EAB

INSIGHT PAPER

Benchmarking the Enrollment Office

Findings from a National Survey of Admissions Teams

Enroll360

Project Director

Tom Cakuls

Survey Design, Implementation, and Analysis

Anne Dodson and Pamela Kiecker Royall, PhD

Table of Contents

Profile of Participating Institutions

182
institutions
participated

Survey was live between
8/20/2024
and
9/24/2024

By respondent **title**

- 17% Director[2]
- 83% VP[1]

	VP[1]
	Director[2]

By institution **selectivity**

- 2%
- 3%
- 20%
- 39%
- 36%

		Acceptance rate
	Most selective	<10%
	More selective	10-30%
	Selective	31%-60%
	Less selective	61%-80%
	Least selective	>80%

By institution **size**

- 10%
- 19%
- 28%
- 43%

		Undergrad enrollment
	Very small	<1,000
	Small	1,000-2,999
	Medium	3,000-9,999
	Large	10,000+

By institutional **control**

- 32%
- 68%

	Public
	Private

By **region**

- 6%
- 11%
- 30%
- 23%
- 30%

	Northeast
	Southeast
	Midwest
	Southwest
	West

1) Includes vice-provost, provost, dean, CXO, SVP, assistant VP, associate VP, and vice-chancellor titles within enrollment.
2) Includes executive-, senior-, associate-, and assistant-director titles within enrollment.

eab.com

Organizational structure

VPEM Position in Organization

Who VPEMs Report To[1]

By Institution Size

	President	Other	Provost	Chancellor
Very small	94%	0%	6%	0%
Small	88%	11%	2%	0%
Medium	58%	21%	18%	3%
Large	59%	6%	24%	12%

By Institution Control

	President	Other	Provost	Chancellor
Private	78%	13%	8%	1%
Public	70%	7%	15%	7%

VPEMs with a Cabinet Seat[2]

By Institution Size

Very small	Small	Medium	Large
100%	90%	76%	77%

1) The question asked was "To whom do you directly report?" Respondents were instructed to pick from the following list of prompts: president, VPEM, provost, EVP of strategy, chancellor, chief of staff, ED admissions, VCSA, and VPSS.
2) The question asked was "Is your position part of the president's/chancellor's cabinet?"

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Functions Overseen by VPEMs

Observations

Most VPEMs oversee four primary functions: admissions, financial aid, recruitment marketing, and enrollment analytics.

A sizable minority also oversee other functions, including ones related to non-enrollment marketing, "special" student populations (adult, international, etc.), and post-matriculation phases of the student lifecycle.

Percentages of Respondents Who Reported Overseeing Listed Functions[1]

Functions Reported by at Least 20% of Respondents

Function	Percentage
Admissions	99%
Financial aid	84%
Recruitment marketing	79%
Enrollment analytics	78%
Institutional marketing	26%
Precollege programs	24%
Registrar	20%
Residential life	20%
International students	20%
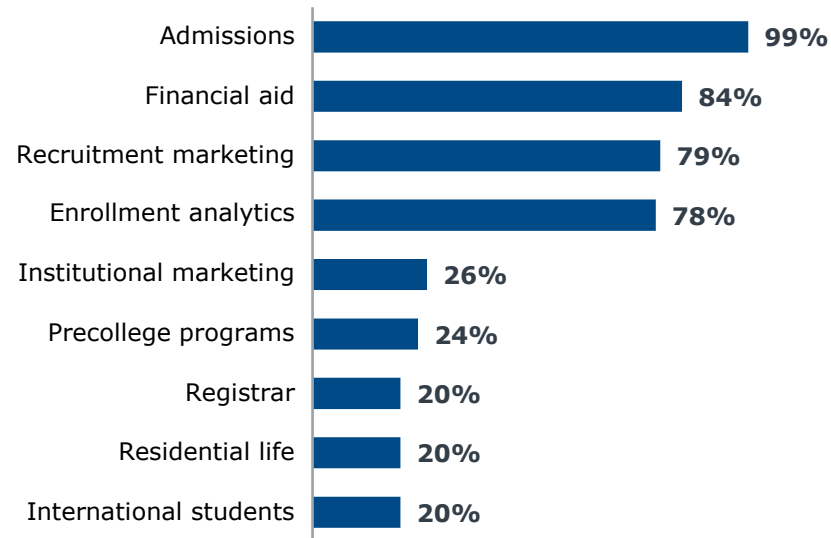
Functions Reported by Fewer than 20% of Respondents

New-student orientation	19%	Adult student services	12%	Institutional research	3%
Bursar	15%	First-year experience	7%	New-program development	2%
Student success	12%	Career services	3%		

1) The prompt on the survey was "For each of the following offices/functions, please indicate if it (1) reports to you, (2) reports to another division, but you receive support from it, or (3) you have little to no involvement with it. Please select N/A if it is not applicable to your institution."

Source: EAB research and analysis.

eab.com

VPEM Purview, by Type of Oversight and Student Population

Recruitment[1]

By School Size

	Very small	Small	Medium	Large
Traditional undergrads	100%	100%	97%	100%
Transfer students	100%	98%	97%	100%
International students	100%	94%	84%	82%
Online learners	43%	40%	66%	41%
Grad/Professional students	71%	62%	63%	41%
Adult learners	71%	48%	63%	47%
Non-degree students	64%	50%	50%	53%

Admit Decision[1]

By School Size

	Very small	Small	Medium	Large
Traditional undergrads	100%	100%	100%	94%
Transfer students	100%	98%	100%	94%
International students	100%	93%	94%	76%
Adult learners	69%	46%	52%	53%
Non-degree students	56%	52%	52%	59%
Online learners	38%	39%	48%	53%
Grad/Professional Students	63%	52%	35%	24%

1) The prompt on the survey was "For each of the following student populations, select area(s) of your responsibility: recruitment/marketing and/or admissions decisions."

Source: EAB research and analysis.

eab.com

EAB

Budget and staffing

2

9

eab.com

Total Enrollment Budget

Observations

Total enrollment-office budgets range from just short of two million dollars at the smallest of schools to more than eight million dollars at the largest.

Budgets vary considerably across selectivity segments within size groupings, with budgets for less selective schools tending to be higher. This is certainly the case for small and medium–sized private colleges and universities. (The sample size was insufficient to support the same analysis for large institutions.)

While we can't say for sure why less selective schools have larger budgets, it is likely a reflection of them having to work harder—and spend more—to attract students, due to their lower prestige.

It is probable that increasing cross-segment competition will push more-selective schools to boost their investment in recruitment moving forward (see page 27).

Total Enrollment Budget, Millions[1]

