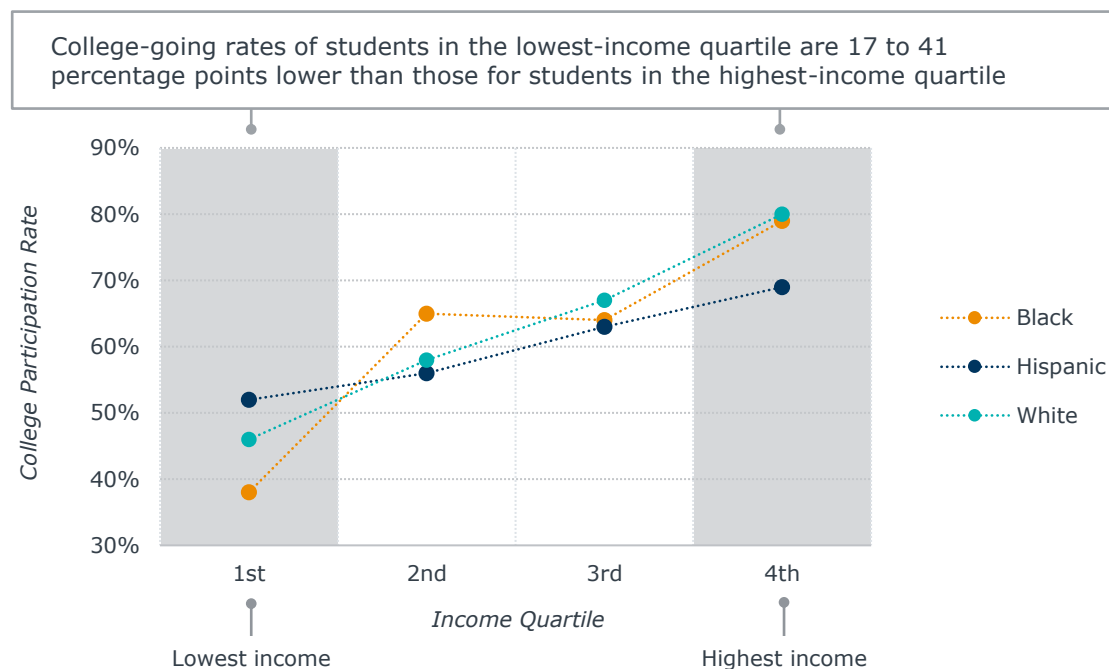
Related projections are, however, based at least to some extent on historical patterns of enrollment, with all of the biases inherent in them. What if addressing barriers to enrollment faced by students of color could increase their college-going rate? And what if the same could be done for low-income and first-generation students more generally?

Wealth a deciding factor

As shown at right, household income is a powerful determinant of college-going—perhaps more so than race/ethnicity on its own. This suggests that addressing specifically economic barriers to enrollment could do much to raise college-going rates for traditionally underrepresented students.

Large Income-Based Disparities in College-Going

College Participation Rate by Race/Ethnicity and Family-Income Quartile, 2020¹



“Which student demographics face the greatest barriers to pursuing college after high school?”

Percentage of Respondents, EAB 2021 Survey of High School Counselors

Low-income	First-generation	BIPOC
75%	66%	40%

1) The rate shown is for dependent 18- to 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in high school.

Source: “[Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States: 2021 Historical Trend Report](#),” The Pell Institute and PennAHEAD.

Is Your College Affordable for Underrepresented Students?

How much is too much?

As already noted, one of the main reasons that private colleges don't enroll more first-generation, Latinx, and Black students is that their tuition is not affordable for many students in these groups.

Given the importance of this particular barrier, and because the concept of college affordability can be tough to nail down, a more detailed explanation is in order. This is the aim of the material at right.

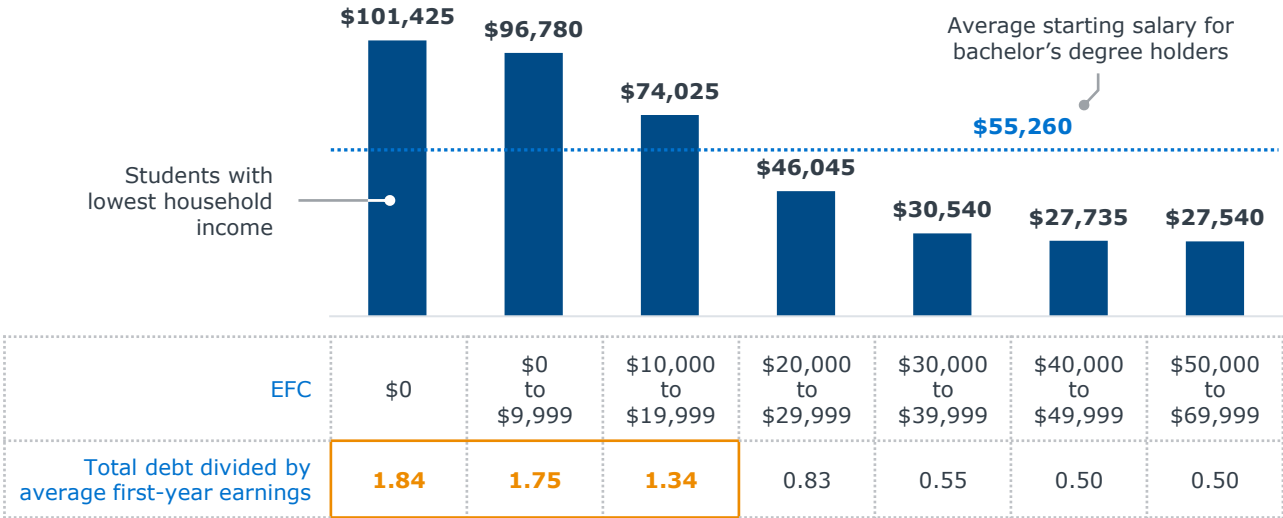
Unmanageable debt

Shown in the chart is the amount of debt that students from households of varying income levels (of which EFC is a proxy) would need to take on to earn a degree at a typical moderately selective private institution.

For low-income students, the corresponding debt burden is of a scale likely to cause them significant and lasting financial hardship—as good a definition of *unaffordability* as any.

Projected Total Debt Burden at Graduation for Bachelor's Degree Holders, by EFC Band

Modeled Using Data on Unmet Need from 45 Moderately Selective Private Institutions' Aid Packages for the Fall 2022 Entering Class¹



According to a common rule of thumb, debt loads in excess of a graduate's starting salary create unacceptable levels of financial hardship; based on that standard, this number should be **less than 1**.

Is Your Campus Climate Okay?

Cause for concern

While campus diversity rarely plays a deciding role in underrepresented students' choice of school, adverse publicity regarding your school's climate for students of color can quickly push you off their short list of institutions to consider.

High- and low-profile problems

Related PR problems may come in the form of high-profile news about especially appalling incidents on a school's campus, such as the harassment of students of color by a college's security staff or displays of racist imagery, symbols, and messages.

More commonly, if less conspicuously, negative perceptions of a school's climate among underrepresented populations spreads via word of mouth from students or staff who may, for any number of reasons, not feel welcome at an institution.

Colleges should have plans and infrastructure in place for addressing both forms of bad publicity, looking beyond immediate fixes to addressing root causes.

How to Promote a Healthy Campus Climate



Training and awareness

Implementing mandatory, campus-wide cultural competency, implicit bias, and anti-racism trainings and campaigns



Climate assessment

Conducting campus climate studies (e.g., focus groups, surveys) to measure perceptions of how your institution supports DEI and captures students' experiences with discrimination, harassment, and harmful policies and practices



Incident reporting and response

Confronting and responding to racist acts (e.g., hate crimes, microaggressions, racial bias) using a clear, transparent bias reporting system and response team that has strong norms of reporting, investigating, and appropriate sanctioning



Campus Safety

Reimagining campus security to balance student well-being and safety considerations and prioritizing restorative justice practices

Underrepresentation Within College Segments

A poor match

Underrepresentation is a concern not only when it results in students being denied a college education; equally significant is the problem of undermatching.

Lower-income students in particular are significantly less likely than their peers in the broader population to attend colleges whose selectivity matches their academic profile—only 8% of high-achieving low-income students apply to institutions that closely match their abilities.

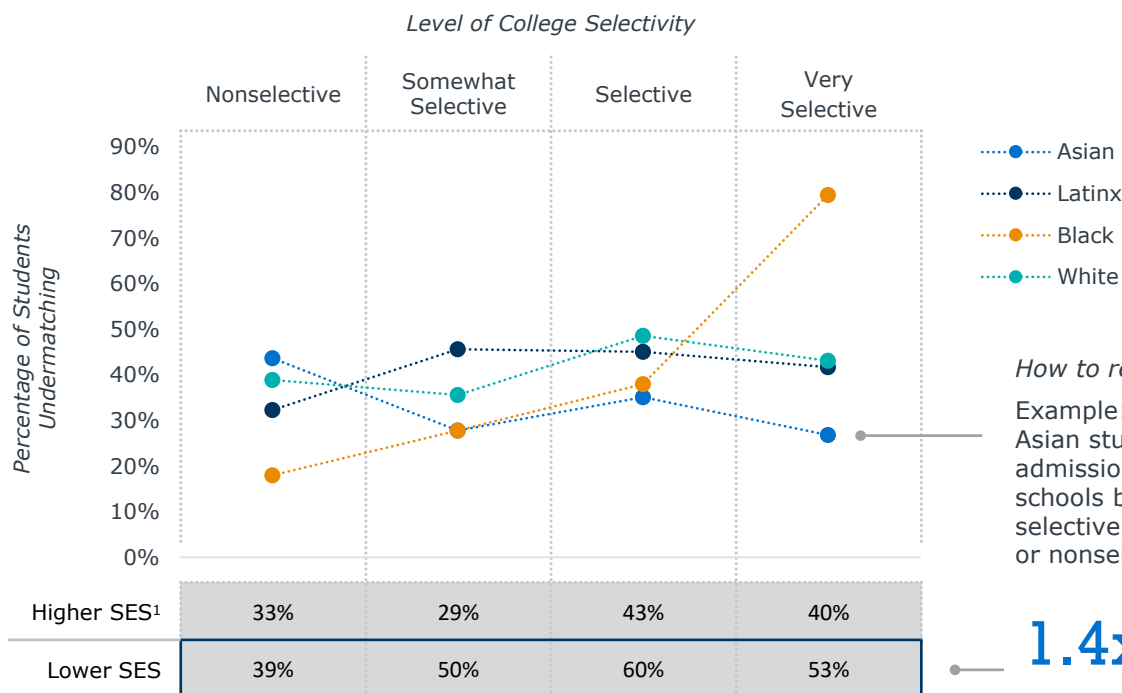
Unrealized potential

This matters insofar as colleges' per-student spending—a rough proxy for quality of education—is higher at more selective institutions. Also significant in this regard is the fact that career outcomes tend to be better for graduates of more selective institutions.

From an enrollment perspective, undermatching is additionally of interest insofar as it represents latent demand, i.e., among categories of students currently going to less selective institutions who might instead be recruited to your (more selective) school.

Undermatching, by Student Demographic and College Segment

Percentage of Students Who Could Have Gone to Schools of the Level of Selectivity Shown but Went to Less Selective Institutions



Some portion of undermatching is likely due to students knowingly choosing schools that are less selective than would be appropriate given their academic ability, due to a feeling on their part (well-informed or not) that the more-selective schools they are rejecting would not be a good fit for them. Effectively engaging these students via recruitment outreach can help reduce the impact of this cause of undermatching.

1) Socioeconomic status.

Source: Jonathan Smith, Matea Pender, Jessica Howell, and Michael Hurwitz, "Getting Into College: Postsecondary Academic Undermatch," College Board, April 2012 via The Executive Office of the President, "Increasing College Opportunity for Low-Income Students"; EAB research and analysis.

A Question of Resources (and Priorities)

A financial commitment

While there are many reasons colleges and universities do not enroll more underrepresented students, some of the most important share a common root cause—resource constraints. As suggested at right, many of the proven best practices for enrolling more low-income, first-generation, Black, and Hispanic students come with an associated cost, which highly tuition-dependent schools with small foundations and limited pricing power may struggle to cover.

Campaign for change

An important additional consideration in this context is that resource constraints are, always, a reflection of budgeting decisions and the institutional priorities those decisions embody. Presenting a clear vision to your key stakeholders of specific steps your institution can take to enroll more underrepresented students and the benefits that doing so would bring your college or university is an important first step in winning the necessary financial support for your efforts.

Budget Constraints Can Stand in the Way of Recruiting More Underrepresented Students

Examples of Investments Required, by Funnel Stage

Recruitment outreach



Recruiting more underrepresented students can require expanding the list of organizations that admission counselors visit and relationships they manage to include underresourced high schools (sometimes not part of counselors' standard rounds, because they are believed to yield fewer admissible candidates) and CBOs. Given that underrepresented students often have less parent and high school counselor support than their peers do, they can also require more hands-on assistance in completing key parts of the application process, such as FAFSA filing. This can claim more of your admission team's time and, depending on the extent of the effort, may require hiring additional staff.

Applicant assessment



Admitting more underrepresented students typically means reducing the weight given to standardized test scores in applicant evaluation. Predicting applicants' likelihood to succeed after enrolling, without the aid of test scores, requires a more comprehensive—and labor-intensive—form of candidate assessment than some enrollment teams' current staffing levels and expertise permit. Backfilling those capabilities can require additional resources.

Aid awarding



Many private colleges' tuition is, by any standard, unaffordable for low-income students, even after factoring in available institutional and government grant aid. Efforts to meaningfully move the dial on the number of such students you enroll will depend on reducing gaps between their financial need and their aid awards—an undertaking that, depending on the scale of the initiative, can cost a college a lot in forgone tuition revenue.

Post-matriculation support



Some underrepresented students, having attended under-resourced high schools, are underprepared for the rigors of studying at academically competitive colleges. Some are also from low-income backgrounds. Both factors can put students at elevated risk of stopping out. For this reason, enrolling more underrepresented students can require building out more robust post-matriculation support, which typically entails additional resource commitments.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Lessons from Some Institutions That Have Gotten It Right

Hobbled by underfunding

One reason higher education has not made more progress on enrolling underrepresented students is that doing so can be difficult—particularly for tuition-dependent schools with limited pricing power and modest endowments whose ability to shoulder the costs of increased recruitment intensity and post-matriculation student support is correspondingly limited.

Success stories

That said, some institutions have shown what is possible with the right level of creativity, resolve, and luck.

By way of inspiration, this and the following page offer two examples of institutions that, using best practices outlined elsewhere in this report, have meaningfully moved the dial on underrepresented-student enrollment.

Rodelius University¹

Institution Profile



Admit rate: **60%**

Endowment: **\$26M**

Total undergrads: **1,674**

Endowment per student: **\$15,531**

Average net price: **\$17,500**

Region: **Midwest**

Retention rate: **81%**

Control: **Private**

Accomplishments

Students of color as percentage of freshman class

2011

25%

2021

50%

	Rodelius	Local Peers	State Average
Net price	\$17.5k	\$19.4k	\$21.4
Graduation Rate	67%	62%	63%
Loan Default Rate	2.8%	4.1%	4.3%

Core Elements of Rodelius University's Approach

- Conspicuous president-level sponsorship
- Full-tuition scholarship for county residents with \$0 EFC and 3.60 or greater HS GPA
- Intensive recruitment marketing
- Multiple CBO partnerships
- High school outreach informed by racial/ethnicity data for 500 region high schools
- Staff includes counselors who share a racial/ethnic identity with residents in the local community
- Revamped outreach, including highly structured financial aid communications

1) A pseudonym.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

A Focused Pursuit of More Equitable Admission Practices

A multifaceted effort

The case study on this page highlights several propositions.

One is the importance of executive-level support. Carsill College's success depended in no small part on the very direct interest the institution's president took in the initiative, e.g., paying personal visits to CBOs around the country. It also depended on the commitment of financial resources to the effort, including redeployment of endowment funds in service of the initiative.

Win upon win

Another lesson from Carsill's experience is the power of this kind of commitment. The institution receives approximately 800 applications annually for the 50 slots in its dedicated scholarship program for underrepresented students and has been able to draw significant numbers of students from as far away as Texas.

Furthermore, students attracted via the program are exceptionally talented, with high school GPAs and test scores higher than the average across all other students in Carsill's incoming classes.