By Institution Size

	Budget
Very small	$1.90
Small	$3.56
Medium	$4.08
Large	$8.27

For Selected Institutional Subsegments

Small schools: More selective $2.01, Less selective $3.56 — **77% higher**

Medium schools: More selective $5.09, Less selective $6.66 — **31% higher**

■ More selective[2]
■ Less selective[3]
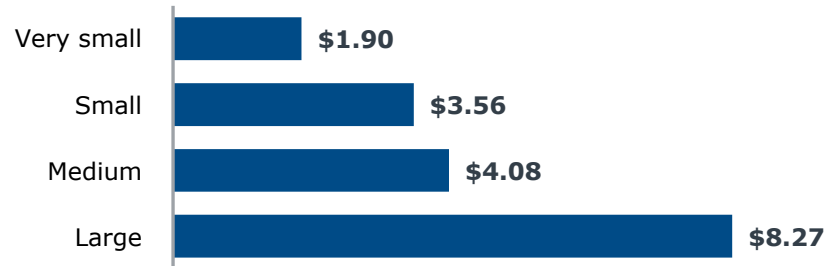
Private colleges and universities
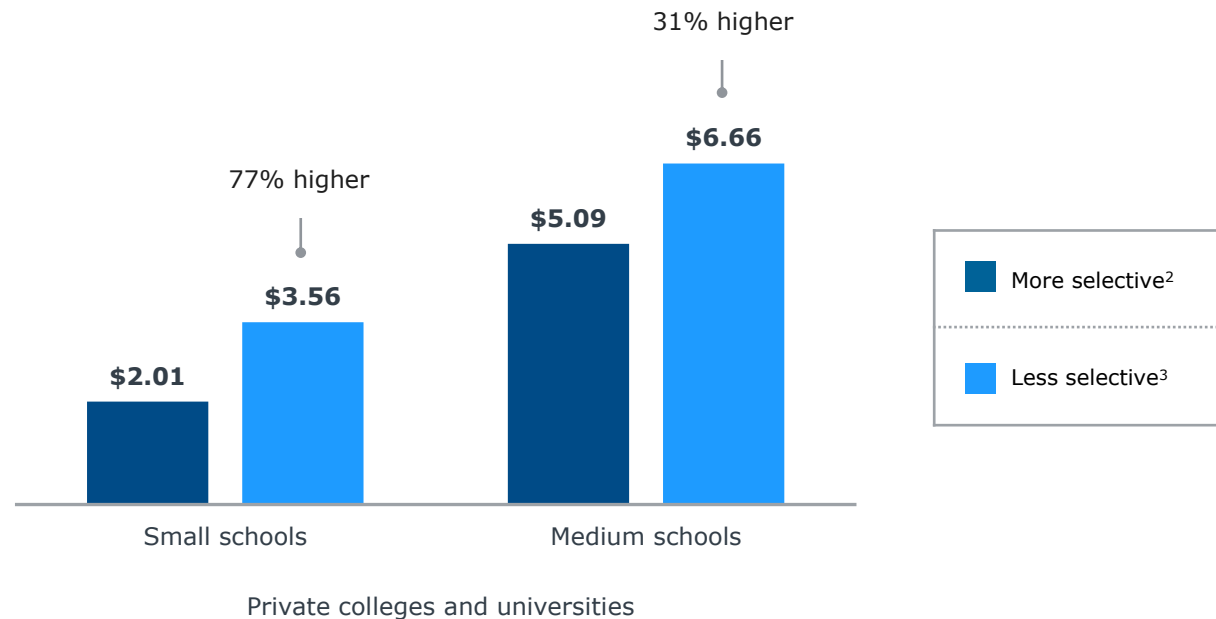
1) The question asked on the survey was "What was your total enrollment management budget for the 2023-2024 academic year? Include all enrollment-related functions you oversee."
2) Includes "selective," "more selective," and "most selective" schools.
3) Includes "less selective" and "least selective" schools.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

eab.com

Total Enrollment Staffing

Observations

Total enrollment-staff size increases more or less linearly with institution size.

Staff sizes tend to be similar across institutions of different selectivity within any given size and control segment, e.g., for more- and less-selective small, private institutions.

Staff sizes do vary across control segments, however—less-selective, medium-sized private institutions, for example, tend to have higher staffing levels than their public counterparts. This is likely a reflection of differences in their approaches to student recruitment, with public institutions less often performing the kind of active, personalized recruitment-marketing outreach commonly seen at private institutions.

Total Enrollment-Related Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs)[1]

By Institution Size, Control, and Selectivity (Selected Subsegments)

Size	Control	Selectivity	Total FTEs
Small[3]	Private	+	25
		−	27
	Public	+	NA[2]
		−	NA[2]
Medium	Private	+	63
		−	60
	Public	+	NA[2]
		−	50
Large	Private	+	NA[2]
		−	NA[2]
	public	+	85
		−	84

+	More selective[4]	−	Less selective[5]

---

1) The corresponding question on the survey was "How many FTEs do you have in your entire enrollment division?"
2) The number of responses for this subsegment was not sufficiently large to generate a robust statistic for this question.
3) Includes "small" and "very small" schools.
4) Includes "selective," "more selective," and "most selective" schools.
5) Includes "less selective" and "least selective" schools.

11

Source: EAB research and analysis.

eab.com

Staffing Ratios

Observations

Staffing ratios, as measured by the number of students processed per admissions FTE, vary enormously by school segment. For example, the number of students admitted per FTE at large, less-selective public institutions is 2.7 times the number at small, more-selective, private institutions.

The number of inferences we can draw regarding segment-based trends is limited by the available data, but some generalizations are possible.

For example, public institutions process far more students per FTE than their private counterparts do.

Among private institutions, more-selective small schools process a lot fewer students per staffer than their medium-sized counterparts do. Conversely less-selective small institutions process more students per FTE than their medium-sized peers do.

Applications, Admits, and Deposits per Admissions FTE[1]

By Institution Size, Control, and Selectivity (Selected Subsegments)

Size	Control	Selectivity	Applications	Admits	Deposits
Small[3]	Private	+	455	188	32
		−	339	245	40
	Public	+	NA[2]	NA[2]	NA[2]
		−	NA[2]	NA[2]	NA[2]
Medium	Private	+	672	342	59
		−	258	221	35
	Public	+	NA[2]	NA[2]	NA[2]
		−	486	372	89
Large	Private	+	NA[2]	NA[2]	NA[2]
		−	NA[2]	NA[2]	NA[2]
	public	+	NA[2]	NA[2]	NA[2]
		−	611	506	113

+	More selective[3]	−	Less selective[4]

1) Excludes financial-aid FTEs.
2) The number of responses for this subsegment was not sufficiently large to generate a robust statistic for this question.
3) Includes both "small" and "very small" schools.
4) Includes "selective," "more selective," and "most selective" schools.
5) Includes "less selective" and "least selective" schools.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

eab.com

Staffing Levels for Key Enrollment Functions

Observations

While the total number of FTEs for specific enrollment functions scales in a more or less linear way based on institution size, very small institutions are an exception: they do not have meaningfully fewer FTEs than their small counterparts (except for the admissions function).

Another exception is cross-functional FTEs, whose number increases less with institution size than does the number of FTEs for the other functional areas—possibly a reflection of larger institutions' greater ability to create dedicated positions for work that is, by necessity, handled by cross-functional staff at smaller institutions.

Also worth noting is the fact that proportionally more FTEs are devoted to non-admissions functions (e.g., financial aid) at small institutions relative to their larger counterparts. This is likely an illustration of one of the disadvantages of small scale—the need to staff critical functions even if the associated workload might not require a full FTE's worth of capacity.

FTEs, by Enrollment Function[1]

By Institution Size
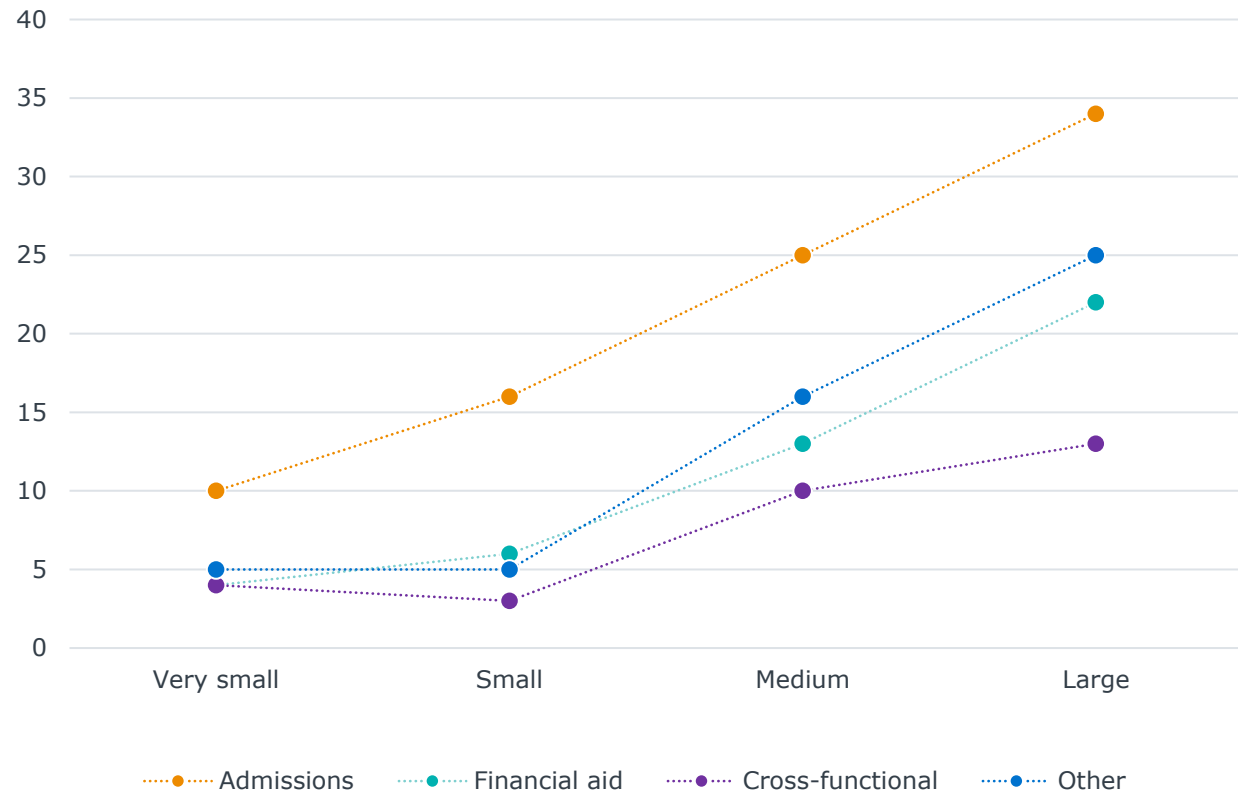
"Other" includes advising, technology, CRM, academic records, communications, admin support, international student recruitment, marketing/communications, registrar, and student affairs.

1) The question on the survey was "How many FTEs are associated with each of the following areas: admissions, financial aid, cross-functional, other (specify)?"

Staffing Levels for Particular Admissions Functions

Observations

Both the number and proportion of admissions staff devoted to particular functions vary with institution size. For example, the share of staff devoted to operations and regional recruitment increases with institution size. Conversely, large institutions devote proportionally fewer FTEs to general management, CRM management, and analytics, a possible indication that these functions scale more readily.

How the functions rank is identical across the size segments, with the notable exception of marketing and communications, to which medium and large institutions give fewer FTEs than they assign to regional recruitment. This last observation likely reflects larger institutions' greater regional reach, the more robust marketing support available to them from their centralized institutional marketing divisions, and their greater name recognition and appeal (and correspondingly reduced need for promotion).

Admissions FTEs, by Function[1]

By Institution Size

	Very small		Small		Medium		Large	
	Total FTEs	% of total FTEs	Total FTEs	% of total FTEs	Total FTEs	% of total FTEs	Total FTEs	% of total FTEs
Campus-based recruiters	5.4	37%	8.0	35%	10.9	35%	10.9	30%
Operations	1.9	13%	3.2	14%	5.2	17%	7.5	21%
Management	1.9	13%	3.1	13%	3.9	12%	3.9	11%
Marketing and communications	1.8	12%	2.2	10%	2.7	9%	3.2	9%
Regional recruiters	1.2	8%	2.2	10%	3.3	11%	5.0	14%
CRM specialists	1.1	8%	1.6	7%	2.1	7%	2.0	5%
Event planning	0.8	5%	1.5	7%	2.2	7%	2.7	7%
Analytics	0.5	3%	1.2	5%	1.1	4%	1.2	3%

1) The question on the survey was "Within admissions, how many FTEs are associated with each of the following areas: campus-based recruiters, operations, management, marketing and communications, regional recruiters, CRM specialists, event planning, analytics?"

Source: EAB research and analysis.

eab.com

Staffing Levels for Particular Financial Aid Functions

Observations

As with admissions (see the preceding page), the various functions within financial aid scale differently.

While large institutions have 2.1 times more student-facing counselors than their small counterparts do, they have only 1.4 times more analytics staff. This may reflect differing scalability of the functions themselves or differences in how the related work is organized; for example, analytics work at larger institutions could be performed more often by dedicated individuals in divisions outside of the aid office, such as admissions or institutional research.

The trend for communications and marketing within financial aid is a more pronounced version of the trend for this function within admissions; financial aid offices at larger schools have fewer FTEs allocated to that function relative to their smaller peers.

Financial Aid FTEs, by Function[1]

By Institution Size

	Very small		Small		Medium		Large	
	Total FTEs	% of total FTEs	Total FTEs	% of total FTEs	Total FTEs	% of total FTEs	Total FTEs	% of total FTEs
Student-facing counselors	2.5	34%	4.3	38%	6.9	43%	9.0	37%
Operations and administrative	1.5	21%	1.7	15%	3.5	22%	7.6	31%
Communications and marketing	1.0	14%	0.9	8%	0.6	4%	0.6	2%
Compliance and policy	0.8	11%	1.2	11%	1.8	11%	1.9	8%
Financial education	0.6	8%	1.7	15%	0.9	6%	2.3	9%
Analytics	0.5	7%	0.8	7%	1.2	7%	1.1	4%
Tech specialists	0.4	5%	0.7	6%	1.2	7%	2.1	9%

1) The question on the survey was "Within financial aid, how many FTEs are associated with each of the following areas: student-facing counselors, operations and administrative, communications and marketing, compliance and policy, financial education, analytics, tech specialists?"

Source: EAB research and analysis.

eab.com

Staff Pay Ranges: Admissions

Observations

Top salaries are uniformly higher at larger institutions, at all levels in the staff hierarchy, with the difference being more pronounced the more senior the position. For example, average maximum pay for entry-level staff at large institutions is 15% higher than the rate at very small institutions; the analogous premium for VP-level positions is 40%.

Average minimum pay shows less consistent variation, especially for more junior positions; for entry-level and director staff it is comparable across institutions of all sizes.

Average Maximum and Minimum Salaries (Thousands)[1]

By Level in Staff Hierarchy and Institution Size

VP[2]
- Max
- Min

Director[3]
- Max
- Min

Entry level
- Max
- Min

VP Max: Very small $146, Small $176, Medium $198, Large $205
VP Min: Very small $120, Small $128, Medium $132, Large $146
Director Max: Very small $82, Small $88, Medium $99, Large $119
Director Min: Very small $64, Small $65, Medium $65, Large $69
Entry level Max: Very small $47, Small $49, Medium $50, Large $54
Entry level Min: Very small $44, Small $43, Medium $45, Large $44

Very small | Small | Medium | Large

Staff Pay Ranges: Financial Aid

Observations

Pay-rate trends for financial aid staff resemble those for admissions staff (see preceding page), although financial aid staff generally speaking earn slightly less.
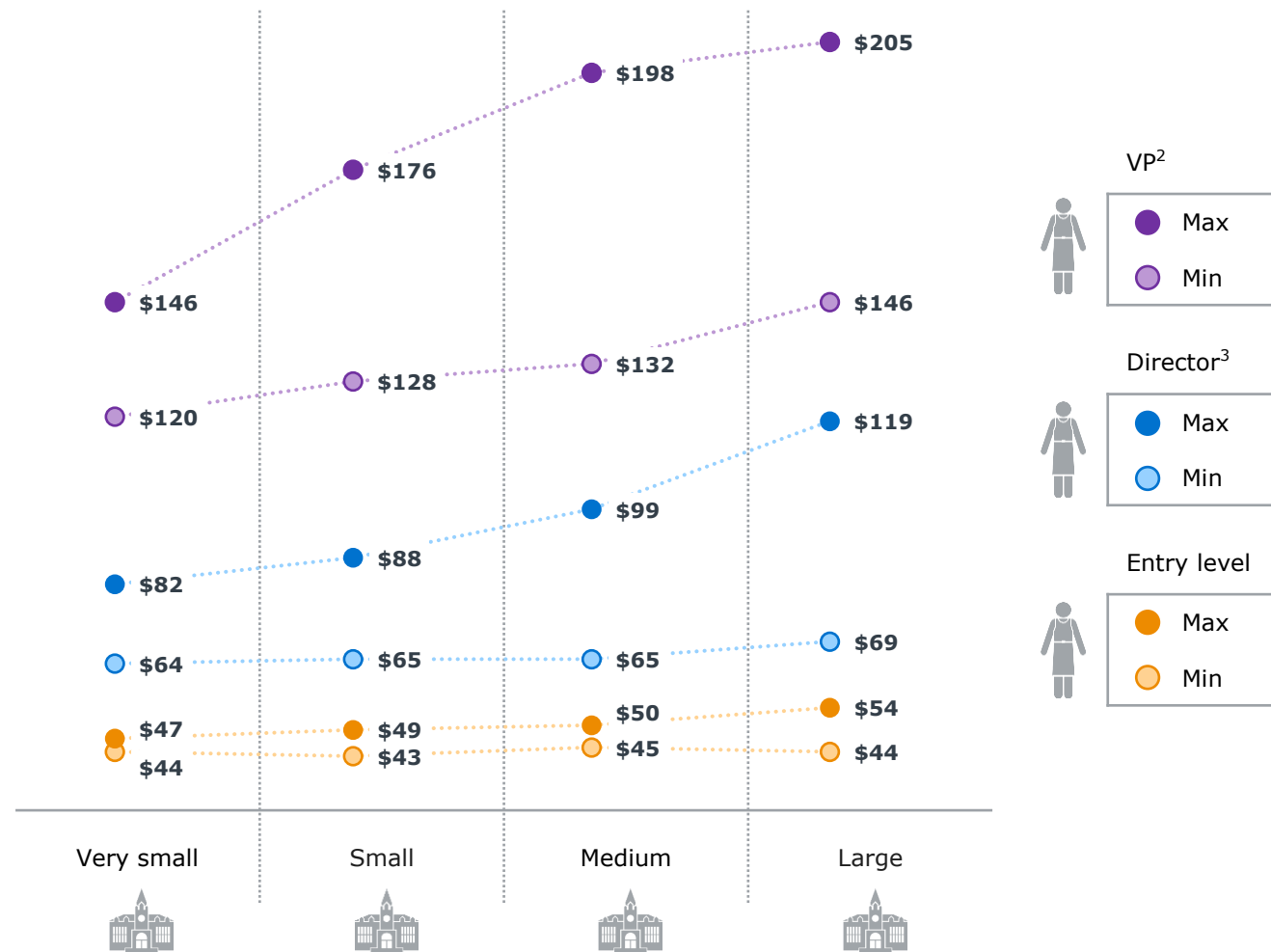
Top salaries are uniformly higher at larger institutions, at all levels in the staff hierarchy, with the difference being more pronounced the more senior the position.