Carsill College¹

Institution Profile



Admit rate: **65%**

Endowment: **\$195M**

Total undergrads: **1,200**

Endowment per student: **\$190,000**

Average net price: **\$19,700**

Region: **Northeast**

Retention rate: **73%**

Control: **Private**

Accomplishments

Students of color as percentage of freshman class

2013

13%

2020

35%



Ranked above **25th** nationally on social mobility by *US News & World Report* in 2021

The number of Black students in Carsill's freshman class increased by 39% in 2020 (a year in which Black student enrollment nationally dropped by 12%).

Core Elements of Carsill College's Approach

- Lavish president-level support, including visits to CBOs across the country
- Goal of enrolling more students of color explicitly addressed in strategic plan
- Meets full need² for 50 incoming students annually
- Intensive recruitment marketing
- Multiple CBO partnerships (KIPP, MOSTE, Noble Network, Say Yes, YES prep)

1) A pseudonym.

2) Meeting full need in this context means that Carsill covers total cost of attendance minus EFC (typically \$0 for these students) and federal loans.

Source: EAB interviews and analysis.

'Program-ize' Your Underrepresented-Student Recruitment

Taking a crucial first step

For most colleges, resource constraints remain the primary barrier to recruiting and optimally serving underrepresented students; many institutions cannot afford to do both at scale (given their current budgeting priorities).

However, this is not to say that most schools could not be doing more. Modestly scoped efforts are far better than none and provide a crucial foundation for expanded future impact.

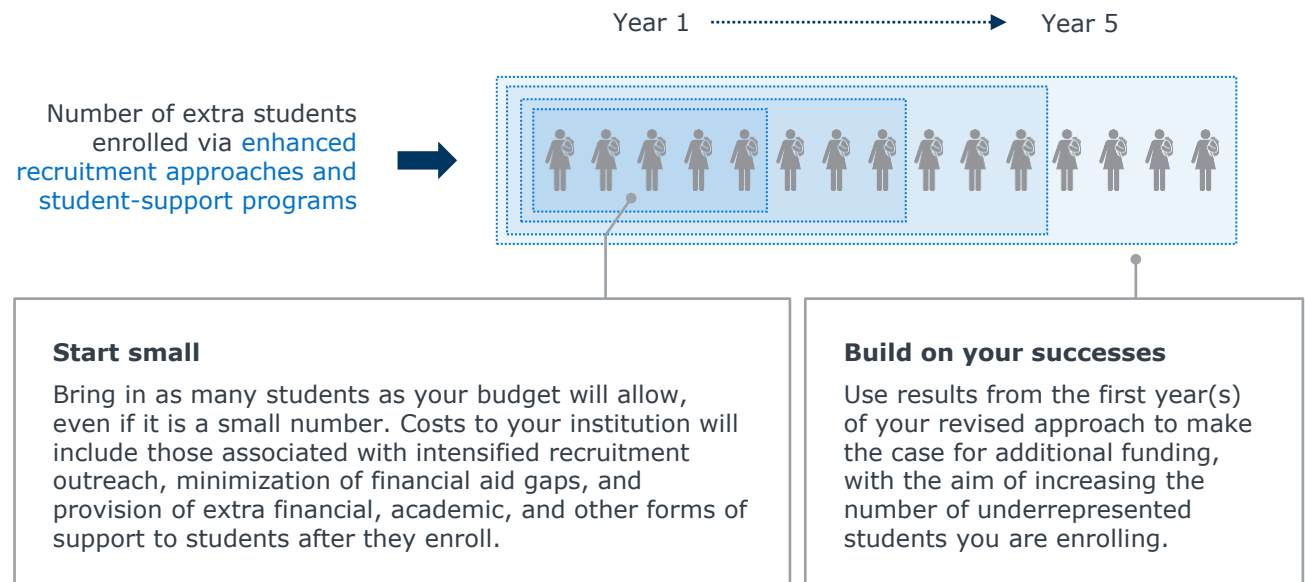
Building on early gains

For many institutions, it will make sense to structure related efforts under a separate, parallel track, based on a dedicated budget earmarked for the recruitment and improved support of a specified number of students—even if that number is, at the outset, small.

Early successes will help make the case for additional resources. Furthermore, raising the profile of underrepresented students at your institution will improve the ability of your broader recruitment efforts (those outside of any special scholarship programs you might set up) to attract similar students.

A Stepwise Approach Makes Enrolling More Underrepresented Students Manageable

Hypothetical



Source: EAB research and analysis.



Nine Steps to Enrolling More Underrepresented Students

SECTION

2

A Comprehensive Framework for Your Efforts

A view from 20,000 feet

The body of research on how to increase college-going and graduation rates for underrepresented students is extensive— so much so that it can be difficult to know where to begin.

Accordingly, one important aim of this report is to offer enrollment leaders a high-level framework for organizing their related work. It does so via the nine-step process shown at right, which encompasses both preliminary efforts, aimed at establishing the necessary enabling conditions for increased enrollment of underrepresented students, and changes to the recruitment process itself.

Detailed guidance

One important category of information this white paper does not cover in detail is the large body of related best practices, which is too extensive to be addressed thoroughly in a report of this size (and which is, in any case, well documented in other sources). The Resources section at the end of this white paper highlights material that readers will find helpful in fleshing out important details on specific tactics they may wish to implement.

Nine Steps to Enrolling More Underrepresented Students

Laying the groundwork

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | Clarify your diversity-recruitment aims |
| 2 | Assess your existing enrollment gaps |
| 3 | Audit existing capabilities for serving high-priority demographics |
| 4 | Initiate/recalibrate CBO relationships |

Realizing improvements at each funnel stage

- | | |
|---|---|
| 5 | Use the right messages and communication channels |
| 6 | Find more underrepresented students to recruit |
| 7 | Get more underrepresented students to apply |
| 8 | Admit more underrepresented students |
| 9 | Maximize underrepresented-student yield |

Each of these steps is covered in the pages that follow

Step 1: Clarify Your Diversity-Recruitment Aims

Vague objectives

One common impediment to increased enrollment of underrepresented students is lack of clarity around related goals. Even for institutions that have already devoted significant attention to the question, diversity-related objectives can remain vague, overly general, or even contradictory.

This is understandable. The related issue set is highly complex and involves concepts that are inherently equivocal (e.g., that of race).

Grounding the effort

That said, any given college's progress on diversity recruitment will remain elusive as long as the institution is not clear about what it is trying to accomplish.

Any strategizing with respect to the recruitment of underrepresented students should begin with careful consideration of points of contact between possible diversity-related objectives and your school's strategic plan, mission, and capabilities.

Different Diversity-Related Goals Map to Different Student Populations

Distinct but
interconnected goals
and student
demographics



<i>Institutional goal</i>	<i>Most relevant student populations</i>
Correcting legacies of structural racism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black students • Native American students
Promoting social mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low-income students • First-gen students • Second-gen students
Maximizing campus diversity to elevate your school's value proposition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-White students¹ • LGBTQ+ students • Students with disabilities • International students • Adult learners
Sustaining total enrollment numbers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low-income students • First-gen students • Latinx students

1) Includes all non-White students, underrepresented or not.

Step 2: Assess Existing Enrollment Gaps

Establishing a baseline

An important first step in enrolling more underrepresented students is to understand the current composition of your student body relative to the overall population of potential college goers in the geographical areas you serve. This step identifies gaps, shows you where your greatest opportunities lie, establishes a baseline, and helps you set targets.

List-source analyses

It is possible to perform the analyses described above using the same commercially available lists typically used to identify students for recruitment, e.g., those from College Board and ACT.

These and other sources can show you the full universe of high school students in your primary market who meet your basic admit criteria, by race, ethnicity, and (with some added analysis) socioeconomic status. Comparing this group of students to those you actually end up enrolling will reveal gaps—demographics that you are, for whatever reason, serving at disproportionately low rates.

An Analysis For Identifying Gaps in Underrepresented-Student Enrollment

Hypothetical

	A	B	C	(C-A)/A
	% of your prospect pool	% of your admit pool	% of your enrollment	Proportional gap
Black students	14%	10%	9%	-36%
Latinx students	22%	18%	12%	-45%
First-generation students	40%	36%	30%	-25%
Low-income students	38%	37%	25%	-34%

The denominator for gap analyses is all students in your primary market who meet minimum test score and/or GPA cutoffs for admission, as determined via name buys from list sources. Note that name buys for underrepresented students may be extended into lower test-score ranges than those for other students, to account for contextual factors that might have artificially suppressed their [underrepresented students'] test scores.

Analysis of these numbers helps highlight points in your admission process where you are losing underrepresented students, e.g., via overly restrictive admit criteria in the admit phase or via insufficient institutional aid in the yield phase.

Step 3: Audit Existing Student-Support Capabilities

Are you ready?

As a result of inequitable access to educational and other resources during their childhood and high school years, underrepresented students sometimes have lower levels of academic preparedness than their peers in the overall college-going population. They often also have greater financial need (in some cases definitionally so, i.e., insofar as low-income students are considered an underrepresented group).

Before recruiting more of these students, you'll want to ensure that you are equipped to offer them the kind of financial, academic, and social support necessary to ensure their success after enrolling.

No-regrets investments

Note that several of the student success interventions described at right—most notably those related to student success management systems—benefit all students, not just those from underrepresented groups. The surplus value they deliver in this respect makes them a logical first priority for diversity-recruitment investments.

Representative Examples of Infrastructure for the Support of Underrepresented Students Once They Enroll

Financial support/relief

- ☐ Dedicated scholarships for low-income students that eliminate gaps between total cost of attendance and financial aid offered
- ☐ Supplementary funding for low-income students, to help cover costs beyond tuition, room, and board (e.g., costs associated with textbooks, health insurance, study abroad opportunities, and unpaid internships)
- ☐ Other practices to help minimize the financial burden on low-income students, such as offering reduced-cost credits during summer term

Academic support

- ☐ Transition-support/bridge programs
- ☐ Remediation options for underprepared students built on demonstrated best practices, e.g., corequisite programs
- ☐ A student success management system that incorporates the following elements:
 - Advanced analytics that match the intensity and timing of advising interventions to student risk
 - Communication and tracking tools that manage student risk behaviors in real time
 - Student-facing technology that scales and extends support by automating guidance
 - Processes and technologies that facilitate case management between student-support offices

Social support

- ☐ Individual case management
- ☐ Peer, alumni, faculty, and staff mentors
- ☐ Housing and nutrition advisory services
- ☐ Cohort- and learning-community-based student groups
- ☐ Quick, easy, and reliable access to high-quality mental health counseling

See also page 69 of this report.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Step 4: Initiate/Recalibrate CBO Partnerships

Proven impact

Any college efforts at recruiting more underrepresented students should incorporate partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs)—groups that have, in the several decades since they first came on the scene, shown a consistent ability to produce increases in college-going and graduation rates for low-income, first-generation, Black, and Latinx students.

Extensive student support

While CBOs vary greatly in terms of size, reach, organization, mission, and mode of operation, the ways they help students are often similar.

Forms of assistance they provide include educating students on the benefits of higher education, advising them on college preparedness, helping them identify schools that will give them the best education at the lowest cost, offering them hands-on assistance with college applications and FAFSA filing, and helping them troubleshoot problems they may encounter after enrolling.

Community-Based Organizations in Brief

Three Types of CBOs

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Independent nonprofits such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jack Kent Cooke Foundation• College Advising Corps• College Possible |
| 2 | Government-funded programs such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• TRIO• Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services• GEAR UP |
| 3 | K-12 schools/networks such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cristo Rey• KIPP• Noble Network |

How CBOs Promote College-Going Among Underrepresented Students

CBOs **educate** students on higher education options, benefits of college-going, and college preparedness

CBOs **counsel** students on college selection, college finances and affordability, and career connections

CBOs give students **hands-on help** with college applications, FAFSA filing, and understanding financial aid offers

CBOs offer students close, ongoing **student success support** after they enroll



Working with CBOs Helps Colleges

Many and varied benefits

While CBOs are typically (and appropriately) thought of as primarily focused on helping students, they do also bring considerable benefits to colleges that partner with them, examples of which are listed at right.

Highly qualified students

One of the more compelling advantages CBOs offer enrollment leaders is added insight into particular students' likelihood to succeed after enrolling.

There is ample data demonstrating that CBO-affiliated students outperform their non-CBO peers on a range of success metrics after enrolling. Based on this fact, admission teams can, with CBOs' help, extend their reach into recruitment settings and demographics where in the past they may have struggled to find enough admissible students to justify related allocations of recruitment-related staff time and resources.

Four Ways CBO Partnerships Benefit Enrollment Teams

Informing your market positioning

Market intelligence

CBOs can tell you what matters most to your target audiences and how they perceive your institution

Valuable advice on infrastructure

CBOs can advise you on particular forms of infrastructure your school should have in place to optimally serve their students

Expanding your recruitment pipeline

Earlier and more complete prospect identification

CBOs can identify prospective students sooner than other audience sources can and identify students whom other sources miss entirely

Highly prepared students

CBO students represent a highly admissible cohort within demographics that otherwise might often fall outside of your selection criteria

A referral source

CBOs are happy to selectively steer students toward your institution if you can demonstrate that you do a good job of serving their students

Extending your geographical reach

Facilitated entry into new markets

CBOs with a national presence can make recruitment-marketing outreach to remote markets, which is often prohibitively expensive, manageable

Increasing your team's bandwidth

An extension of your staff

CBOs often perform functions that would otherwise fall to your staff, such as explaining financial aid to students

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Effective CBO/College Partnerships Are Grounded in Mutual Benefit

CBOs’ point of view



The preceding page outlines the many benefits that CBO partnerships bring to admission teams. That is, of course, only part of the picture—in order to better understand the specific role that such partnerships might play in your own recruitment efforts, it is also important to consider CBOs’ motivations.

Appealing partners

A helpful perspective on this question may be found in the memorandums of understanding (MOUs) that are sometimes used to structure CBO-college partnerships, a generic example of which is shown at right.

Details aside, the basic transaction is simple—CBOs preferentially steer their students to colleges and universities that do a good job of serving students like theirs. That includes keeping any aid-awarding gaps to a minimum and ensuring high persistence and graduation rates.

Generic Example of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Between a CBO and a College Partner, Showing Key Commitments of Each

MOU	
 CBO commitments	 College commitments
Make students available to the college for early recruitment communications	Provide travel assistance to students for campus visits
Identify students within a specified range of academic ability	Admit an agreed-upon number of qualified CBO students per year
Ensure that students file a FAFSA by a specified date	Guarantee CBO students a minimum agreed-upon amount of institutional financial aid
Offer continued support to CBO students after they enroll	Provide CBO students with guaranteed housing for a predetermined number of years
Help students identify as many scholarships as possible that they might be eligible for	Provide students with travel assistance for visits home

MOU terms reflect factors that CBOs have found to be most impactful in attracting and retaining underrepresented students.

Untapped Potential

Where to begin?

Given the many ways that CBO partnerships can benefit colleges, it is perhaps surprising that a greater number of schools don't pursue them more intently.

This may, in part, be a reflection of a larger struggle many cash-trapped colleges face in securing resources for the pursuit of diversity initiatives and a related deprioritization of such efforts.

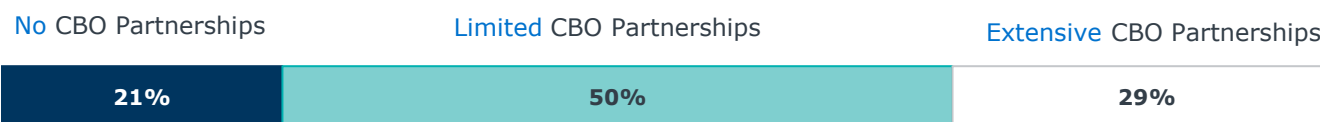
However, it is likely also an indication of trouble some schools have had figuring out how to initiate and manage CBO partnerships, which can, to the uninitiated, seem complicated.

Flexible options

The good news here is that CBO partnerships can be a lighter lift than many suppose. A key related consideration is that such initiatives can be highly flexible with respect to scale; many CBOs will happily work with you even if funding constraints limit you to enrolling, say, only five of their students each year.

Many Admission Teams Still Have Limited CBO Involvement

Informal EAB Poll of Enrollment Leaders



More than 70% of admission teams make limited or no use of CBOs.

Some Barriers to Partnering with CBOs and How to Address Them

Problem: "We can't afford to gap students less; CBOs won't want to send us students."

Solution: *Fund a smaller number of CBO students more generously*

Problem: "Our low graduation rate, a reflection of the high-risk populations we serve, puts off CBOs."

Solution: *Share "risk-adjusted" data with CBOs, describe infrastructure improvements you're making*

Problem: "We're understaffed; our counselors don't have time to visit CBOs."

Solution: *Start small, doing what you can; visiting one CBO is better than visiting none.*

Problem: "The CBO landscape is too complicated—we can't figure out who to work with."

Solution: *Use a [third-party CBO liaison](#) to help you find a suitable partner*

E.g., EAB's College Greenlight division, which offers structured CBO-search tools and expert college-CBO "matchmaking" services

Step 5: Focus Your Outreach on the Right Messages and Channels

Communication is key

As noted elsewhere in this report, underrepresented students are highly responsive to recruitment marketing. Given the weight that such outreach carries with these students, it is important to make sure that your communications focus on questions that matter most to them and use channels they prefer.

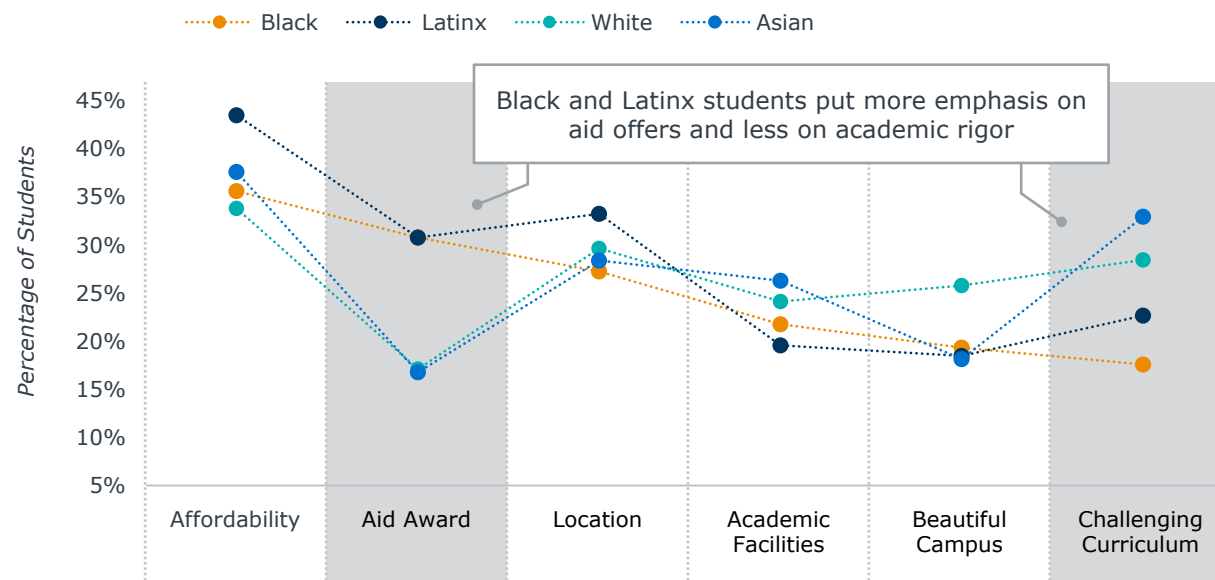
To help you in that effort, this and the following pages present related data from EAB surveys of underrepresented students—starting, on this page, with a look at factors that Black and Latinx students weight most heavily in their college selection.

Distinct concerns

One striking fact revealed by the data is the extraordinarily high priority Black and Latinx students place on aid awards. Another, perhaps more surprising finding is the relatively low importance they place campus diversity, which was cited by 10% or fewer of Black and Latinx students as a key factor in their choice of school.

Percentage of Students Citing Various Factors as Primary Reasons for Their Choice of College, by Race/Ethnicity¹

EAB 2021 Survey of New College Freshmen



Factors Not Cited by More than 25% of Students of Any Race/Ethnicity

(Percentage of All Respondents)

Merit scholarships (17%)	Competitive athletics (7%)	Religious affiliation (4%)
College reputation (14%)	Friends attending (6%)	Comprehensive academic offerings (4%)
Employment outcomes (12%)	Safe campus (5%)	Student organizations (4%)
Student facilities (8%)	Diverse student body (5%)	Research opportunities with faculty (3%)
School spirit (8%)	Students like me on campus (5%)	
Experiential learning (7%)	Flexible scheduling (5%)	

1) The chart shows factors cited by at least 25% of students in at least one demographic group. Survey participants were asked to select up to three primary reasons.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Which Factors Drive Low-Income Students' Choice of College?

High, low, and middle

Looking at how key determinants of college choice vary across income bands, a few things stand out.

One is that, for the most part, students from moderate-income households resemble those from low-income households more than they do those from high-income households (though on most points they do land, as one would expect, somewhere in the middle).

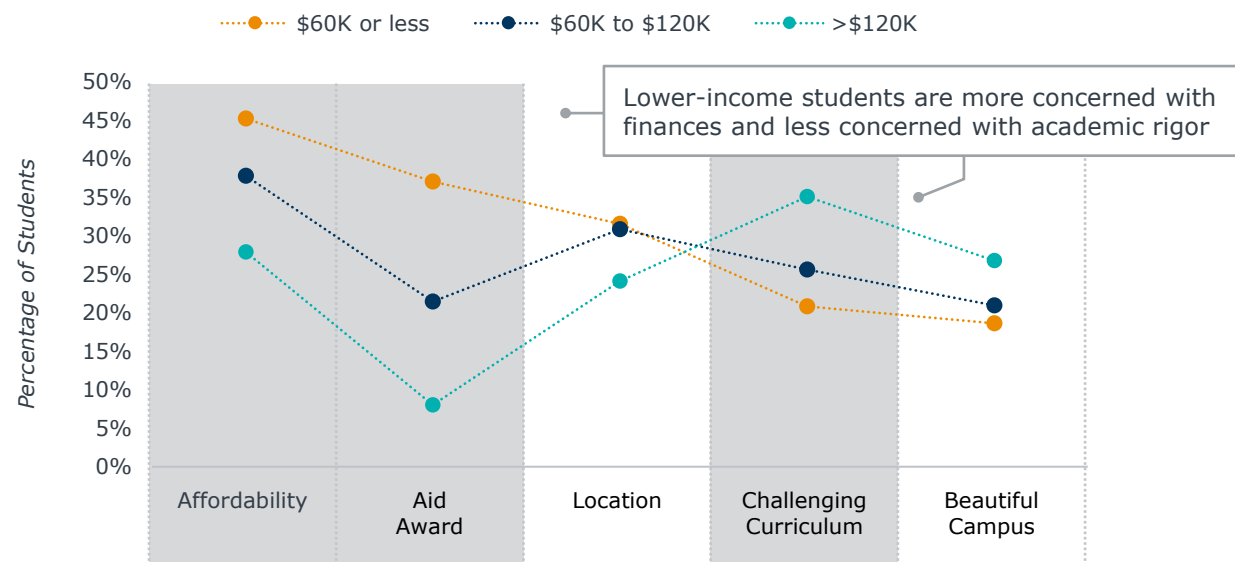
Different priorities

Students from different income bands are most polarized on questions related to cost; see, for example, the large gap between the percentage of lowest-income students citing aid awards as an important factor and the percentage of highest-income students doing the same.

Highest-income students are most likely to give greater attention to markers of a school's academic competitiveness, such as the rigor of its curriculum.

Percentage of Students Citing Various Factors as Primary Reasons for Their Choice of College, by Household Income¹

EAB 2021 Survey of New College Freshmen



Factors Not Cited by More than 25% of Students of Any Income Level

(Percentage of All Respondents)

Academic facilities (23%)	Experiential learning (7%)	Flexible scheduling (5%)
Merit scholarships (17%)	Competitive athletics (7%)	Religious affiliation (4%)
College reputation (14%)	Friends attending (6%)	Comprehensive academic offerings (4%)
Employment outcomes (12%)	Safe campus (5%)	Student organizations (4%)
Student facilities (8%)	Diverse student body (5%)	Research opportunities with faculty (3%)
School spirit (8%)	Students like me on campus (5%)	

1) The chart shows factors cited by at least 25% of students in at least one demographic group. Survey participants were asked to select up to three primary reasons.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Which Factors Drive First-Gen Students' Choice of College?

Group affinities

The factors that first-gen students identify as most important to their choice of college closely mirror those cited by lower-income and Black and Latinx students—a finding that is not surprising given the significant overlap between these populations.

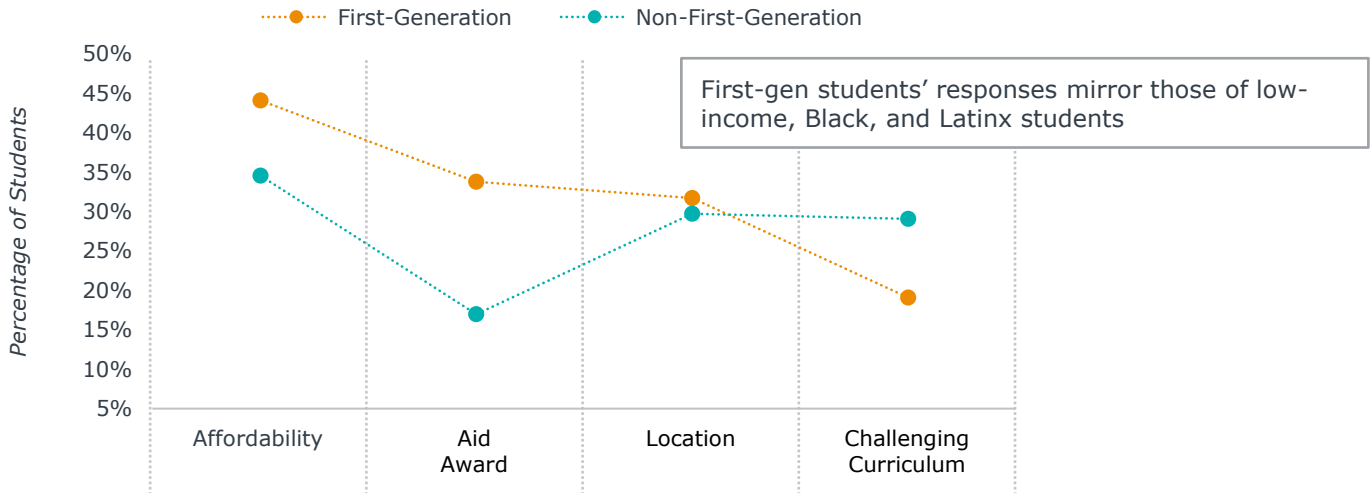
How to portray your academics

The relatively low importance that first-gen students (and lower-income, Black, and Latinx students) place on a challenging curriculum suggests that colleges will need to find some other basis on which to differentiate their academic offerings to these students.

It is reasonable to suppose that messaging suggesting a high level of competitiveness—and carrying related implications of difficulty—might be off-putting for students who may fear they are underprepared. Alternate messaging, aimed at showing how a school's academic offerings are engaging and relevant, may play better with these groups.

Percentage of Students Citing Various Factors as Primary Reasons for Their Choice of College, by First-Generation Status¹

EAB 2021 Survey of New College Freshmen



Factors Not Cited by More than 25% of First-Gen or Non-First-Gen Students

(Average Across All Respondents)

Beautiful campus (23%)	Experiential learning (7%)	Active social life (4%)
Academic facilities (23%)	Friends attending (7%)	Comprehensive academic offerings (4%)
Merit scholarships (16%)	Competitive athletics (6%)	Student organizations (4%)
College ranking (12%)	Diverse student body (6%)	Religious affiliation (4%)
Employment outcomes (11%)	Flexible scheduling (5%)	Research opportunities with faculty (3%)
Student facilities (8%)	Safe campus (5%)	
School spirit (8%)	Students like me on campus (4%)	

¹ The chart shows factors cited by at least 25% of first-gen or non-first-gen students. Survey participants were asked to select up to three primary reasons.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Topics of Greatest Interest, by Race/Ethnicity

What interests students?

Related to the question of which factors underrepresented students weight most heavily in selecting a college (see preceding pages) is that of which topics are of greatest interest to them in their college search—a question on which data from students’ interactions with college websites sheds helpful light.

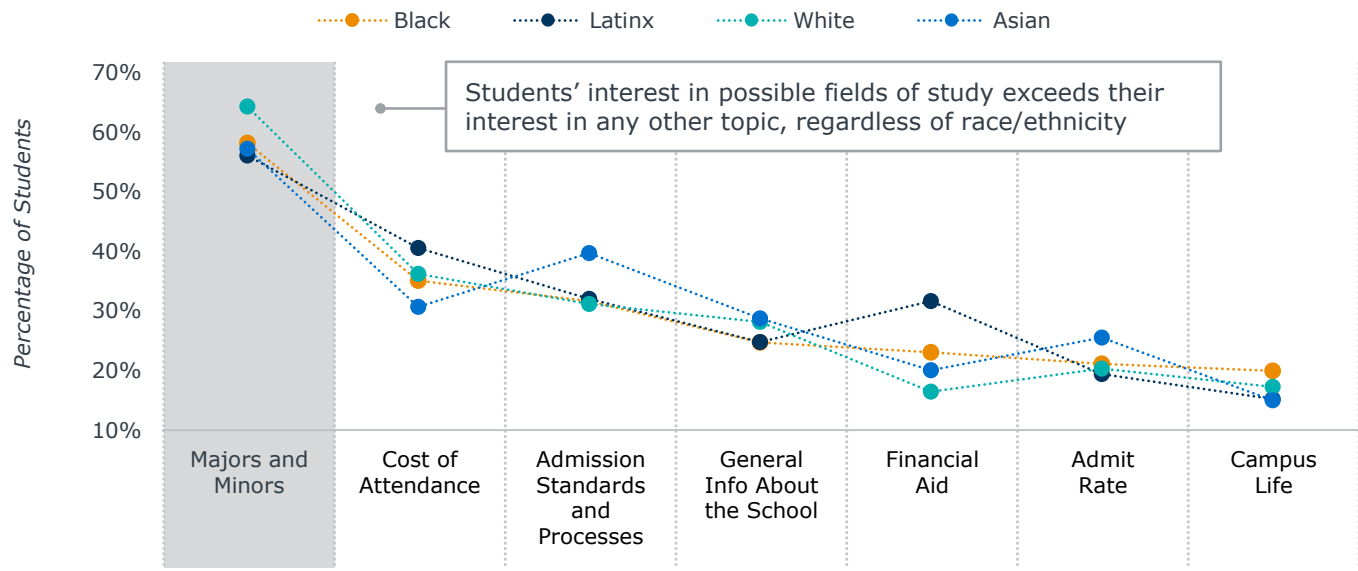
A .edu perspective

EAB survey research has shown that colleges’ websites are the information source that all students, underrepresented or not, find most helpful in their college search. Accordingly, they spend a lot of time on .edus, and observing what, specifically, they are looking for while they’re there tells us much about what they are most concerned about and interested in.

While differences do exist across races and ethnicities in this regard, the overall picture that emerges from the data is one of a relatively high degree of consensus—students from different demographic groups are, for the most part, interested in more or less the same things.

Percentage of Students Searching for Information on Specific Topics When Visiting College Websites, by Race/Ethnicity¹

EAB’s 2021 Survey of Student Communication Preferences



Topics Not Cited by More than 20% of Students in Any Racial/Ethnic Category

(Percentage of All Respondents)

Merit scholarships (12%)	Virtual tour (5%)	Student profiles (1%)
Experiential learning (11%)	Images of campus/people (5%)	Events on campus (1%)
Specific classes offered (8%)	Graduation rates (4%)	Military/ROTC (1%)
Athletic programs (8%)	Career services (3%)	Other (1%)
Student activities (7%)	Campus visits (3%)	Faculty profiles (1%)
Career outcomes (7%)	Faculty research (2%)	Alumni profiles (0%)

1) Topics cited by at least 20% of respondents in at least one racial/ethnic group. Survey participants were asked to select their top three search topics.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Topics of Greatest Interest, by Household Income

Majors/minors dominate

Of all the topics that students seek information on when visiting college websites, majors and minors are a clear standout—a trend that holds across ethnicities, income levels, and first-gen statuses.