Average minimum pay shows less consistent variation, especially for more junior positions. For entry-level and director roles it is comparable across institutions of all sizes. Furthermore, the base pay rate for these positions does not necessarily increase with institution size and, in fact, decreases in some cases (see the trend for directors).

Average Maximum and Minimum Salaries (Thousands)[1]

By Level in Staff Hierarchy and Institution Size

VP[2]
- Max
- Min

Director[3]
- Max
- Min

Entry level
- Max
- Min

Very small | Small | Medium | Large

VP Max: $147 (Very small), $159 (Small), $187 (Medium), $202 (Large)
VP Min: $110 (Very small), $117 (Small), $125 (Medium), $150 (Large)
Director Max: $87 (Very small), $90 (Small), $90 (Medium), $116 (Large)
Director Min: $69 (Very small), $67 (Small), $63 (Medium), $69 (Large)
Entry level Max: $47 (Very small), $48 (Small), $46 (Medium), $54 (Large)
Entry level Min: $41 (Very small), $42 (Small), $41 (Medium), $43 (Large)
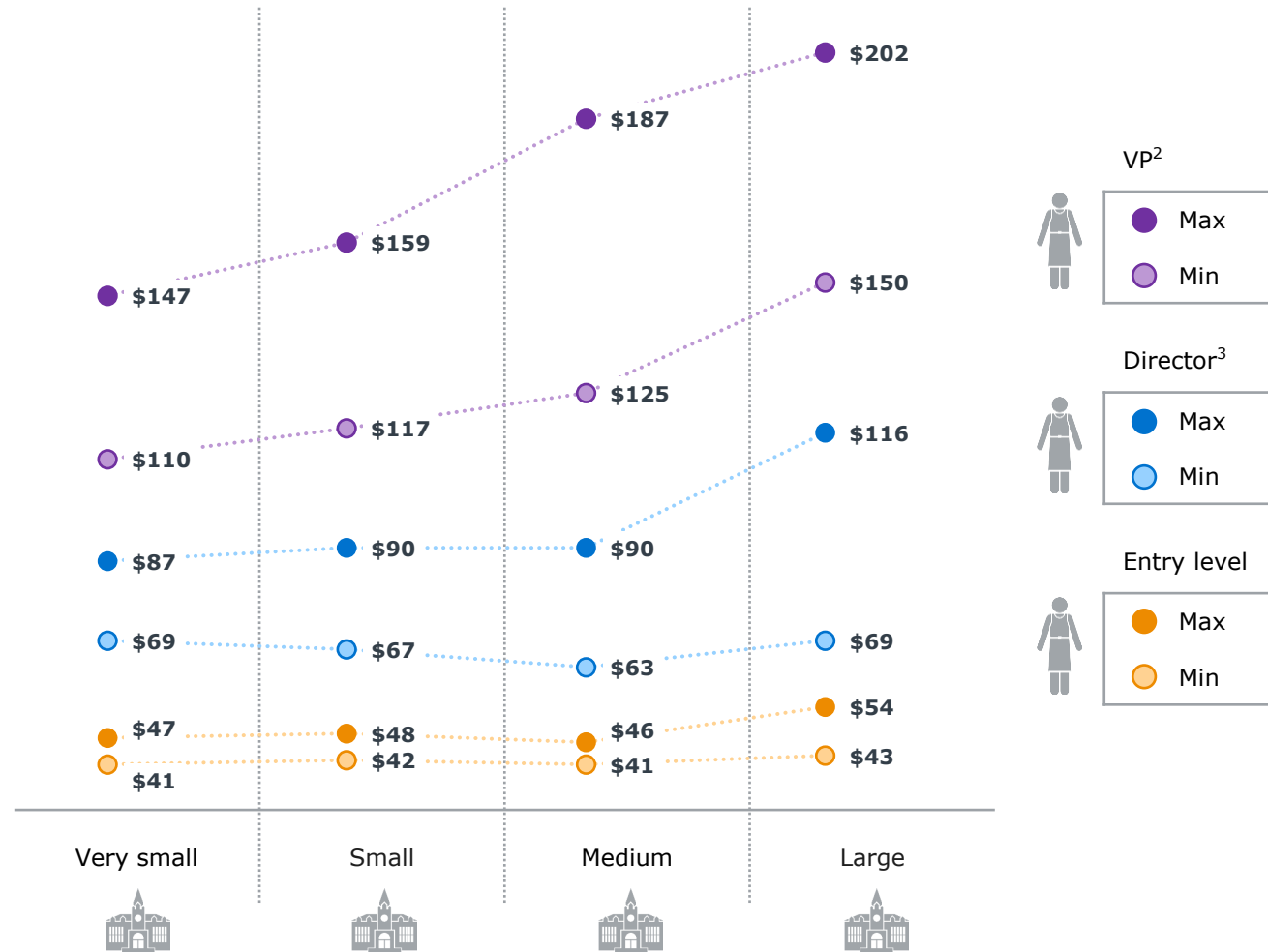
1) The question on the survey was "Indicate the salary ranges for each of the following positions (or its equivalent) at your institution."
2) Includes vice-provost, provost, dean, CXO, SVP, assistant VP, associate VP, and vice-chancellor titles within enrollment.
3) Includes executive-, senior-, associate-, and assistant-director titles within enrollment.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

eab.com

Admissions Staff Pay, by Institution Size and Selectivity

Observations

Among small and medium-sized private institutions, pay rates are uniformly higher at more-selective schools versus their less-selective counterparts. (There was not a sufficient number of responses for schools within other subsegments to support meaningful conclusions for them.) This is true of both admissions and financial aid staff, and the trend is especially pronounced at medium-sized institutions.

The only exception to the rule is the average for director-level staff, which is higher at less selective schools.

The selective-institution pay premium is highest for VPs at medium-sized institutions, though large discrepancies also exist for director-level titles within this segment.

By Level in Staff Hierarchy, Private Institutions[1]

		Small institutions			*Medium-sized institutions*		
		More selective[2]	Less selective[3]	Selectivity premium[4]	More selective[2]	Less selective[3]	Selectivity premium[4]
Admissions							
Entry-level	Min	$47K	$43K	+9%	$50K	$42K	+19%
	Max	$58K	$47K	+24%	$54K	$49K	+10%
Director	Min	$64K	$65K	-2%	$62K	$65K	-5%
	Max	$96K	$85K	+14%	$113K	$84K	+34%
VP	Min	$131K	$126K	+3%	$165K	$128K	+29%
	Max	$173K	$168K	+3%	$263K	$204K	+29%
Financial aid							
Entry-level	Min	$43K	$42K	+4%	$46K	$39K	+16%
	Max	$51K	$47K	+8%	$50K	$47K	+6%
Director	Min	$63K	$69K	-8%	$58K	$66K	-12%
	Max	$92K	$89K	+3%	$109K	$83K	+32%
VP	Min	$132K	$116K	+13%	$156K	$105K	+49%
	Max	$168K	$160K	+5%	$277K	$160K	+73%

Source: EAB research and analysis.

eab.com

Staff Recruitment and Retention

Survey respondents rated staff recruitment and retention between "somewhat difficult" and "not difficult or easy" for most levels in the staff hierarchy, a fact that holds true for both admissions and financial aid teams.

Both divisions reported greater difficulty recruiting staff than retaining them, at all levels of the staff hierarchy (with admissions teams' entry-level positions being an exception).

Financial aid teams are finding it harder to recruit and retain personnel than admissions teams are, at most levels in the staff hierarchy.