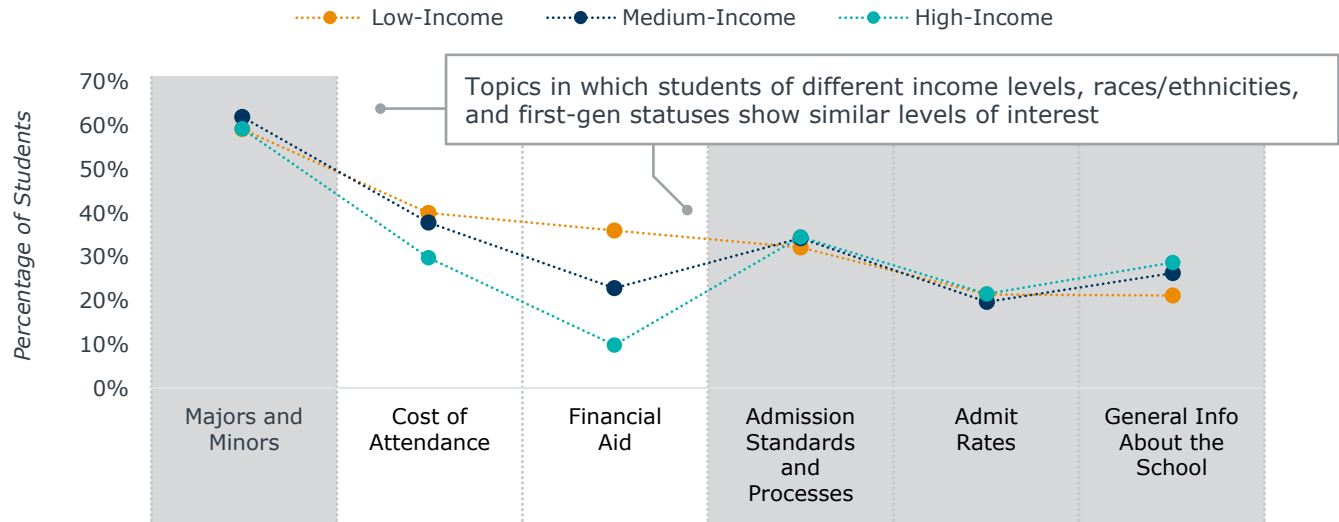
You should, accordingly, make related portions of your website a priority. Content on majors and minors should be both easy to find and compelling to students—less about course syllabi and graduation requirements and more about the interesting and exciting things they will do when studying in a particular academic discipline and working in associated fields after graduation.

Low-priority topics

While knowing what students are most interested in is helpful, it is also important to understand what topics are less of a priority for them—knowledge that will help you more effectively triage your content-creation and communication efforts. The table at right (and similar tables on the preceding pages) give examples of topics in which students show relatively low levels of interest.

Percentage of Students Searching for Information on Specific Topics When Visiting College Websites, by Household Income¹

EAB's 2021 Survey of Student Communication Preferences



Topics Not Cited by More than 20% of Students of Any Income Level

(Percentage of All Respondents)

Campus life (16%)	Virtual tour (5%)	Student profiles (1%)
Merit scholarships (13%)	Images of campus/people (5%)	Events on campus (1%)
Experiential learning (13%)	Campus visits (4%)	Other (1%)
Specific classes offered (8%)	Graduation rates (4%)	Faculty profiles (0%)
Athletic programs (7%)	Career services (3%)	Alumni profiles (0%)
Career outcomes (7%)	Faculty research (1%)	
Student activities (7%)	Military/ROTC (1%)	

1) Topics cited by at least 20% of respondents in at least one income band. Survey participants were asked to select their top three search topics.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Topics of Greatest Interest, by First-Gen Status

Shared characteristics

As a comparison of the chart on this page with those on the preceding pages shows, topics of greatest interest to first-generation students are largely the same as those that low-income and Black and Latinx students are most often looking for on your website.

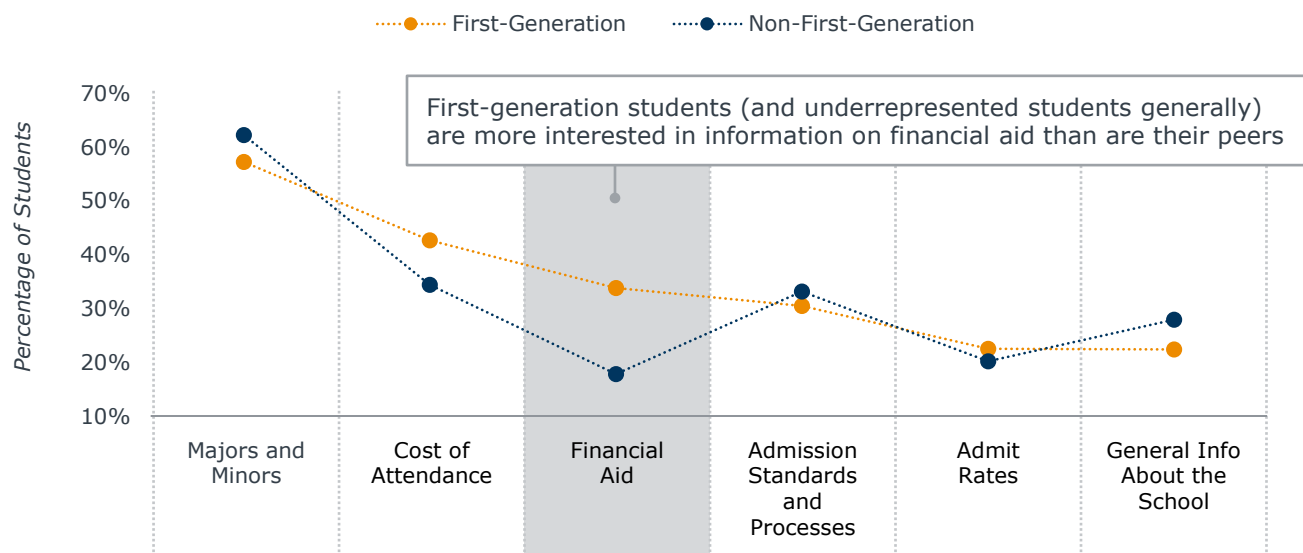
Financial aid a special case

One topic on which students from different demographics consistently diverge is that of financial aid; low-income, first-gen, and Latinx students report seeking out aid-related information on .edu at much higher rates than do their peers.

Given the importance and complexity of financial aid and the limited amount of students' total mindshare colleges' recruitment outreach is able to claim, it may make sense to develop segmented communication streams on financial aid specifically for populations for whom this information matters most.

Percentage of Students Searching for Information on Specific Topics When Visiting College Websites, by First-Generation Status¹

EAB's 2021 Survey of Student Communication Preferences



Factors Not Cited by More than 20% of First-Generation or Non-First-Generation Students

(Percentage of All Respondents)

Campus life (16%)	Images of campus/people (5%)	Student profiles (1%)
Merit scholarships (12%)	Virtual tour (4%)	Events on campus (1%)
Experiential learning (9%)	Campus visits (4%)	Other (1%)
Specific classes offered (8%)	Graduation rates (4%)	Faculty profiles (0%)
Athletic programs (8%)	Career services (3%)	Alumni profiles (0%)
Career outcomes (6%)	Faculty research (2%)	
Student activities (6%)	Military/ROTC (1%)	

1) Topics cited by at least 20% of first-gen or non-first-gen respondents. Survey participants were asked to select their top three search topics.

Insights from CBO Advisors and High School Counselors

Students' key influencers

While understanding student preferences (see preceding pages) is clearly important, recruitment-marketing outreach should also factor in the perspectives of individuals who influence students' college selection—for example, community-based organization (CBO) advisors and high school counselors.

This page presents some related insights concerning factors these key recruitment allies consider when recommending colleges to students.

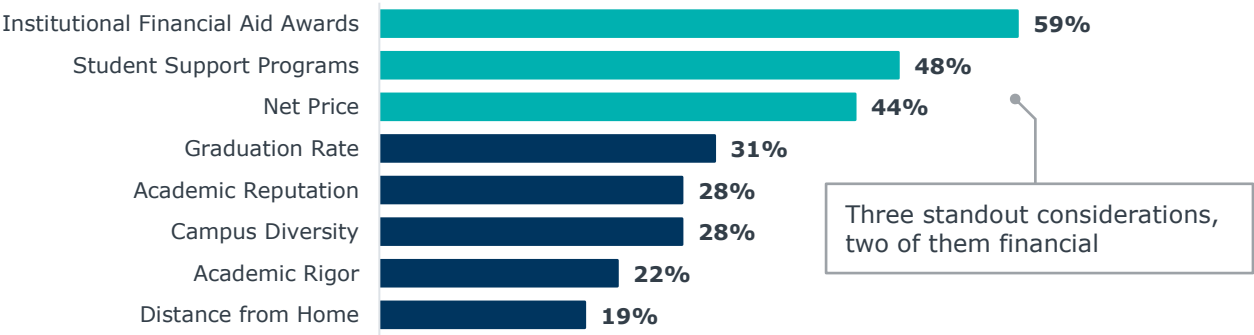
Cost looms large

By way of additional context, the data on this page corresponds to individuals whose work focuses primarily on underrepresented students. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that financial considerations loom large among their priorities.

Perhaps less intuitive is the significantly greater emphasis CBO advisors and high school counselors place on student-support programs versus more direct measures of colleges' student success performance (e.g., graduation rate).

"What institutional factors do you consider before recommending a college to a student?"¹

Percentage of Respondents, Greenlight Equity Collaborative 2022 Survey of CBO Advisors and High School Counselors



"What information or assistance from colleges is helpful to students and helps you advise them on college options?"¹

Percentage of Respondents, Greenlight Equity Collaborative 2022 Survey of CBO Advisors and High School Counselors

Nongovernmental/noninstitutional financial aid (79%)	Academic support for enrolled students (48%)
Funded campus visit opportunities for students (74%)	Funded campus visits for counselors (46%)
Financial aid (69%)	Meeting alumni of the institution (46%)
Transition-support/bridge programs (66%)	Advice regarding application process (42%)
A designated campus contact to work with (62%)	Insights into test-optional admission (41%)
Demographic-specific student narratives (58%)	Funded campus visits for family members (41%)
Calendar of critical admissions deadlines (53%)	Information specifically for parents (33%)
Graduate outcomes by student demographic (52%)	Graduation rates (32%)
Admissions criteria (48%)	Ongoing campus-wide DEI programming (27%)

1) Survey participants were asked to select up to three factors they considered most important.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

What Matters Most to Parents of Black and Latinx Students?

Make parents a priority

While parents are widely (and correctly) believed to be the individuals with the greatest influence on students' college-related decision-making, enrollment leaders are sometimes unclear on the extent to which this holds true for underrepresented students.

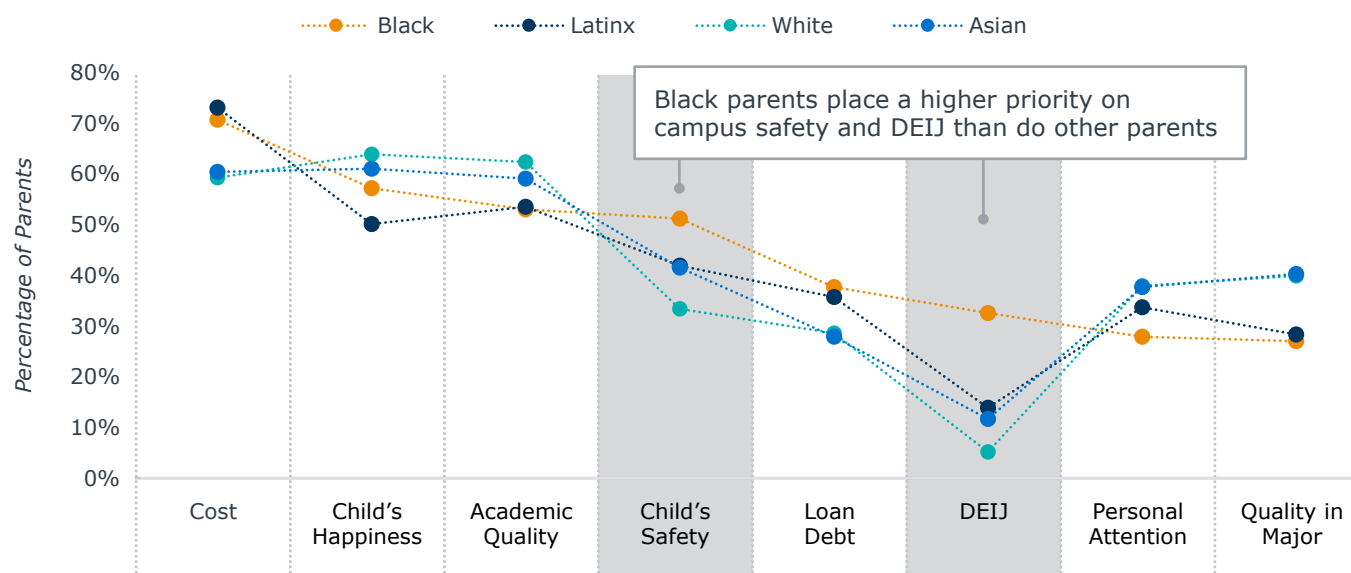
It is undoubtedly the case that these students rely less on their parents for college advice than do their peers in the wider population of college goers (see pages 43 to 45); that said, their parents do play an important enough role that you'll want to make a point of engaging them.

Demographic differences

That effort should be informed by an understanding of what matters most to parents about colleges their children might attend. As shown in the chart at right, this varies considerably across demographics, with Black and Latinx parents showing significantly more concern over issues such as cost and, in the case of Black parents, campus safety and DEIJ climate.

Percentage of Parents Identifying Particular College Characteristics as Important, by Race/Ethnicity¹

EAB 2022 Parent Survey



Factors Not Cited by More than 33% of Parents of Any Race/Ethnicity

(Percentage of All Respondents)

Job prospects after graduation (27%)	General academic quality (19%)	Institution ranking (7%)
Proximity to home (23%)	Institution prestige (11%)	Religious affiliation (4%)
Reputation for major (21%)	Social activities (10%)	Other (2%)

1) The chart shows only factors selected by at least 33% of respondents in at least one racial/ethnic category. Respondents were asked to select up to five factors.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

What Matters Most to Parents of Low-Income Students?

Wide variation

Parent opinion on important college characteristics, in addition to varying by race/ethnicity (see preceding page), also differs considerably based on household income.

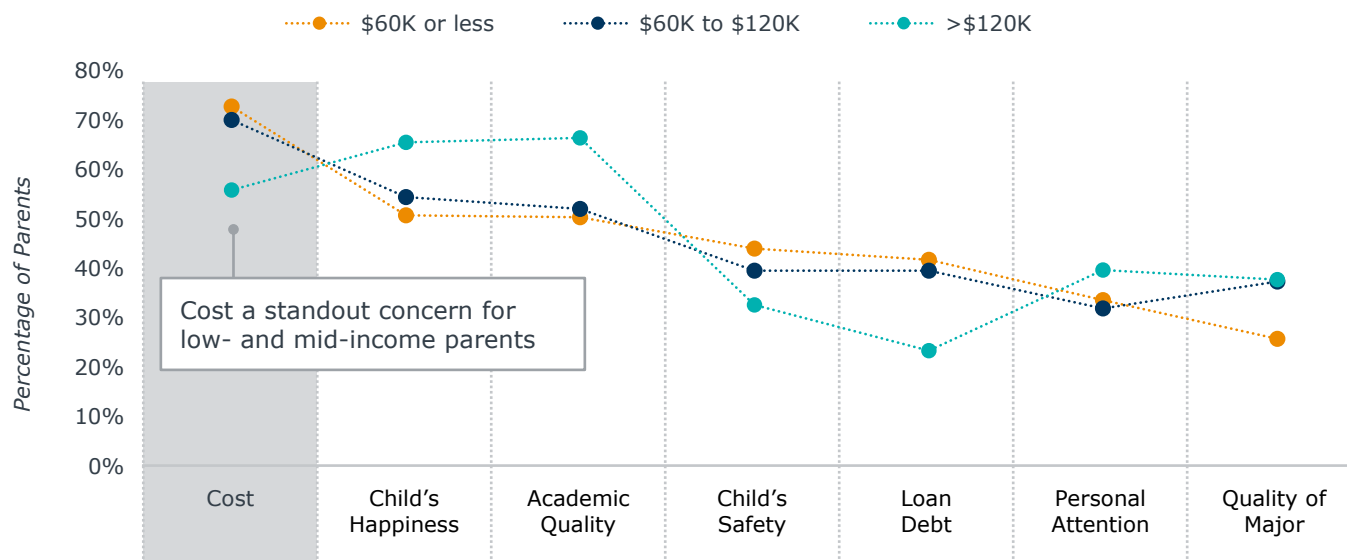
Compared to affluent parents, parents from lower-income households are more likely to consider financial factors, including cost and loan debt, to be important. They are less likely than parents from wealthier households to stress indicators of a school's quality related to academic offerings or the degree of personal attention given to students.

A focus on basic needs

Lower-income parents may, generally speaking, be thought of as more preoccupied with needs further down in the Maslow hierarchy—they are, for example, more likely than affluent parents to worry about their child's safety at their chosen school while being less likely to consider their child's happiness there an urgent concern.

Percentage of Parents Identifying Particular College Characteristics as Important, by Household Income¹

EAB 2022 Parent Survey



Factors Cited by Fewer than 33% of Parents of Any Income Level

(Percentage of All Respondents)

Job prospects after graduation (26%)	General academic quality (21%)	Institution prestige (9%)
Proximity to home (22%)	DEIJ (12%)	Institution ranking (9%)
Reputation for major (21%)	Social activities (11%)	Religious affiliation (5%)

1) The chart shows only factors selected by at least 33% of respondents in at least one racial/ethnic category. Respondents were asked to select up to five factors.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Most Helpful Information Sources, by Race/Ethnicity

Message versus channel

The preceding pages focused on messages most likely to resonate with underrepresented students and their parents, based on what survey data reveals about their interests and concerns.

The following pages focus on another crucial aspect of recruitment-marketing outreach to these populations—their preferred information sources and communication channels.

Notable differences

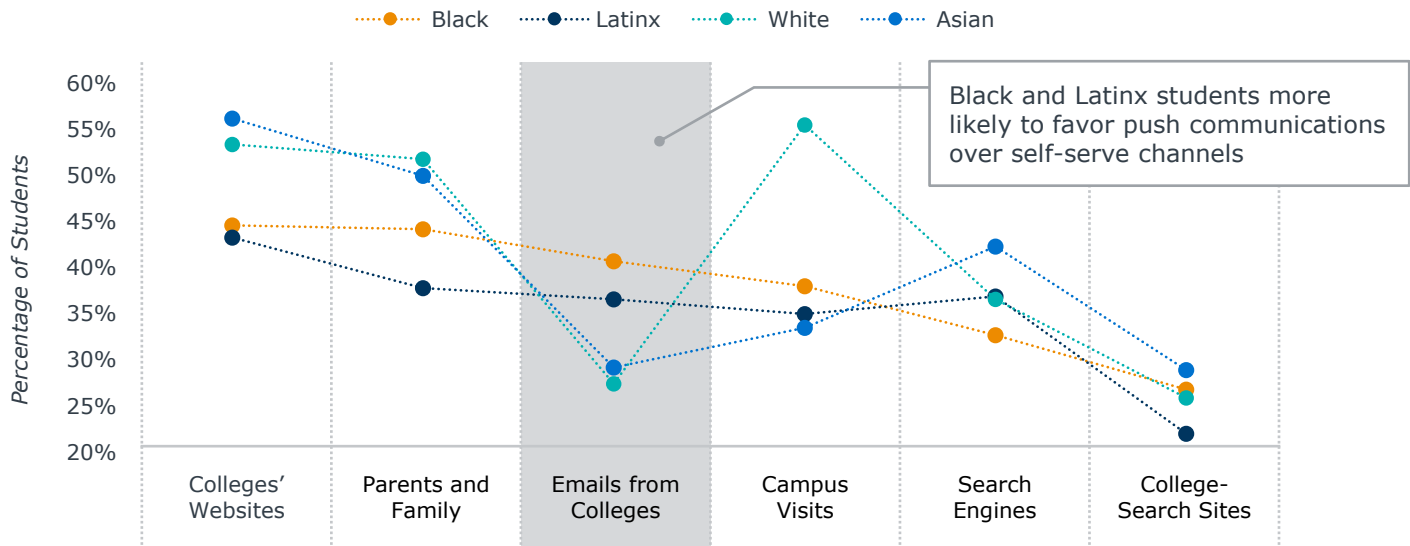
The chart at right shows information sources that students of different races/ethnicities found most helpful in making enrollment decisions.

Note the considerable variation; the average gap between the highest and lowest percentage of respondents expressing a preference for any given channel is a considerable 13 points.

By way of generalizations, Black and Latinx students are less likely to report finding any given channel helpful. They are also less likely to rely on “self-serve” channels, such as college websites, and more likely to prefer push channels, including email.

Sources of Information Students Found Most Helpful for Making Enrollment Decisions, by Race/Ethnicity¹

EAB 2021 Survey of New College Freshmen



Sources Cited by Fewer than 25% of Students of Any Race/Ethnicity

(Percentage of All Respondents)

Friends/classmates (24%)	USNWR/other rankings (14%)	Videos from colleges (7%)
High school counselors (22%)	College fairs (13%)	College publications (4%)
Personal letters from colleges (20%)	Current college students (13%)	Virtual college communities (4%)
Virtual tours (20%)	Alumni (10%)	College guidebooks (4%)
Social media (15%)	College rep high school visits (8%)	Independent college counselors (4%)
Teachers (14%)	Coaches/athletic recruiters (7%)	Telephone calls from colleges (2%)

1) The chart shows only channels cited by at least 25% of students within at least one racial/ethnic group. Respondents were asked to select up to five sources that they found most helpful.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Most Helpful Information Sources, by Income

A recurring pattern

Looking at communication preferences by family income reveals a pattern that roughly mirrors that seen when the data is cut by race/ethnicity (see preceding page), with the preferences of lower-income students resembling those of Black and Latinx students.

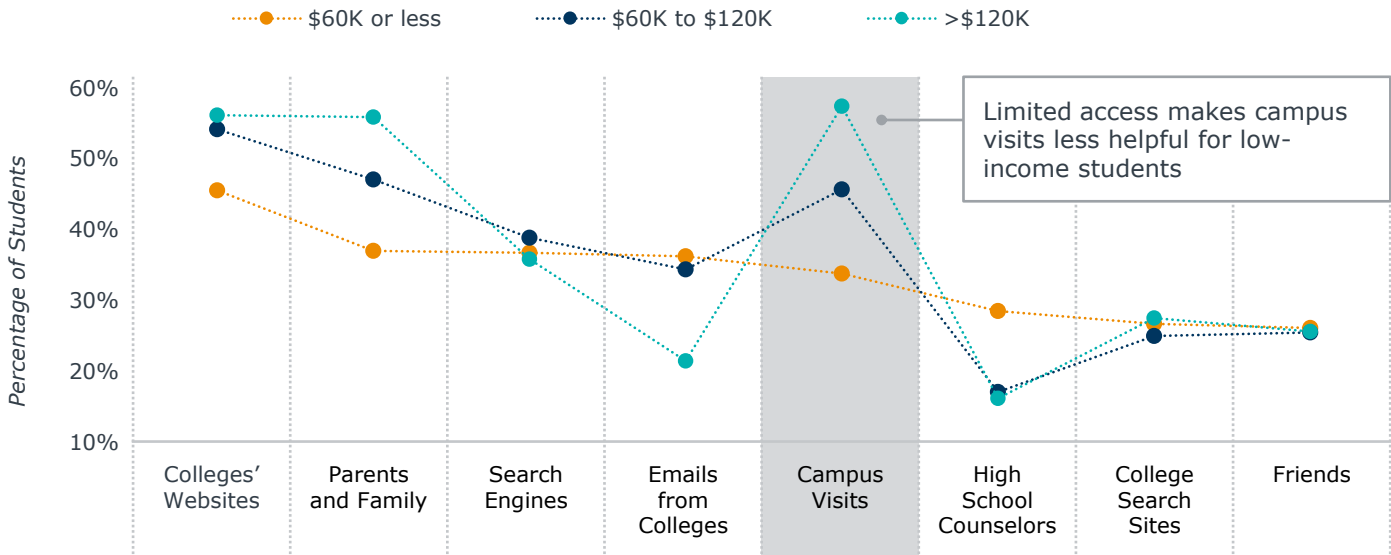
A variety of options

While lower-income students are less likely to find colleges' websites helpful, their opinions on other research-based, "self-serve" channels, e.g., search engines and college search sites, are in line with those of moderate- and high-income students.

Like Black and Latinx students, lower-income students are more likely to find emails from colleges helpful (a reflection of a more general preference on their part for push communications).

Sources of Information Students Found Most Helpful for Making Enrollment Decisions, by Household Income¹

EAB 2021 Survey of New College Freshmen



Sources Cited by Fewer than 25% of Students of Any Income Level

(Percentage of Respondents)

High school counselors (21%)	Teachers (14%)	College publications (4%)
Personal letters from colleges (19%)	College fairs (12%)	Independent college counselors (4%)
Virtual tours (19%)	Alumni (10%)	Virtual college communities (4%)
USNWR/other rankings (14%)	College rep high school visits (7%)	College guidebooks (4%)
Current college students (14%)	Coaches/athletic recruiters (7%)	Telephone calls from colleges (2%)
Social media (14%)	Videos from colleges (6%)	Religious advisors (1%)

1) The chart shows only channels cited by at least 25% of students within at least one income band. Respondents were asked to select up to five sources that they found most helpful.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Most Helpful Information Sources, by First-Gen Status

Kinship across segments

First-gen students’ preferred information sources most resemble those of lower-income, Black, and Latinx students, which is to say that they find colleges’ websites, campus visits, and parents less helpful than their peers in the broader college-going population do, while finding emails from colleges more helpful.

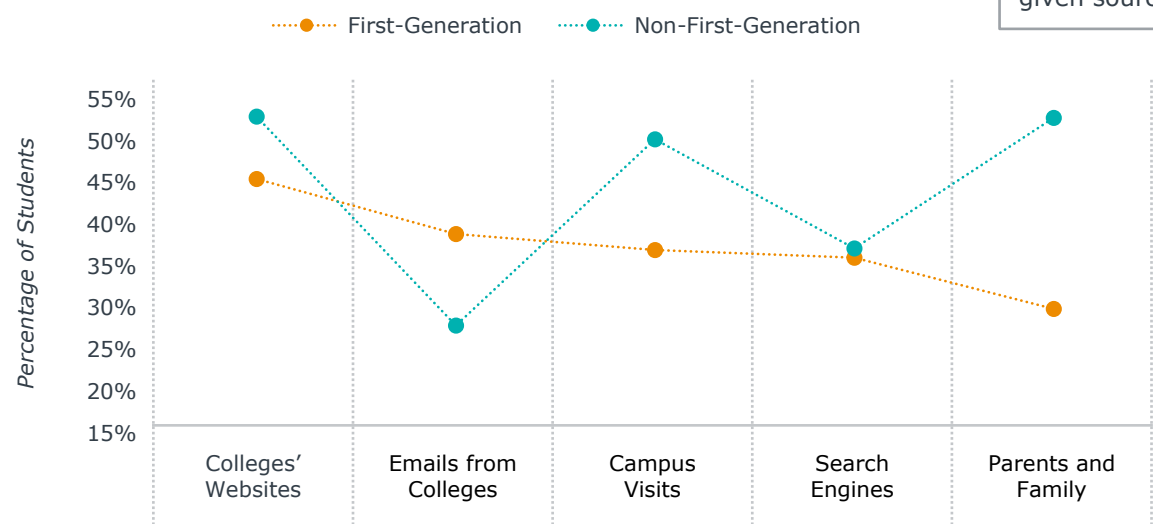
A long tail

One point not called out on the preceding pages is that relatively few information sources are cited by many students as being helpful—only six to eight are mentioned by more than a quarter of students (depending on which demographic cut you’re examining).

Looked at another way (see the table at right), there is a large number of sources that have at least some draw for students, even if the associated numbers are not large. While your core outreach efforts should focus on students’ most favored sources, complete engagement may depend on extending further into this “long tail” of channels.

Sources of Information Students Found Most Helpful for Making Enrollment Decisions, by First-Generation Status

EAB 2021 Survey of New College Freshmen



Sources Cited by Fewer than One-Third of First-Generation and Non-First-Generation Students

(Percentage of All Respondents)

College-search sites (25%)	College fairs (13%)	Virtual college communities (4%)
Friends/classmates (25%)	Current college students (12%)	College publications (4%)
High school counselors (22%)	USNWR/other rankings (12%)	College guidebooks (4%)
Personal letters from colleges (22%)	Alumni (9%)	Independent college counselors (4%)
Virtual tours (18%)	College rep high school visit (8%)	Telephone calls from colleges (3%)
Teachers (15%)	Coaches/athletic recruiters (7%)	CBOs (2%)
Social media (15%)	Videos from colleges (7%)	Telephone calls to colleges (1%)

1) The chart shows only channels cited by at least one-third of first-generation or non-first-generation students.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

A Special Role for Social Media

Channel-preference nuance

One thing to appreciate about the data on information sources shown on the preceding pages is that the generalizations it makes can occasionally mask important insights. A case in point is illustrated at right.

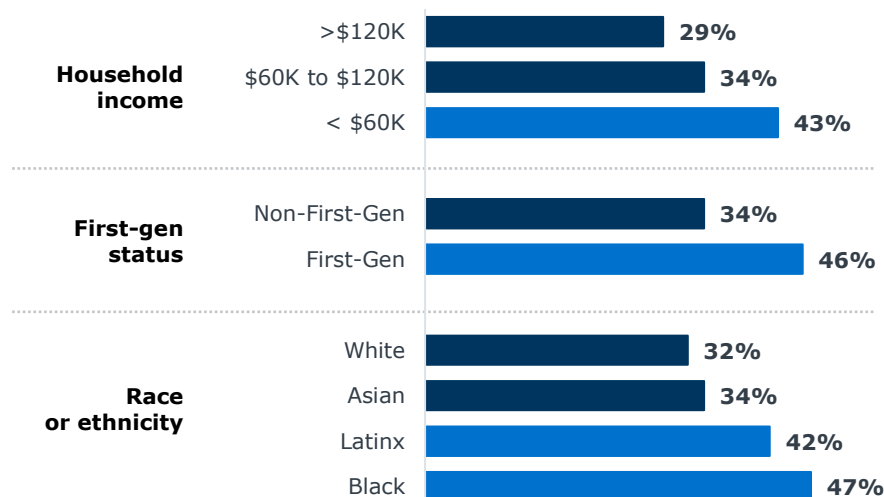
A tool for discovery

As may be seen in the various tables shown earlier in this section, few students in any demographic cite social media as a source that proved helpful to them in making enrollment decisions.

That said, social media does, according to students themselves, play a big part in them learning of the existence of particular schools. This phenomenon is especially pronounced for lower-income, first-gen, Black, and Latinx students, almost half of whom report first hearing about a school via social channels.

Percentage of Students Who Said They Discovered a Particular College or University on Social Media

EAB 2021 Survey of Student Communication Preferences



1.5x

Higher likelihood of underrepresented students first hearing about a school via social media (relative to their peers in the broader college-going population)

Step 6: Find More Underrepresented Students to Recruit

Generalizable best practices

Understood within the framework of the admissions funnel, the effort to enroll more underrepresented students begins with identifying more suitable candidates to recruit.

Many of the audience-sourcing best practices that apply to majority populations also work well with underrepresented students. That said, there are some additional steps you'll want to take to ensure complete capture of low-income, first-generation, Black, and Latinx students, as outlined at right.

Special measures

One way of identifying more underrepresented prospects is to make sure that the criteria you're using to select students for the top of your funnel match the criteria you're using to assess applicants; for many schools, the pivot to test-optional introduced significant changes in this regard.

Another is to ensure you're drawing on a full range of sources, including ones that are likely to pick up students who don't test and therefore don't show up in the related lists from College Board and ACT.

Three Steps to Complete Capture

1 Make the most of **test-based** list sources

- Do not limit name buys to geographies and student segments with historically high yield rates; aim to capture all students in your main markets who meet your admit criteria
- If you revised your admit criteria when you went test-optional, be sure to align your name-buy parameters with your new standards
- Keep in mind that many underrepresented students test late (well into their senior year); don't neglect to acquire their names as well
- Consider using lower test-score cutoffs for name buys from high-poverty areas—scores are more likely to understate ability for students from these areas

2 Use **non-test-based** sources

- Because underrepresented students test at lower rates, schools in states without mandatory testing will miss a lot of these students if they are relying heavily on testing-based sources for their name buys. While all schools should use a comprehensive set of list sources, including NRCCUA, CBSS, and college search aggregator sites/services (such as Cappex, Niche, and Intersect), it is especially important for institutions in states without mandatory testing to do so.