Ease of Recruitment and Retention, by Level in Staff Hierarchy[1]

Admissions

Level	Recruitment	Retention
Entry-level	2.8	2.4
Director	2.4	3.1
VP	2.2	3.0

1 — Extremely difficult
2 — Somewhat difficult
3 — Not difficult or easy
4 — Somewhat easy
5 — Extremely easy

Financial Aid

Level	Recruitment	Retention
Entry-level	2.1	2.4
Director	2.0	2.6
VP	2.2	2.7

1 — Extremely difficult
2 — Somewhat difficult
3 — Not difficult or easy
4 — Somewhat easy
5 — Extremely easy
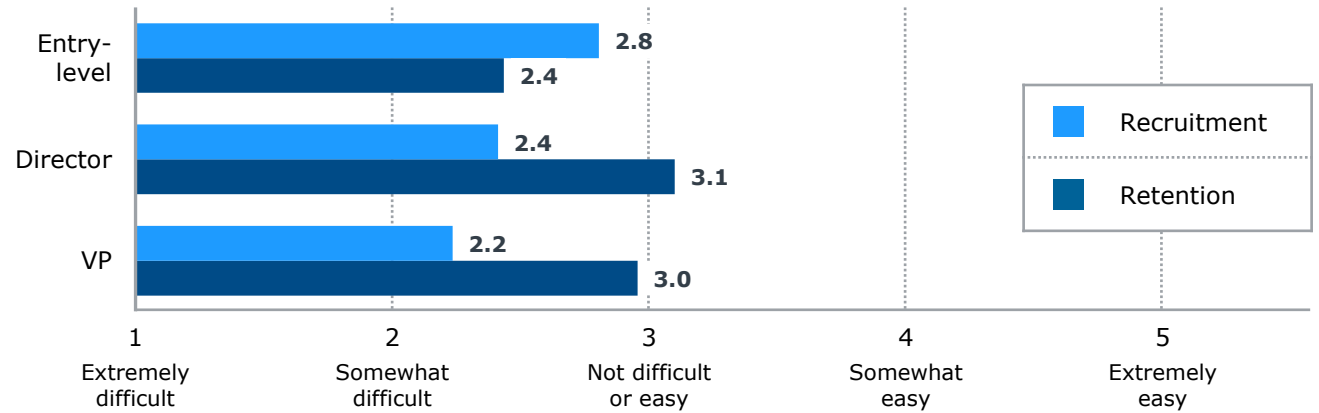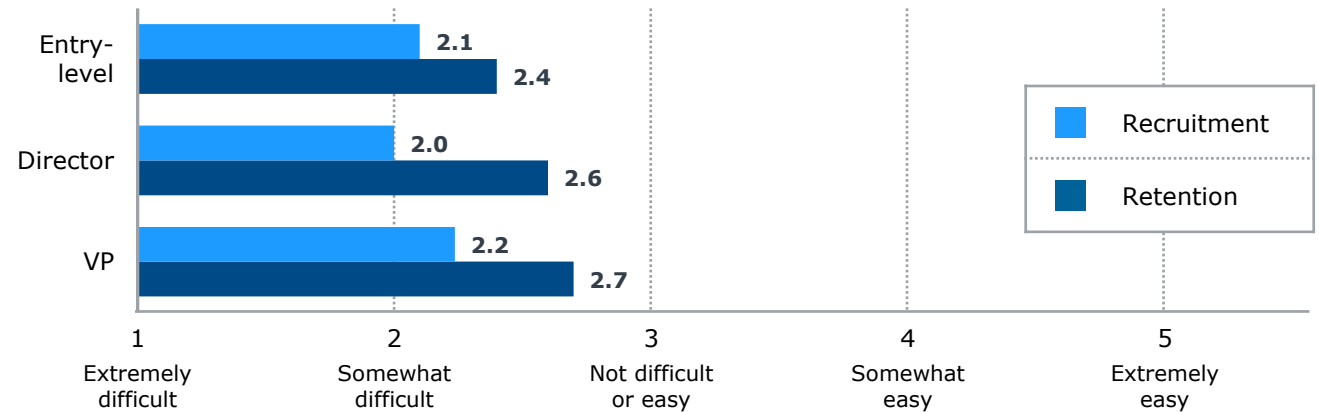
1) The question asked in the survey was "Indicate the relative ease/difficulty of recruiting and retaining staff for each of the following positions."

Source: EAB research and analysis.

eab.com

Enrollment-Leader Tenure

Observations

Enrollment-leader tenure increases with institution selectivity. This is true both of tenure at their institution and in their particular role.

This may be because more-selective institutions are better able to retain their staff (which could, in turn, be due to their higher pay rates—see page 18[3].)

Alternately, enrollment leaders at less selective institutions may more often miss their enrollment targets, due to their schools' lower prestige and the correspondingly greater challenge they face in attracting students—a situation that might cause institutional leadership to more frequently bring in new enrollment-management talent.

Enrollment-Leader Years at Institution and in Position[1]

By Institution Selectivity

Time at institution
- More selective[2]: 13.1
- Less selective: 9.5
- Least selective: 8.6

Time in position
- More selective[2]: 6.1
- Less selective: 5.4
- Least selective: 3.2
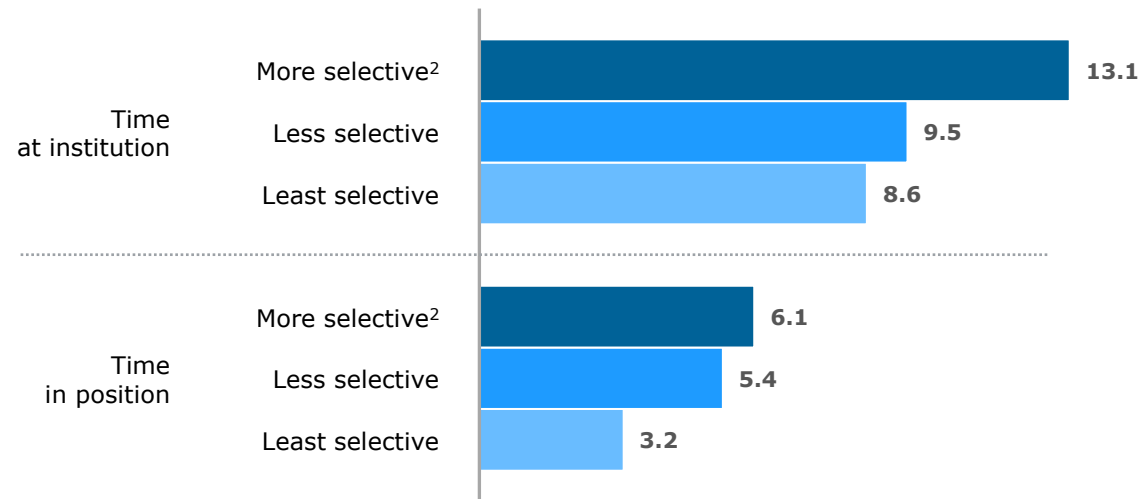
1) "Enrollment leaders" in this instance means VP, AVP, and director-level titles. The questions asked in the survey were "How long have you been at your current institution?" and "How long have you been in your current position?"
2) Also includes "selective" and "most selective" schools.
3) The survey showed that pay rates at more-selective small and medium-sized private institutions are higher than pay rates at their less-selective counterparts. The number of responses for other subsegments was not large enough to support meaningful conclusions regarding pay differences.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

eab.com

EAB

Enrollment objectives

3

Enrollment Leaders' Objectives

Observations

Unsurprisingly, enrollment leaders reported that enrolling more first-year students is their top priority.

Note that this objective manifests in different ways. One example is found in their aim to grow net tuition revenue. We may infer from the relatively low proportion of institutions aiming to lower their discount rate that most expect their desired revenue increases to come from enrollment growth.

Similarly, their desire to enroll more transfer and international students likely reflects a prioritization of "new" sources of enrollment to shore up their headcount, as opposed to, say, an intention to diversify their classes for the sake of diversity. As may be seen from the table at the bottom of the page, few institutions are prioritizing objectives related to altering their student mix.