3 Leverage **CBO** partnerships

- CBOs can give you access to students who never make it into any list source
- CBOs can make students available to you earlier than other sources do
- Since a student's CBO affiliation is often an indication of greater likelihood to succeed after enrolling, it can be used to help qualify for admission students who might not otherwise meet your admit criteria



See EAB's [white paper](#) "Recruiting in an Era of Channel Overload" for detailed guidance on how to identify prospective students to recruit.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

A Note on Standardized Testing

A familiar controversy

A key consideration when identifying underrepresented students to recruit is what role standardized testing should (or should not) play in the effort.

Testing is, with some justification, often talked about as a factor that inappropriately limits underrepresented students' (especially Black students') access to higher education.

Less commonly acknowledged is the positive role that testing can play in identifying strong candidates who might previously have been overlooked.

Expanding access

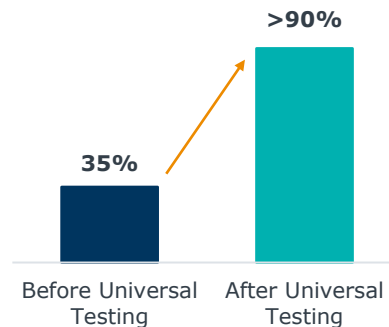
For example, the growing adoption by states of universal standardized testing has led to the identification of large numbers of additional low-income students who, based on their scores, are suitable candidates for admission to selective colleges.

The corresponding lesson for admission teams is to recognize the positive contribution that test scores can make in enabling college access for underrepresented students who might otherwise go unidentified.

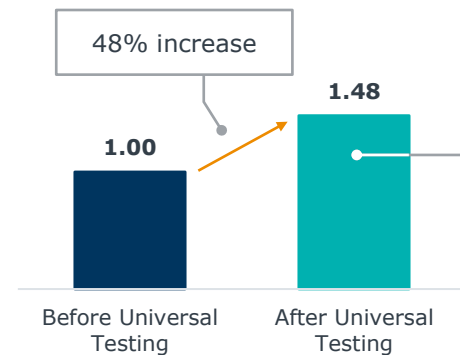
Universal Standardized Testing Reveals More Low-Income Students Suitable for Admission to Selective Colleges

The State of Michigan's Experience as a Case in Point

Percentage of Low-Income High School Students Testing

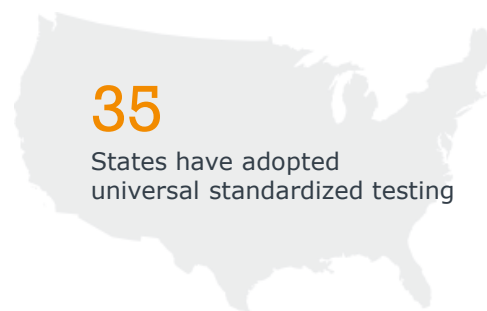


College-Ready¹ Low-Income Students Identified Indexed to Pre-Universal-Testing Baseline



For every 100 low-income students who scored high enough to attend a selective college previously, another 48 were uncovered by universal testing.

A National Phenomenon



1) The authors of the study cited use a cutoff of 20 on the ACT as a rough proxy for "college readiness," of which there is no single, generally accepted measure.

Source: Susan Dynarski, "ACT/SAT for all: a cheap, effective way to narrow income gaps in college," Brookings.edu, Thursday, February 8, 2018; EAB research and analysis.

Step 7: Get More Underrepresented Students to Apply

An awareness challenge

One major struggle students face in their college search is finding out about particular schools that might be a good fit for them. As shown in the chart at right, more than a third of high school counselors cite limited awareness of particular colleges as a major factor preventing students from applying.

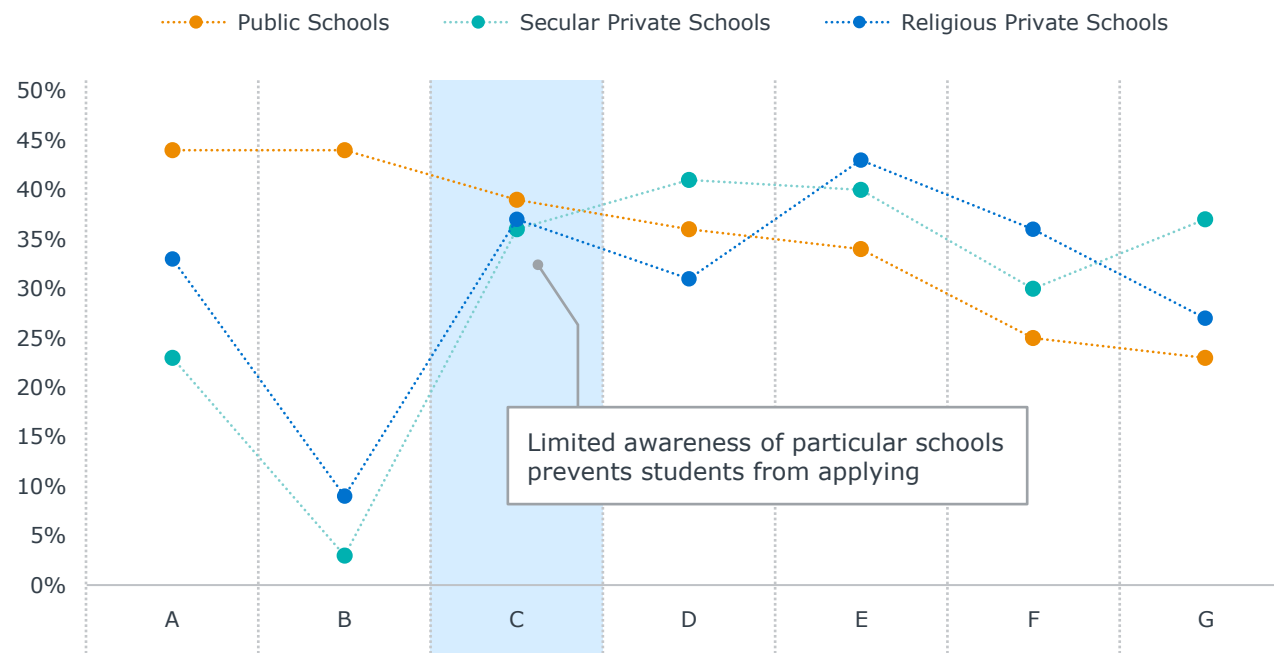
While this is equally true for students at private and public high schools, students at public institutions often face the additional and related barrier of being first-generation college goers, i.e., they don't have degree-holding parents to help bring potential schools to their attention. (Note as well the much higher frequency with which lack of family support was cited as a barrier by counselors at public high schools.)

A solution at hand

One piece of good news in this respect is that colleges have at their disposal a highly effective and proven means of correcting information deficits of this sort among high school students—namely, recruitment marketing.

High School Counselors Cite Lack of Awareness of Colleges as a Major Factor Preventing Students from Applying

Percentage of High School Counselors Identifying Various Factors as Barriers to Application, by High School Segment, EAB 2021 Survey of High School Counselors



A	Completing the FAFSA	E	Visiting campus
B	Lack of family support	F	Taking standardized tests
C	Awareness of colleges	G	Preparing for standardized tests
D	Preparing essays		

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Recruitment Marketing Has Outsize Positive Impact

Extraordinary response

Direct marketing is, by now, a pillar of most schools' recruitment efforts—a fact attributable to its long track record of demonstrable positive impact on enrollment outcomes. Less widely appreciated is the fact that underrepresented students respond especially well to this form of outreach.

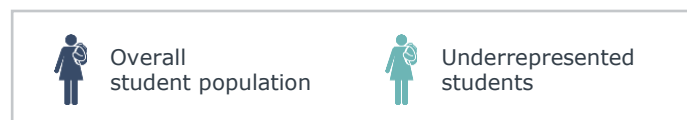
Filling an information gap

As illustrated at right (based on data from EAB's own work), underrepresented students contacted via recruitment marketing inquire and apply at rates 1.3 times higher than do their peers in the overall college-going population. Crucially, this higher initial response rate translates into downstream impact, with recruitment marketing generating 1.4 times more admits from underrepresented students per equivalent number of initial contacts.

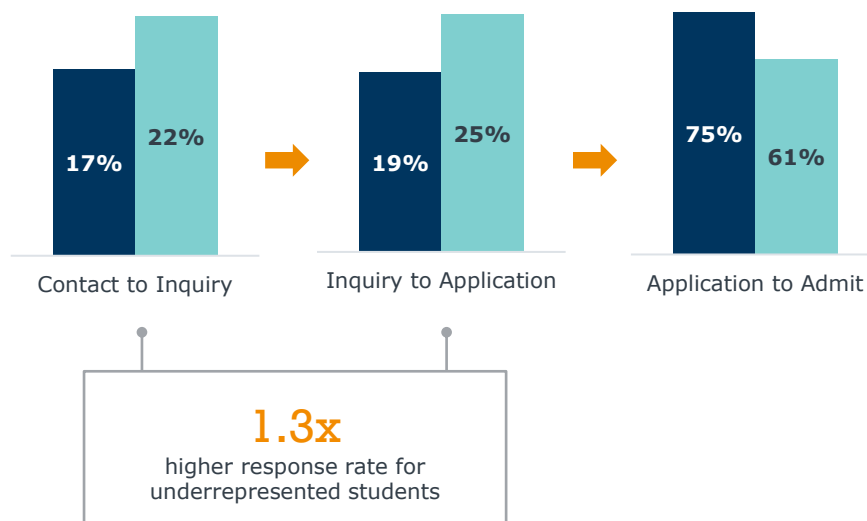
While it is not possible to say for certain why this is, it is likely a reflection of underrepresented students' more limited access to other forms of information on college-going, e.g., due to the preponderance among them of first-gen students.

Recruitment-Marketing Response

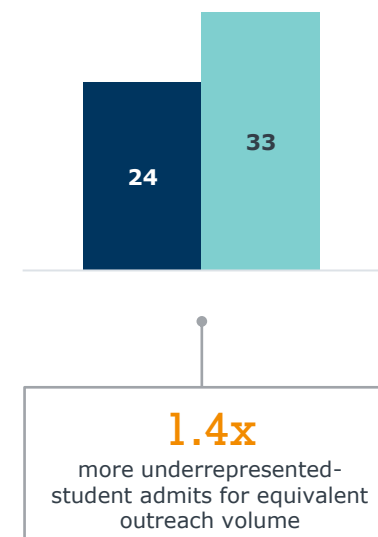
Underserved Students vs. Overall Student Population, Sophomore, Junior, and Senior High School Students Contacted via Search Marketing¹



Funnel Conversion Rates



Admits per 1,000 Contacts



¹ The analysis shown here was based on data from 179 colleges and universities, comprising 19.2 million student contacts (13.3 million contacts with students from the general population and 5.9 million contacts with underrepresented students), for students entering college in 2019. "Underrepresented" students were defined as Black, Latinx, Native American, and Multiracial. White and Asian students were excluded from the underrepresented group.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Streamlined Applications Boost Underrepresented-Student Enrollment

Learning from the pandemic

One major lesson admission teams learned from the pandemic was the positive impact that going test-optional has on the number of underrepresented students applying (see page 54).

A broader phenomenon

This observation confirms a more general and well-established trend; as shown at right, colleges reducing application requirements have, historically, seen marked increases in application volumes. Crucially, these same institutions also saw much higher growth in admits and enrolls, showing that the “extra” applicants were both qualified and genuinely interested in the institutions they were applying to.

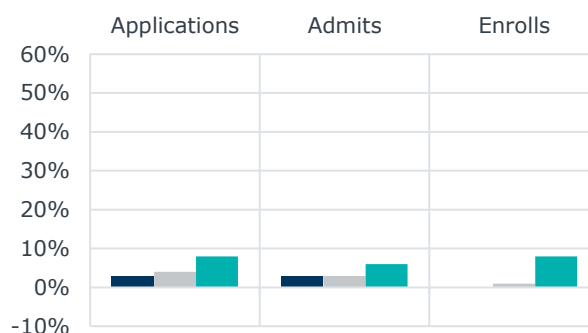
Also significant is the fact that the above phenomena were far more pronounced at less selective institutions—a finding that underscores the extent to which surplus application requirements have a disproportionate negative impact on underrepresented students’ likelihood to apply (i.e., to the extent that less selective schools tend to serve more underrepresented students).

Change in Key Enrollment-Funnel Metrics

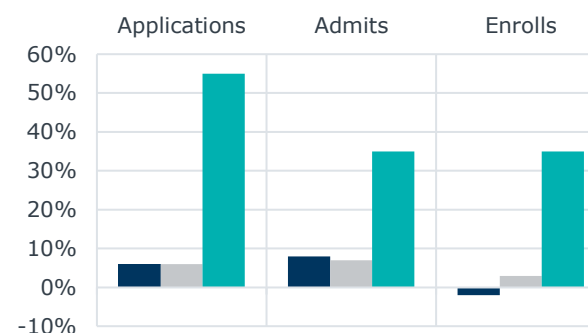
By Change in Number of Application Requirements, Entering Class 2015 vs. 2016, Public and Private Not-for-Profit Four-Year Institutions, United States¹

■ Schools that added requirements ■ Schools that did not add requirements ■ Schools that reduced requirements

More-Selective Institutions



Less-Selective Institutions



Test-Optionality a Case in Point

~25%

of Black and Latinx students cite test optionality as an important factor in their choice of schools to apply to (versus just 12% of White students)²

45%

of private colleges saw “somewhat” or “significantly” increased applications from students of underrepresented races and ethnicities after going test-optional³



EAB’s [white paper](#) “Maximizing Application Completion” includes detailed guidance on reducing application requirements.

1) Source: EAB analysis of IPEDS data.

2) Source: EAB Survey of New College Freshmen.

3) Source: Maguire and Associates.

Source: EAB analysis of IPEDS data; EAB Survey of New College Freshmen; “The Future of Test-Optional,” Maguire and Associates, July 2021.

A New Frontier in Application Streamlining

Direct admissions

One recent innovation that considerably reduces barriers to college-going faced by underrepresented students is the practice of so-called “direct admissions.”

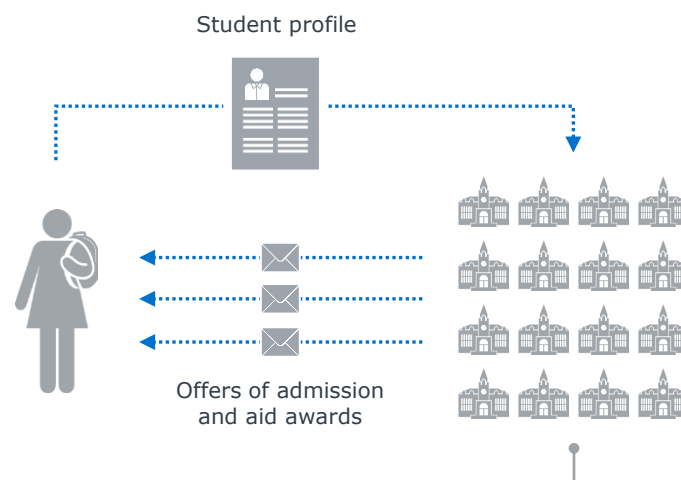
Under this approach, colleges proactively make offers of admission (including aid packages) based on simplified profiles students submit to a consortium of participating schools—a process that does not require students to identify (or even to be aware of) particular colleges in order to receive offers of admission from them.

Multiple benefits

Among the major barriers to college-going that this approach addresses are the extensive research students must undertake to identify colleges that might be a good fit for them, the misunderstandings over pricing that often cause students to prematurely rule out schools that might in fact constitute excellent value for them, and the undermatching that can result from students’ tendency to mirror their peers’ college-going behaviors.

Colleges “Apply” to Students

Pilot Programs Testing a Matching-Based Alternative to Traditional Application Processes



Student profile made available to a group of colleges participating in the match network, without the student having to identify particular institutions



EAB’s College Greenlight division is currently piloting a direct-admission program in partnership with admissions-services provider Concourse

Six Ways That Direct Admission Helps Students

1	✓ Eliminates burden of research required to discover potential schools
2	✓ Student has to complete only one profile rather than multiple applications
3	✓ Profile eliminates essays, recommendations, and other onerous application requirements
4	✓ Application fee eliminated
5	✓ Students’ experience of rejection minimized
6	✓ Student misconceptions regarding affordability preemptively put to rest

Source: EAB research and analysis.