Five Most Frequently Reported Priorities[1]

Priority	%
More new first-year students	82%
Higher net tuition revenue	67%
More transfer students	55%
Lower discount rate	31%
More international students	13%
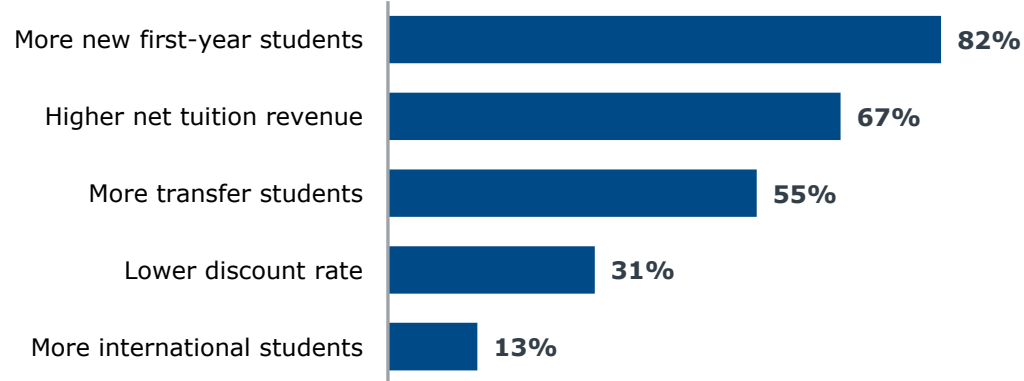
Not Among the Five Most Frequently Reported Priorities

More ethnic and racial diversity	12%	Higher test scores	3%
Boosting academic programs	9%	Better gender balance	3%
More in-state students	7%	More-diverse international students	3%
More out-of-state students	6%	More full-pay students	3%

1) The corresponding prompt in the survey was "Considering the list of enrollment objectives and goals below, select up to three that were top priorities for your 2024 entering class."

eab.com

Enrollment Leaders' Objectives, by Institution Selectivity

Observations

Differences in enrollment objectives are most pronounced across institutions of varying selectivity.

As indicated at right, selective schools are less likely to prioritize growing their freshman class and are more interested in enrolling greater numbers of international students, increasing diversity, and boosting particular academic programs.

Top Priorities[1]

Areas of Significant Difference

	More selective[2]	Less selective	Least selective
More new first-year students	52%	87%	98%
More international students	31%	8%	8%
More ethnic and racial diversity	28%	10%	5%
Boosting enrollment for particular programs	21%	8%	3%

1) The corresponding prompt in the survey was "Considering the list of enrollment objectives and goals below, select up to three that were top priorities for your 2024 Entering Class."
2) Also includes "selective" and "most selective" schools.

eab.com

Changes to Headcount Goals

The majority of schools in all size segments increased their headcount goal for Entering Class 2024.

Apart from that, there is no obvious pattern to the changes that admissions teams made to their headcount goals.

This likely reflects the varied circumstances of the responding institutions. Some might, for example, have set a higher goal to make up for a shortfall in the preceding cycle. Others might have lowered their goal so as to better pursue competing enrollment aims, such as reducing their discount rate or shifting their class mix.

Changes to Headcount Goals[1]

Entering Class 2024 versus 2023, by Institution Size

	Very small	Small	Medium	Large
Significant increase (>3%)	57%	47%	35%	21%
Slight increase (0 to 3%)	7%	19%	26%	37%
No change	0%	13%	9%	16%
Slight decrease (0 to 3%)	7%	15%	12%	16%
Significant decrease (>3%)	29%	6%	18%	11%

1) The question asked in the survey was "How did the enrollment headcount goal for your 2024 entering class differ from the headcount goal for your 2023 entering class?"

Source: EAB research and analysis.

eab.com

Enrollment Leaders' Goal Attainment

Observations

Well over half of enrollment leaders reported hitting their headcount goal for Entering Class 2024, and an even larger percentage said they achieved their net tuition revenue target.

Note that goal attainment reflects both goal-setting practices and actual performance; an institution could appear to be underperforming if it set its goal too high, even if it had a good year, and vice versa. For this reason, it is an imperfect measure of success.

That said, assuming that the rate of goal attainment does shed at least some light on schools' actual enrollment outcomes, admissions teams' performance for Entering Class 2024 presents a mixed picture; while many hit their goals, a third or more did not.

Percentages of Respondents Who Met Their Enrollment Goals[1]

Entering Class 2024

Headcount Goals

Yes **57%** **43%** No

Net Tuition Revenue Goals

Yes **67%** **33%** No
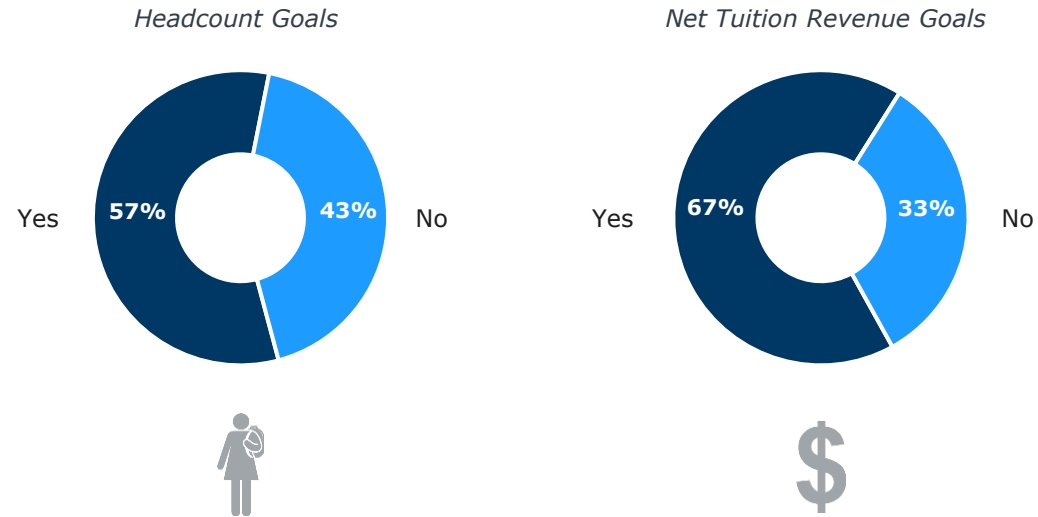
1) The question asked in the survey was "Did you achieve your enrollment headcount and net tuition revenue goals for your 2024 entering class?" The numbers exclude respondents who answered "unsure" (5% of total respondents for headcount, 17% of total for NTR). Most of the "unsure" responses were presumably due to the timing of the survey, i.e., some teams were probably waiting on final census numbers before judging their performance against goal.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

eab.com

Reasons for Missed Goals

Observations

The main reason enrollment leaders gave for missing their goals—and this applies to both headcount and net tuition revenue goals—was other schools offering more aid.

Other common causes of missed goals were variations on the theme of increased competition. Examples include other institutions increasing the scope of their recruitment beyond populations they have historically focused on and more students choosing to enroll at community colleges rather than four-year institutions.

Another major factor reported by survey respondents was fewer students pursuing college. This ranked among the top three reasons for both missed headcount and net tuition revenue goals.

Top Five Reasons Enrollment Leaders Gave for Missing Goals[1]

Headcount Goals
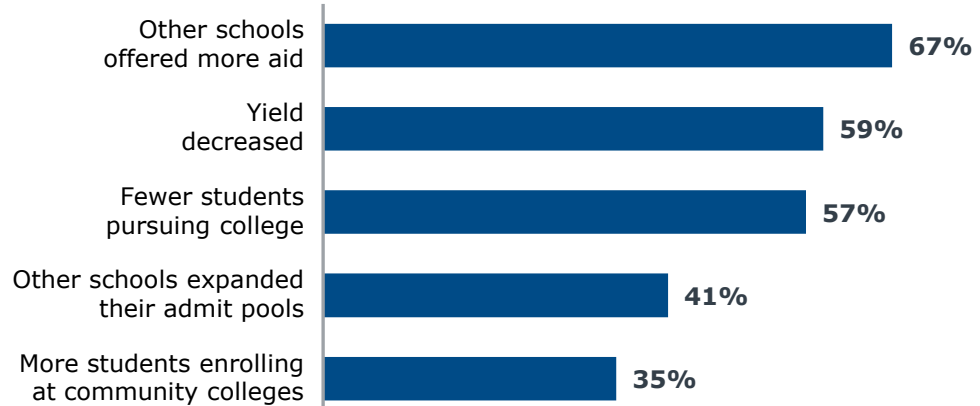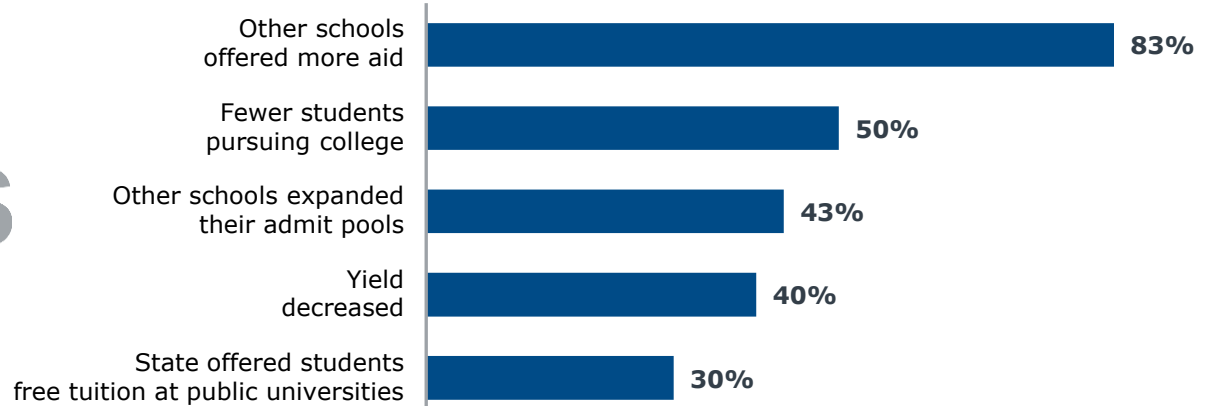
Reason	%
Other schools offered more aid	67%
Yield decreased	59%
Fewer students pursuing college	57%
Other schools expanded their admit pools	41%
More students enrolling at community colleges	35%

Net Tuition Revenue Goals

Reason	%
Other schools offered more aid	83%
Fewer students pursuing college	50%
Other schools expanded their admit pools	43%
Yield decreased	40%
State offered students free tuition at public universities	30%

1) The question asked in the survey was "What factors contributed to your missing headcount and/or net tuition revenue (NTR) goals?"

eab.com

Reasons for Missed Goals, by School Selectivity

Observations

The first two reasons for missed enrollment goals listed in the headcount table at right—other schools offering more aid and other schools expanding their admit pools—were reported least often by schools in the "less selective" category. One interpretation of this finding is that these institutions have been using aggressive aid awarding to win market share (or defend existing share) from both more- and least-selective schools.

Admissions teams at more-selective schools were likelier to report a reduction in applicants as a reason for missing their goals than were their counterparts at less-selective institutions. This is consistent with other EAB research[3] showing that recent drops in the rate of college-going have been especially large among affluent students (who constitute a greater share of enrollment at more-selective schools).

Areas of Greatest Difference[1]

Headcount Goals: % of Respondents Reporting Reason

	More selective[2]	Less selective	Least selective
Other schools offered more aid	82%	45%	88%
Other schools expanded their admit pools	82%	23%	38%
Fewer students applied	73%	27%	13%

Net Tuition Revenue Goals: % of Respondents Reporting Reason

	More selective[2]	Less selective	Least selective
More students enrolling at community colleges	13%	67%	15%
Other schools expanded their admit pools	88%	22%	31%
Fewer students applied	75%	11%	15%

1) The question asked in the survey was "What factors contributed to your missing headcount and/or net tuition revenue (NTR) goals?"
2) Also includes "selective" and "most selective" schools.
3) See the EAB report titled "The Great Opt-Out: Why More Students Are Forgoing College and What Enrollment Leaders Can Do About It."

Source: EAB research and analysis.

This page intentionally left blank

EAB

Recruitment practices

29

Core Funnel Metrics

More-selective schools see much higher application volumes than do their less selective counterparts—a trend observed for both small and medium-sized schools. (The sample size was not big enough to support the same analysis for large schools.) This is surely a reflection of more-selective schools' greater prestige and their correspondingly greater ability to attract students.

There is a smaller gap in the number of students that more- and less-selective schools admit—a function of their lower and higher admit rates, respectively.

The gap widens again for deposits, which presumably reflects the advantage that more-selective schools' prestige gives them in yielding admitted students.

Core Funnel Metrics[1]

For Selected Institutional Subsegments

Applications — **Admits** — **Deposits**
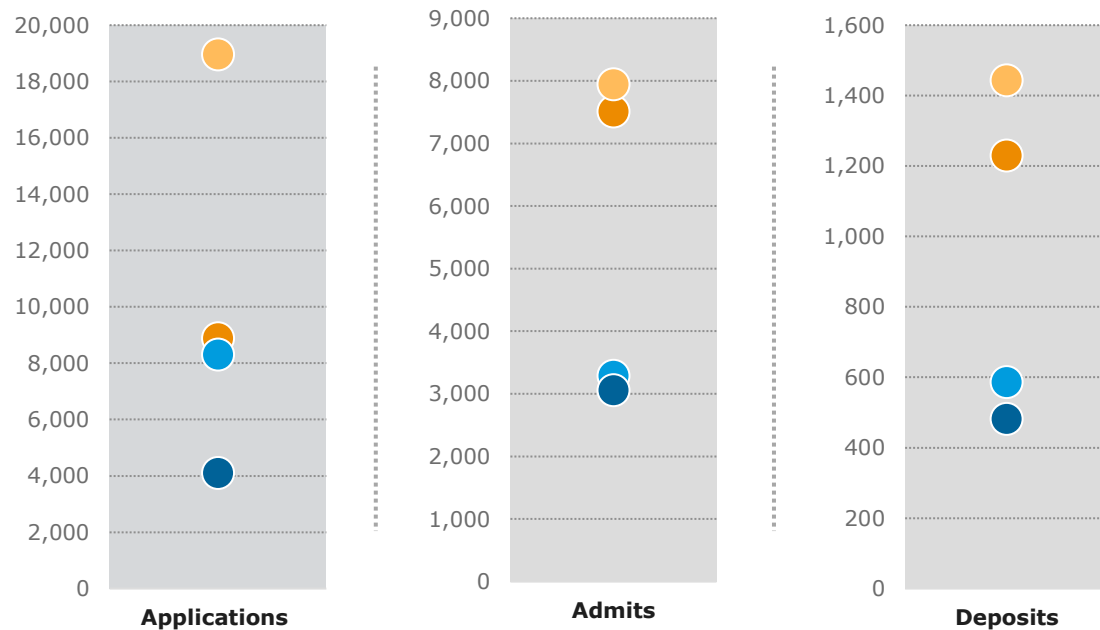
	Small schools	*Medium-sized* schools
More selective[2]	● (light blue)	● (light orange)
Less selective[3]	● (dark blue)	● (dark orange)

Source: EAB research and analysis.

eab.com

Feeding the Top of the Recruitment Funnel

Observations

Most admissions teams use a variety of sources to find students to recruit, including ones associated with standardized testing, online college search platforms, and student surveys.

More specifically, a large majority use College Board and Encoura, while a smaller number, though still a sizable majority, also use online college-search platforms such as Appily, Niche, and Naviance/Intersect.

Where Do Enrollment Teams Find Students to Recruit?[1]
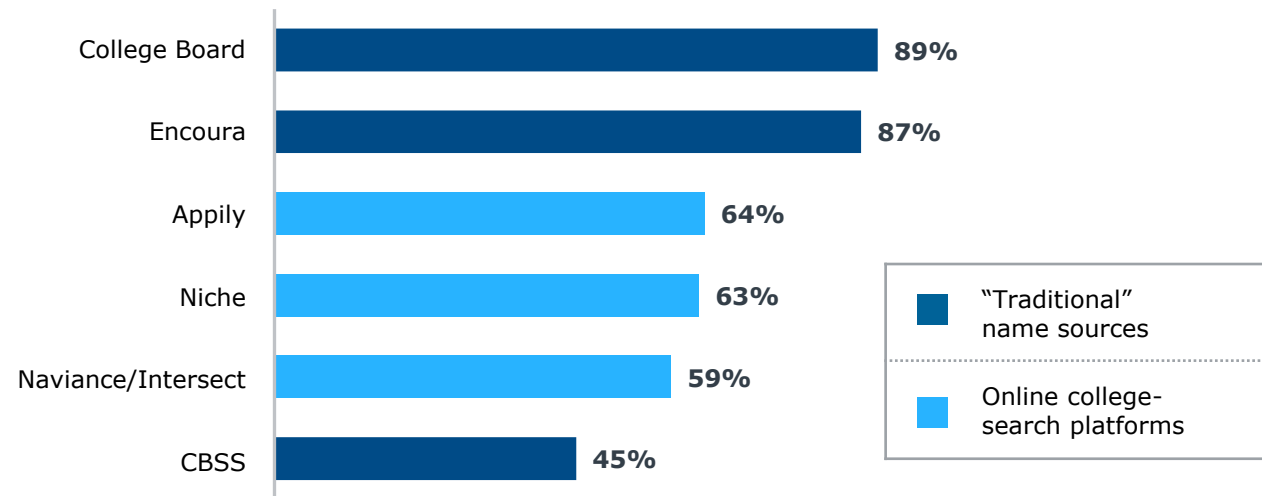
Source	Percentage
College Board	89%
Encoura	87%
Appily	64%
Niche	63%
Naviance/Intersect	59%
CBSS	45%

Legend:
- "Traditional" name sources
- Online college-search platforms

eab.com

Direct Admission

Many schools, especially ones that are not particularly selective, have adopted direct admission—a practice whereby students are offered admission before applying.