“

I think many colleges have difficulty admitting to themselves how open their admissions selections really are. For those colleges, the pre-admit approach may have certain advantages in simplifying the process for students and families that we know are often befuddled by it. Often these are the [first-gen and low-income students](#) who are eagerly sought after by colleges but who can easily fall by the wayside and not complete and submit their applications for admission.

”

Richard Ekman
Former President, Council of Independent Colleges

Step 8: Admit More Underrepresented Students

A key root cause

Historically, one of the major barriers to college access for underrepresented students has been admission teams’ reliance on standardized test scores for the evaluation of applicants.

Scores vary significantly by race and ethnicity. Black students, for example, tend to score significantly lower than White and Asian students—a disparity that is widely believed to reflect bias in the tests themselves and/or Black students’ unequal access to college preparatory resources rather than differences in students’ academic potential.

Evidence of impact

The widespread adoption by colleges of test-optional admission policies during the pandemic offered a historic opportunity to gauge just how big an impact removing test scores from admit decisions has on outcomes for underrepresented students. And test optionality has, in fact, resulted in many schools receiving more applications from underrepresented students and enrolling them in greater numbers.

Percentage of Surveyed Colleges Reporting Improved Performance¹ on Selected Enrollment Metrics After Going Test-Optional

		% of public colleges	% of private colleges
Students of underserved races and ethnicities	Increased applications	56%	45%
	Increased enrollments	52%	38%
Students with financial need	Increased applications	48%	37%
	Increased enrollments	42%	33%
First-generation students	Increased applications	49%	34%
	Increased enrollments	44%	30%

Test-Blind Aid Awarding Massively Boosts Percentage of Black and Latinx Students Getting Highest-Level Aid Award at Tillwood State University²



1) Includes schools reporting “somewhat” and “significantly” improved performance. Source: McGuire.
2) A pseudonym.

Source: “The Future of Test-Optional,” Maguire and Associates, July 2021; EAB research and analysis.
eab.com

Top-Line Observations on Test-Optional Admissions

So far so good

As explained on the preceding page, the nation's wholesale pivot to test-optional admissions during the pandemic appears to have been an overwhelmingly positive development for underrepresented students.

Even so, the transition has been far from straightforward, and many open questions remain regarding its impact on admission teams and potential implications for students in the longer term.

Open questions

In spite of its demonstrated shortcomings, standardized testing does, in fact, accurately predict students' likelihood to succeed after enrolling. Test score unavailability matters more or less depending on other steps admission teams are taking to evaluate candidates. For institutions with the bandwidth and expertise required for holistic applicant review, it is less of an issue. Other colleges, e.g., those relying primarily on high school GPA—a notoriously equivocal measure of student ability and preparedness—risk admitting students ill equipped to succeed at their institutions.

Four Primary Considerations Related to Test-Optionality



No going back

Given the widespread adoption of test-optionality during the pandemic, students' enthusiastic embrace of it, and the positive enrollment impact that many schools have seen from going test-optional, it seems unlikely that a significant number of schools will go back to requiring test scores.



Positive impact on admissions equity

While past studies of test optionality—particularly ones undertaken at highly selective institutions—showed limited impact on underrepresented-student recruitment, evidence from a broader swath of institutions in the pandemic era suggests that it does in fact boost the number of Black, Latinx, first-gen, and low-income students enrolling.



Mixed evidence on the predictive power of test scores

It remains to be seen how well test-optional schools have been able to evaluate applicants' likelihood to succeed after enrolling; evidence from the literature regarding the predictive power of test scores is mixed, with at least one major study suggesting that test scores have independent predictive power over and above high school GPA.



A heavy lift

Assessing applicants without test scores is more labor-intensive, especially when it comes to students at the lower end of the academic-ability spectrum and those from under-resourced schools; admission teams unable to find the extra capacity required for close and broadly scoped applicant review will have to rely on less refined forms of assessment, which can miss qualified students in underrepresented demographics.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

A Four-Part Framework for Implementing Test-Optionality

Test-optional **recruiting**

1

Look beyond test-based list sources

The number of student names available from ACT and College Board is likely to continue its decline, even after the pandemic ends and testing rebounds; enrollment leaders should learn to make optimal use of the many additional lead sources available to them.

Align audience selection with admit criteria

If you are no longer requiring students to submit test scores to be considered for admission, remove that constraint from the name buys you are doing for recruitment of future classes, as this will increase the size of your prospect pool and boost application volume.

Overinvest in communicating your policy

How you describe your test-optional policy can make the difference between a student applying or not; ensure that you're being totally clear in your related communications, and avoid encumbering your policy with conditions that may needlessly suppress application volume.

Test-optional **admitting**

2

Commit to closer applicant review

High school GPA can be an equivocal measure of student ability, and you're unlikely to see optimal enrollment outcomes if it is the primary driver of your admit and aid decisions. Take a broader perspective on students' academic potential, incorporating detailed transcript review.

Scope the effort to your recruitment aims

How you review applicants should match the importance your institution places on enrolling students with high academic ability; close review of most or all applicants is resource-intensive and may not be necessary or realistic for budget-constrained institutions with high admit rates.

Initiate rapid-cycle outcomes assessment

Evaluate first-year outcomes for students admitted under your test-optional approach to ensure that it is producing results consistent with your intentions, e.g., that it is not resulting in unacceptably high rates of attrition. Promptly revise your admit criteria as necessary.

Source: EAB research and analysis.



See EAB's [white paper](#) "Enrollment Strategy for a Test-Optional Era" for detailed guidance on how to implement and make the most of test optionality.

Test-optional **awarding**

3

Take a "do no harm" approach

Structure your merit-aid awards so that students submitting test scores will always receive the highest amount they are entitled to (i.e., between the award factoring in test score and the award calculated without it). Foreground this policy in your communication with students.

Refine your merit-aid awarding criteria

Unavailability of test scores can reduce the accuracy of aid modeling and the efficiency of your aid spend; expand your merit-aid awarding criteria to include new measures of student academic ability that approach or match the predictive power and granularity of test scores.

Continuously monitor aid impact through yield season

Enrollment outcomes can be unpredictable for schools new to test-optional; close monitoring of progress toward enrollment goals throughout yield season and making corresponding course corrections via fine-tuned adjustment of awards become especially important in this context.

Test-optional **infrastructure**

4

Campaign for capacity

Even schools that opt not to do closer review of all applicants will find test-optional admissions to be more labor-intensive than test-based approaches; be prepared to lobby for the additional resources required to do test-optional well.

Increase your analytics bandwidth

Success under test-optional depends on continuous assessment of outcomes and corresponding policy adjustments; this is difficult to do without robust "in-team" data/analytics capabilities (or unconstrained access to an institutional research team or similarly skilled third party).

Sync with your school's student success capabilities

Test-optionality will likely lead to your enrolling types of students your institution may not be as familiar with. It will definitely lead to you having less information on students. Both considerations call for closer coordination with your student success teams.

Step 9: Yield More Underrepresented Students

A high-risk funnel stage

While challenges at the other funnel stages addressed in this report are daunting, the risk of losing underrepresented students is arguably greatest during the yield phase.

Cost looms large

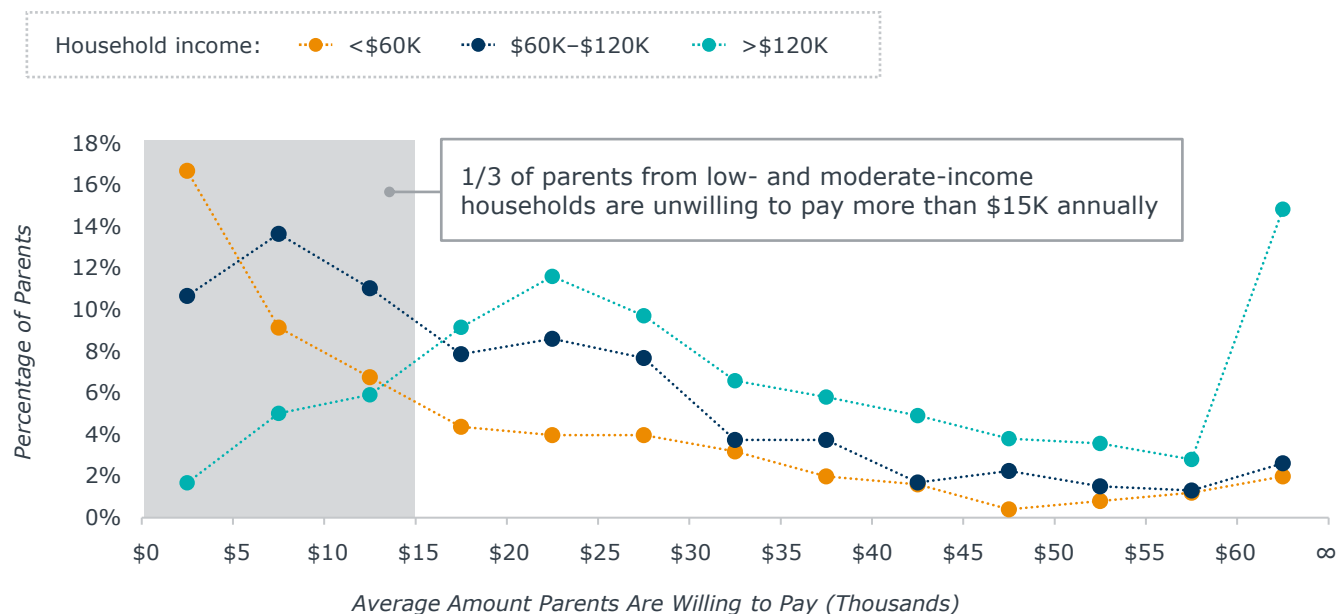
There are many reasons for this, but one of the most critical is that this is when most families finally learn just how much their student's education will cost.

Parents are of particular concern in this regard; surveys consistently show college finances to be a more urgent worry for them than for their children (which is saying something, since it is a chief source of anxiety for students as well).

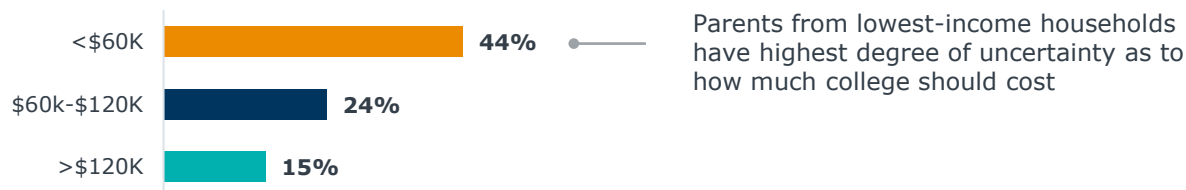
The data at right helps paint a more detailed picture of parent expectations in this regard. As indicated, of parents who have definite expectations about college cost, one-third from low- and moderate-income households are unwilling to pay more than \$15,000 annually.

Maximum Parents Are Willing to Pay for College, by Household Income

Percentage of Parents, by Total Annual Cost of Attendance, EAB 2021 Survey of Parents of College-Bound Students



Percentage of Parents Who Are Unsure How Much They Would Be Willing to Pay, by Household Income



1) Surveyed parents were asked "In terms of the total cost of your child attending college (tuition, fees, housing, and meals), what is the maximum amount you would pay per year?"

Unaffordability Is a Key Cause of Failure to Convert

Non-yielding students

Some insight into the role that cost plays in the decision-making of college-bound students may be gained from surveys of admitted students who ultimately choose not to enroll.

Affordability front and center

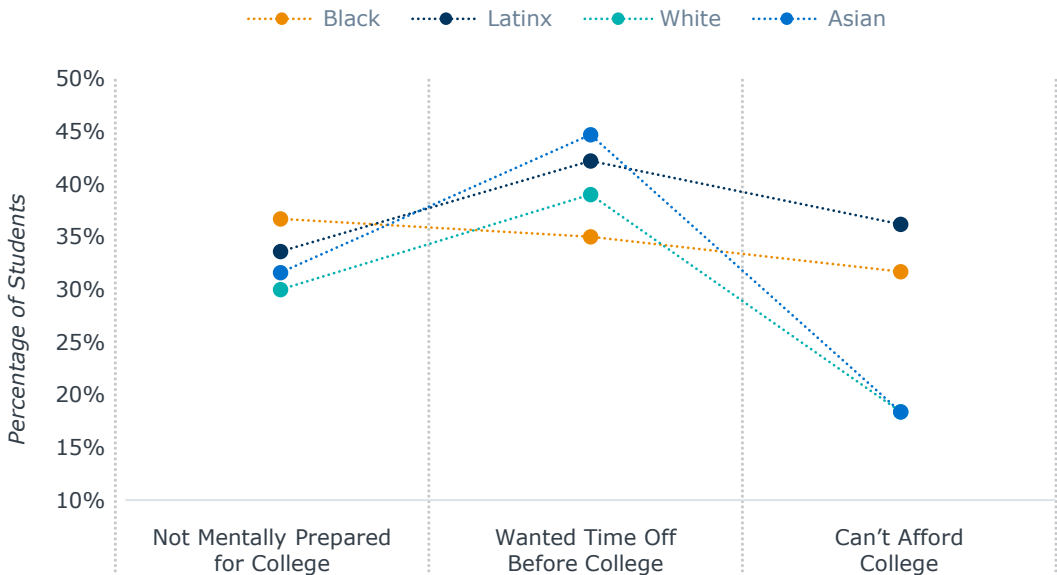
While student motivations in this regard vary tremendously, affordability is among the top reasons non-yielding students give for their decision—a point illustrated in the chart at right.

Not incidentally, this explanation is especially common among Black and Latinx students, who are about twice as likely to cite affordability as a deciding issue relative to their White and Asian peers.

Also worth noting is the fact that most nonmatriculating students don't appear to question the value of college—just 13% said they didn't think college was worth the cost, and even fewer believe that they can earn as much without a degree.

"Why did you decide not to enroll at a college or university?"

Factors Cited by at Least One Third of Students in at Least One Demographic Category, EAB Survey of New College Freshmen



Factors Cited by Fewer than One-Third of Students in Any Racial/Ethnic Category

(Percentage of All Respondents)

Other (24%)	COVID concerns (9%)
College not worth the cost (13%)	Family responsibilities (7%)
Degree not required for intended career (12%)	Never planned to go to college (5%)
Need to work (9%)	Can earn as much without a degree (4%)

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Helping Students Overcome Financial Barriers

Financial fixes

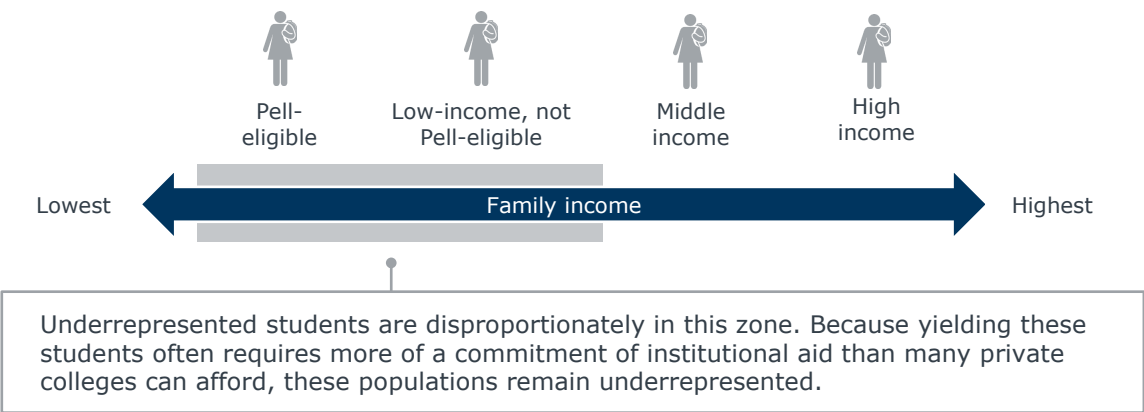
Insofar as affordability is a key factor preventing underrepresented students from yielding, financial fixes should be part of your response. This is especially true if your institution is gapping many students to any great extent on financial aid versus need.

The difficult reality here is that those fixes typically entail some sacrifice of tuition revenue; there’s really no other way of making a major difference in your school’s affordability than charging students less.

Incremental progress

This approach will not, for most schools, be scalable to any great degree. That said, it is absolutely worth pursuing, even its scope is limited; enrolling five more underrepresented students annually (or however many your budget will allow) is far better than nothing. Furthermore, apart from this seemingly narrow impact, progress you make on the enrollment of underrepresented students across consecutive enrollment cycles will continuously build your experience with recruiting these populations and your school’s draw for them.

Colleges’ Efforts at Increasing Underrepresented-Student Enrollment Are Hobbled by Financial Constraints



Nailing Down a Defined and Manageable Commitment

Hypothetical Scenarios for a Cohort of Five Underrepresented Students

	Additional commitment of institutional grant-aid required annually	
	Per student	Total
Scenario A: free tuition Additional institutional aid grant large enough to ensure that students graduate debt-free	\$20,000	\$100,000
Scenario B: affordable tuition Additional institutional aid grant large enough to reduce students’ projected total debt at graduation to a manageable level (see page 18)	\$10,000	\$50,000

This forgone revenue is the effective “cost” of the program.

Source: EAB research and analysis.



Additional Resources

SECTION

3

Recommended Self-Service Resources

EAB Resources

Blueprint for Enrolling a Diverse Student Body

This series of four research publications offers best practice advice on how to identify, engage, and recruit students from underrepresented populations. Specific topics addressed include college-access programs, strategies for engaging parents of first-generation students, and minimizing barriers to application. The series can be accessed [here](#).

DEIJ Resource Center

Available via eab.com, the DEIJ Resource Center brings together EAB's extensive library of best practice research, tools, and insights dedicated to helping college and university leaders cultivate diversity, foster inclusion, promote equity, and fight for justice for their students, faculty, staff, and communities. The Resource Center can be accessed [here](#).

Institutional Strategy Index for DEIJ

EAB's Institutional Strategy Index for DEIJ comprehensively and objectively evaluates the current state of your institution's DEIJ efforts against best practice. It creates a personalized, prioritized roadmap of investments and actions designed to help close your institution's most critical equity-related gaps. Additional information on the Strategy Index can be found [here](#).

Non-EAB Resources

The Playbook: Understanding the Role of Race-Neutral Strategies in Advancing Higher Education Diversity Goals

This joint publication from the College Board and Education Counsel offers a detailed and thorough but highly accessible examination of the legal issues associated with the recruitment of underrepresented students, along with a wealth of case studies and practical advice. The piece is available for download [here](#).

Opening Doors: How Selective Colleges and Universities Are Expanding Access for High-Achieving, Low-Income Students

This publication from the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation offers detailed and comprehensive advice on recruiting underrepresented students, from high-level strategy to granular tactics. Recommendations are illustrated with case studies throughout. The piece is available for download [here](#).

Toward a More Equitable Future for Postsecondary Access

This joint publication by NACAC and NASFAA offers a set of practical recommendations for enrolling more underrepresented students—Black students, especially—based on a framework that uses racial equity as the primary objective for college enrollment. Included are policy recommendations for state and federal lawmakers and strategies colleges themselves can adopt. The piece is available for download [here](#).

Five Ways EAB Can Help

1 Enrollment support

As explained elsewhere in this report, recruitment marketing has been shown to have a disproportionately large positive impact on enrollment outcomes specifically for underrepresented populations. EAB's **Enroll360** directly supports admission teams' enrollment and recruitment-marketing efforts through a combination of managed services, proprietary technologies, and highly customized expert advice.

Key program components

Audience generation

Ensures your recruitment efforts capture the full universe of desirable prospects—a particular challenge when it comes to underrepresented students, who can present differently from their peers in list sources, making them easy to miss. Benefits of working with EAB on audience generation include access to students on the **Cappex** and **Intersect** platforms.

Recruitment-marketing outreach

Comprehensive recruitment-marketing communication campaigns, comprising creative development, comm flow design and deployment, analysis, and reporting, are all part of the **Enroll360 Apply** solution.

CBO relationship development

EAB's **College Greenlight** maintains a comprehensive and easily searchable nationwide directory of CBOs that includes detailed profiles of each organization within it—a resource that greatly simplifies the task of finding potential partner organizations. Greenlight staff are also available to play “matchmaker” to enrollment leaders searching for CBO partners.

Virtual tours

YouVisit provides best-in-industry design, creation, implementation, and management of virtual campus tours—a crucial element of underrepresented-student recruitment, given barriers to in-person visits these populations so often face.

Virtual communities

Wisr offers the creation and management of dedicated, school-owned, social-network-like online communities where prospective students can interact with each other and members of your campus community, including faculty and currently enrolled students from underrepresented populations.

Financial aid optimization and yield analytics

Highly customized data science and consulting support through the **Enroll360 Aid** solution ensures that your aid spend has the largest possible impact on the goals that matter most to your institution (including recruitment of underrepresented students). EAB's related **Enroll360 Yield** offering provides advanced predictive yield modeling, incorporating admitted-student surveying.

2 Student success support

Recruiting more underrepresented students can mean enrolling more students who, due to their greater need for academic, financial, and social support, are at elevated risk of poor academic outcomes, including degree non-completion. EAB directly supports colleges' student success efforts through **Navigate**, a comprehensive Student Success Management System that includes:

- Communication and workflow tools that allow advisors and other staff to focus and scale student interventions, coordinate support, and manage student caseloads
- Integrated analytics and expert guidance to help teams understand which interventions are working and how to adjust their strategy
- Student-facing technology that provides automated guidance and academic-planning support

3 Research and insights

EAB's **Strategic Advisory Services** division has teams of researchers focused exclusively on analysis of the higher education industry—work undertaken with the aim of providing senior college and university leaders high-level strategic advice of unmatched rigor and insight, as well as hands-on implementation support. It also has teams whose sole charge is sourcing best practices developed by high-performing colleges nationwide, covering key functional areas within institutions of higher education, including academic affairs, the business office, student affairs, and enrollment. DEIJ is an ongoing focus of both teams' work.

4 Organizational-diversity research and consulting

Seramount is a division of EAB focused exclusively on providing diversity support to organizations in higher education and beyond. Services offered by Seramount include DEI assessment and benchmarking, strategy and program implementation, and staff education.

5 Data and analytics support

In addition to the important data/analytics components of the various offerings described on this and the previous page, EAB has a solution that helps college and university leaders unify, govern, and activate data across their campuses. **Edify** simplifies higher education data management by pairing powerful data warehousing technology with direct-to-user analytics tools. Such capabilities are critical in the context of underrepresented student enrollment, due to the many urgent, difficult, and data-intensive questions it raises regarding student preparedness, outcomes, and finances.

An Inventory of Best Practices

This report aims to give enrollment leaders high-level strategic guidance on diversity recruitment rather than providing a detailed and comprehensive guide to related best practice (which is beyond the scope of a report of this length). That said, a broad overview of the related best practice terrain is undoubtedly helpful to anyone interested in recruiting and serving more underrepresented students. For that reason, this and the following pages present a representative list of such practices, which we hope will, at a minimum, serve as an inspiration and starting point for related work at your institution.

Establish robust program leadership

- ✓ Create a dedicated staff position for oversight of underrepresented-student recruitment and post-enrollment success initiatives
- ✓ Secure specific commitments (financial and political) from your college president in support of your efforts

Promote college-going among underrepresented students

- ✓ Have undergraduates from your institution tutor underrepresented middle school and high school students
- ✓ Offer free on-campus summer programs to low-income and first-generation students
- ✓ Educate high school students and counselors on free testing and test-prep programs offered by ACT and College Board
- ✓ Partner with secondary schools on academic-development and college-coaching programs that span students' high school years
- ✓ Offer students who successfully complete college-prep programs that you sponsor guaranteed admission and financial support
- ✓ Give high school students an opportunity to attend classes taught by your faculty
- ✓ Host workshops on financial aid and affordability for high school counselors in underrepresented students' communities
- ✓ Educate guidance counselors at schools that serve underrepresented students on aspects of college-going unique to selective colleges
- ✓ Support local high schools' efforts to educate their students about college finances, including sources of aid and ways of securing it

Find more underrepresented students to recruit

- ✓ Use a comprehensive and complementary array of list sources when identifying students to recruit
- ✓ Develop relationships with a comprehensive and complementary set of community-based organizations (CBOs)
- ✓ Audit your name buys to ensure you are not excluding zip codes with high concentrations of underrepresented students
- ✓ Use school-level data on the demographic breakdown of students at high schools in your region to inform your outreach
- ✓ Use lower test-score cutoffs for low-income students (whose true abilities testing can understate)
- ✓ Make sure your name-buy parameters are not more restrictive than the criteria you're using when making admit decisions
- ✓ Initiate/expand transfer-recruitment relationships with two-year institutions
- ✓ Develop relationships with community college honor societies (e.g., Phi Theta Kappa)
- ✓ Create "2+2" dual-enrollment agreements with community colleges
- ✓ Remove barriers to reenrollment for adult students, including those who were formerly incarcerated

An Inventory of Best Practices (continued)

Engage parents of underrepresented students

- ✓ Schedule recruitment events during evenings to make it easier for parents with inflexible work schedules to attend
- ✓ Solicit parent contact information from students as part of your recruitment communications with them
- ✓ Use consumer databases and other data tools to proactively identify parents of prospective students (i.e., without having to rely on students)
- ✓ Develop recruitment-marketing communication streams purpose-built for parents of students from specific underrepresented populations
- ✓ Cover travel costs for parents of low-income and first-generation students visiting your campus

Boost inquiries and applications from underrepresented students

- ✓ Go/remain test-optional
- ✓ Reach out to underrepresented students with expertly designed and executed direct-marketing campaigns
- ✓ Review your application requirements and remove any that don't actually influence admit decisions
- ✓ Automatically waive application fees for low-income and first-generation students
- ✓ Proactively send qualified students offers of admission and financial aid without requiring them to apply
- ✓ Set explicit CBO-visit goals for your admission counselors
- ✓ Make sure that push channels (e.g., email) feature prominently in your recruitment-marketing outreach
- ✓ Cover travel costs for low-income and first-generation students visiting your campus
- ✓ Fund visits to your campus for guidance counselors from schools with high concentrations of underrepresented students
- ✓ Never mention the cost of attending your institution without also mentioning discounting and the availability of financial aid
- ✓ Preemptively offer underrepresented students detailed guidance on applying, including process checklists and text-message reminders
- ✓ Have your current undergraduates help high school seniors with college applications and FAFSA filings
- ✓ Ensure that your institution has a robust presence on social media (where many underrepresented students first encounter colleges)

Admit more underrepresented students

- ✓ Go/remain test-optional
- ✓ Use contextual information such as that found in the College Board's Landscape tool when assessing candidates
- ✓ Make sure your applicant-assessment rubric adjusts for adverse circumstances that may mask students' academic potential
- ✓ Train your application readers to make the kind of adjustments mentioned above
- ✓ Give applicants who are affiliated with CBOs and/or have demonstrated commitment to DEIJ extra points in your assessment rubric
- ✓ Incorporate noncognitive variables into your assessment of applicants
- ✓ Assess applicants relative to students of similar backgrounds
- ✓ Eliminate athletic preferences favoring sports that low-income students are less likely to participate in (e.g., water polo, lacrosse)

An Inventory of Best Practices (continued)

Yield more underrepresented students and minimize summer melt

- ✓ Use predictive analytics to focus your most intensive outreach on admitted students for whom it is most likely to make a difference
- ✓ Create online social spaces where members of your campus community can cultivate relationships with admitted students
- ✓ Invest in advanced financial aid optimization, which maximizes the impact of aid spend on diversity-related (and other) enrollment goals
- ✓ Offer summer bridge programs for low-income and first-generation students
- ✓ Create supplementary scholarships specifically for high-achieving low-income and first-generation students
- ✓ Engage incoming freshmen with summer outreach and early academic advising
- ✓ Send students matriculation-focused text-message reminders between high school graduation and the start of the fall semester
- ✓ Look to underrepresented-student affinity groups on your campus when recruiting student staffers for your admission team
- ✓ Ensure that your staff includes admission counselors from underrepresented backgrounds (see previous point)
- ✓ Provide hands-on FAFSA-filing assistance to underrepresented students
- ✓ Include numbered steps in the FAFSA-filing and other financial aid instructions you provide to students
- ✓ Audit your financial aid communications for understandability
- ✓ Offer to “translate” aid offers students receive from other institutions into a common template, to facilitate comparisons
- ✓ Pair any mentions your recruitment communications make of cost of attendance with compelling demonstrations of your value proposition
- ✓ Explicitly state in your financial aid communications that grant aid does not need to be repaid and that suggested loan amounts are optional
- ✓ Consider including in your financial aid award communications a page modeled on the federal “shopping sheet”

Use the right recruitment-marketing messages and channels

- ✓ Create dedicated content highlighting the ways in which your institution supports underrepresented students
- ✓ Share stories about positive experiences that particular students from underrepresented groups have had with your institution
- ✓ Hire underrepresented students to review your recruitment-marketing outreach
- ✓ Audit images and copy used on your school’s website for sensitivity to underrepresented-student perspectives
- ✓ Avoid language and imagery suggestive of affluence or exclusivity
- ✓ Highlight DEIJ-related aspects of your institution’s academic offerings (e.g., majors/minors, research institutes, funded initiatives)
- ✓ Share diversity-related stats on your institution (e.g., number of languages spoken on your campus)
- ✓ Involve Spanish-speaking financial aid counselors in conversations with families of Latinx students
- ✓ Recognize diversity as a feature of your campus that appeals to mainstream and underrepresented student populations alike
- ✓ Showcase non-White faculty members and senior administrative staff from your institution
- ✓ Acknowledge Native American lands used by your institution

An Inventory of Best Practices (continued)

Provide robust academic support to underrepresented students after they enroll

- ✓ Use student success technology to enable proactive academic advising and better match intensity of interventions with student need
- ✓ Create a coordinated care network that spans your offices of financial aid, career advising, support services, and counseling
- ✓ Use academic degree maps to establish clear pathways to timely completion of essential courses
- ✓ Offer credit-bearing meta-major courses that provide students with broad overviews of various programs of study
- ✓ Foster peer bonding and concentrate support services via underrepresented-student learning communities
- ✓ Offer review courses for course-placement exams
- ✓ Offer math remediation programs based on the Statway and Quantway models
- ✓ Offer underprepared students simultaneous enrollment in remedial and standard course sections (the so-called “corequisite” approach)
- ✓ Partner with employers to provide underrepresented students with experiential learning/internship opportunities
- ✓ Create summer- and winter-session programs that provide additional advising to underrepresented students
- ✓ Eliminate or revise unnecessary registration holds
- ✓ Offer course schedules and pathways to graduation that are flexible and responsive to the needs of working students

Provide robust financial support/relief to underrepresented students after they enroll

- ✓ Offer retention grants to in-need students
- ✓ Make confidential emergency grant funding available to low-income students
- ✓ Offer students the opportunity to earn credits at a discounted rate during summer sessions
- ✓ Reduce the expected “summer savings” contribution for low-income students
- ✓ Help low-income students pay for textbooks and course materials
- ✓ Provide low-income students funding for experiential learning, including study abroad and unpaid internship programs
- ✓ Award students college credit for life experiences that represent significant learning

Provide comprehensive personal and social support to underrepresented students after they enroll

- ✓ Have professors include basic-needs-support information in their syllabuses
- ✓ Train and fund peer-based student-benefits navigators to provide housing and nutrition advisory services to low-income students
- ✓ Create built-in support networks for underrepresented students via cohort recruitment (as in the Posse program)
- ✓ Pair underrepresented students with peer, alumni, faculty, and staff mentors from similar backgrounds
- ✓ Support underrepresented students via individual case-management services
- ✓ Provide college-coaching support modeled on approaches proven to increase retention and graduation rates (e.g., Inside Track)
- ✓ Ensure that underrepresented students have quick, easy, and reliable access to high-quality mental health counseling

Source: EAB research and analysis.

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ABOUT EAB

At EAB, our mission is to make education smarter and our communities stronger. We work with thousands of institutions to drive transformative change through data-driven insights and best-in-class capabilities. From kindergarten to college to career, EAB partners with leaders and practitioners to accelerate progress and drive results across five major areas: enrollment, student success, institutional strategy, data analytics, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). We work with each partner differently, tailoring our portfolio of research, technology, and marketing and enrollment solutions to meet the unique needs of every leadership team, as well as the students and employees they serve. Learn more at eab.com.