The fact that almost a third of more-selective institutions have adopted direct admission is noteworthy. Some enrollment leaders worry that direct admission is viewed negatively by students who prize exclusivity. The numbers here suggest that admissions teams at many selective schools don't share that concern.

Also worth noting is the large number of schools that are planning on embracing direct admission in the next year or two. In addition to these, there is a sizable cohort who are "unsure"—a group that presumably includes institutions that are not necessarily opposed to direct admission.

Percentages of Institutions That Currently Offer Direct Admission[1]

By Institution Selectivity

Selectivity	Percentage
Least selective	50%
Less selective	42%
More selective[3]	32%

Percentages of Institutions That Plan to Offer Direct Admission in the Future[2]

By Institution Selectivity

Least selective
- Unsure: 26%
- Yes, but not in next enrollment cycle: 16%
- Yes, in next enrollment cycle: 32%

Less selective
- Unsure: 21%
- Yes, but not in next enrollment cycle: 14%
- Yes, in next enrollment cycle: 11%

More selective[3]
- Unsure: 21%
- Yes, but not in next enrollment cycle: 0%
- Yes, in next enrollment cycle: 0%

Legend:
- Unsure
- Yes, but not in next enrollment cycle
- Yes, in next enrollment cycle
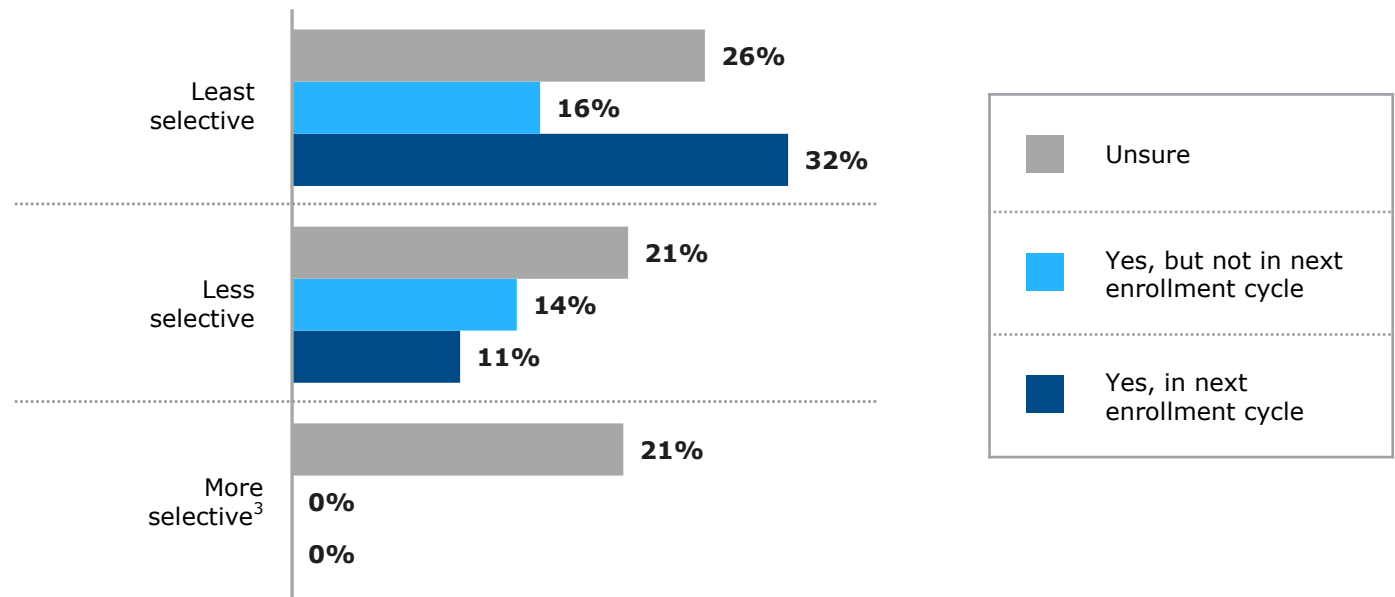
1) The question on the survey was "Does your institution make proactive offers of admission to qualified students (a practice sometimes called 'direct admission')?"
2) The question on the survey was "Is your institution considering adding direct admission in the future?" This question was asked only of schools that do not currently offer direct admission.
3) Includes "selective," "more selective," and "most selective" schools.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Outsourcing

Observations

For the enrollment functions examined in the survey, full in-house management was the most common approach reported, followed by split responsibility (i.e., partial outsourcing) and, least commonly, full outsourcing. None of the functions examined in the survey is fully outsourced by more than 56% of institutions.

Admissions teams vary greatly in terms of whether or not they outsource any given function and the degree to which they do so. For example, while 31% manage all of their recruitment-related name-buying with in-house resources, 42% collaborate with third parties on that work and 27% outsource it fully.

Various Enrollment Functions, by Degree of Outsourcing[1]

	Fully in-house	Split responsibility	Fully outsourced
Market research	21%	55%	25%
Financial aid optimization	22%	40%	38%
Chatbot	25%	18%	56%
Digital brand awareness	27%	63%	10%
Name buying	31%	42%	27%
Direct-marketing	34%	48%	19%
SEO/SEM	45%	39%	16%
Data/analytics	50%	50%	0%
Branding	64%	29%	8%
International recruitment	66%	32%	2%
Website	69%	29%	2%
Admissions CRM	70%	20%	10%
Financial aid call center	84%	9%	7%
Admissions call center	93%	6%	1%

Five most-outsourced functions (Market research through Name buying)

1) The corresponding prompt on the survey was "Indicate whether the function was outsourced or managed in-house for the 2023-2024 academic year." The full text of the response options, listed in the same order as in the table above, was as follows: market research, financial aid optimization, chatbot or automated response platforms, digital and social media brand awareness campaigns, name buying, direct-response recruitment marketing campaigns, SEO/SEM management, data analysis/analytics, branding, international recruitment, website design/management, admissions CRM, financial aid call center, admissions call center.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

eab.com

What Changes Are Enrollment Leaders Making?

Observations

It is perhaps no surprise that boosting aid topped the list of changes enrollment leaders made in 2024. As noted elsewhere in this report, many schools blame missed enrollment goals on being out-awarded by competitors.

Boosting aid budgets could also help address the problem of reduced college-going, another reason many admissions teams cite for missing their goals. (Unaffordability is one of the most common reasons students give for opting out of higher education.)

Improved marketing also loomed large among this year's changes, with four of the five highest items in the list being some variation on this theme.

As we look into the next year, some familiar priorities top the list, including aid-budget increases and website redesigns. This is also where most respondents saw their AI-related work happening.

Top Ten Changes Enrollment Leaders Are Pursuing[1]

This Year (2024)

Change	%
Aid-budget increase	40%
More market research	34%
Website redesign	33%
Brand refresh	30%
Increased search-site marketing	27%
Organizational redesign	23%
Virtual-tour redesign	22%
Staff-size increase	21%
Adoption of direct admission	18%
New CRM system	17%

Next Year (2025)

Change	%
Website redesign	32%
Aid-budget increase	29%
Virtual-tour redesign	29%
Increased use of AI	29%
More market research	28%
Start using AI	28%
Increased search-site marketing	24%
Brand refresh	23%
Organizational redesign	22%
Increased list-source variety	18%

1) The questions on the survey were "Which of the following changes, if any, did you make this year?" and "Which changes, if any, are you planning to make next year?"

Source: EAB research and analysis.

We Know Students

enroll360
by EAB

Cultivate
Affinity-Building Inquiry and Nurture Campaigns

Apply
Demand-Generating Application Marketing Campaigns

Aid
Data-Driven Policy Creation and Financial Aid Optimization

Yield
Actionable Analytics to Drive Conversion-Boosting Campaigns

Intersect
Connection Point to Millions of Naviance Users

Leads
High-quality Inquiries and Candidates from Appily

Virtual Tours
Best-in-Class Digital Experiences

Match
Today's Top Direct Admission Platform

First-Year   Underrepresented   International   Transfer

The Enroll360 Difference: Higher Education's Largest Student Dataset **+** Insights and Campaigns Driven by Enterprise-wide AI **+** A Team of Experts Ready to Help You Make the Right Calls

To get started, email **eabenrollmentcomm@eab.com** or visit **eab.com/Enroll360**.

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**.