

PERSONA PACKAGE

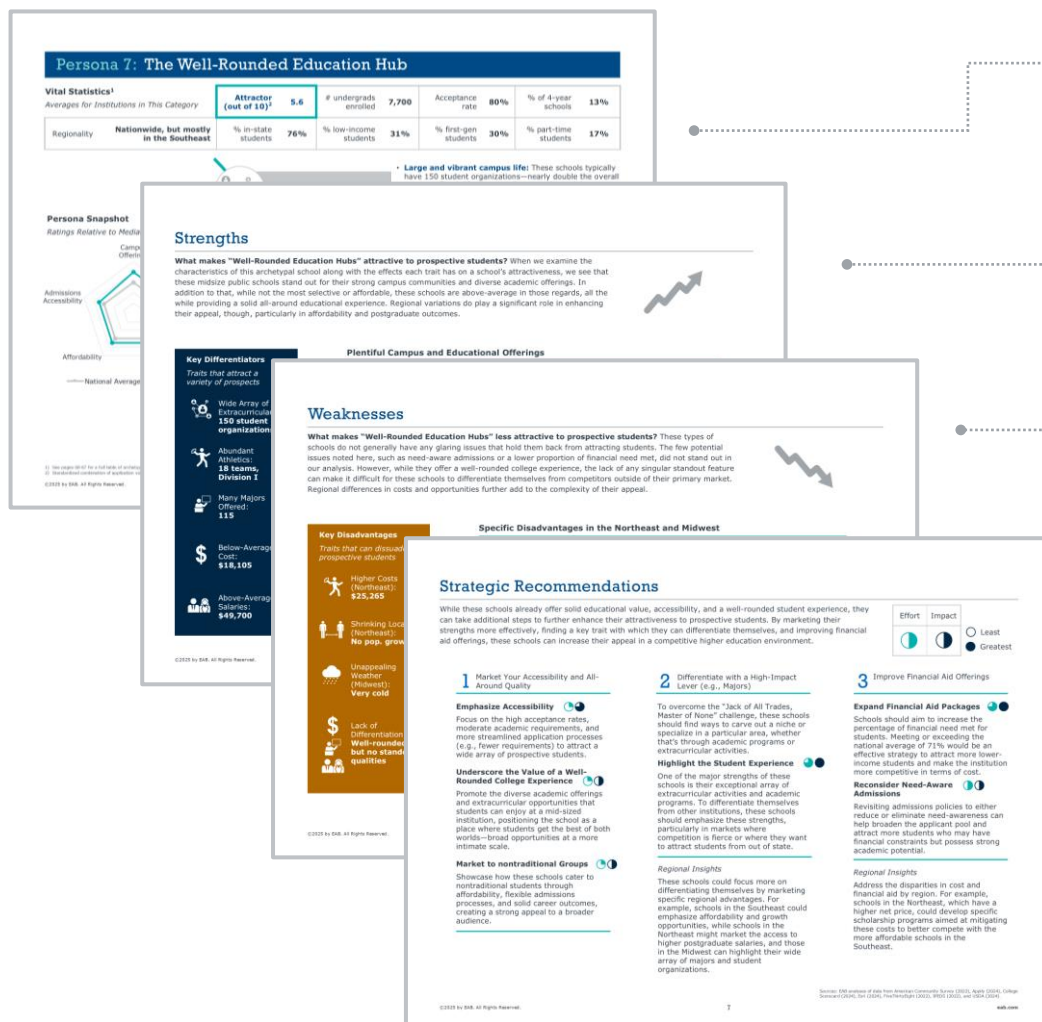
# Persona 7: The Well-Rounded Education Hub

An Extract from "Why Students Pick the Schools They Do"



# How To Use This Document

This is a focused slice of our full research paper, “Why Students Pick the Schools They Do—And How to Boost Your Odds of Making the Cut.” In it, you’ll find everything you need to know about the “Well-Rounded Education Hub” persona. We’ve also included some key pieces of context in the appendices. If you’d like access to the complete study—including all personas and overarching insights—please click [here](#).



## Page 1: **Persona overview**

- Average school size, selectivity, and student demographics versus national averages
- Median student-attractor score
- Summary assessment of student attractors

## Page 2: **Strengths**

- Traits that boost the persona’s student-attractor score
- Differentiators examined include campus life, academic variety, affordability, and location

## Page 3: **Weaknesses**

- Traits that limit a persona’s appeal, negatively impacting its student-attractor score
- Common challenges include high costs, limited campus amenities, and location-based factors

## Page 4: **Strategic recommendations**

- Persona-specific strategies for leveraging strengths and mitigating weaknesses
- Strategies are assessed on their potential to impact the student-attractor and their difficulty

# Understanding Your School's Positioning

## Three Steps to Gain a Better Grasp of Your Competitive Context

### 1) Align Within Your Persona

#### > Compare key traits

How does your institution compare to the persona's typical characteristics?

- *Example:* Is your school in line with most of your persona's traits, or does it differ in one or more dimensions?

#### > Leverage strengths

In which areas do you outperform others in your persona?

- Explore how to emphasize these in your messaging and outreach strategies.
- *Example:* Does your school have lower costs than the typical school in your persona?

#### > Consider weaknesses

Which traits do you fall short on?

- Consider whether these are critical to your target market or manageable through strategic adjustments.
- *Example:* If your school has lower graduate earnings, is that important for the types of students you want to attract? (See page 11.)

### 2) Evaluate Regional Competitiveness

#### > Understand regional dynamics

How does your school compare to your persona's traits in your region?

- *Example:* Are there shared challenges or opportunities that define the competitive landscape?

#### > Identify regional differentiation

What unique qualities make your school stand out against similar schools in your area?

- Pay special attention to traits that are particularly valued by the students you serve.
- *Example:* Affordability or academic offerings are key for Pell recipients.

#### > Assess interregional positioning

How does your school differ from those of your persona in other regions?

- Use this analysis to refine your strategy for cross-regional recruitment.
- *Example:* Are there traits that could attract students from outside your area—or risks that could drive local students elsewhere?

### 3) Look Across Personas

#### > Evaluate cross-persona differences

What unique qualities set your persona apart from others?

- Given the importance of school size, pay special attention to the personas adjacent to yours in this report for the closest comparisons.
- *Example:* Is affordability the primary draw for students to your type of school versus adjacent personas?

#### > Identify competitive threats

Are there traits where schools in other personas outperform yours in ways that could erode your appeal?

- *Example:* If affordability is your primary draw, are other personas offering deeper affordability and/or better combining it with key traits, such as campus life or academics?

#### > Exploit relative advantages

Where does your persona outperform others?

- *Example:* Focus on strong attributes that can broadly differentiate your school from other personas, such as educational offerings (pages 8–13).

# Persona 7: The Well-Rounded Education Hub

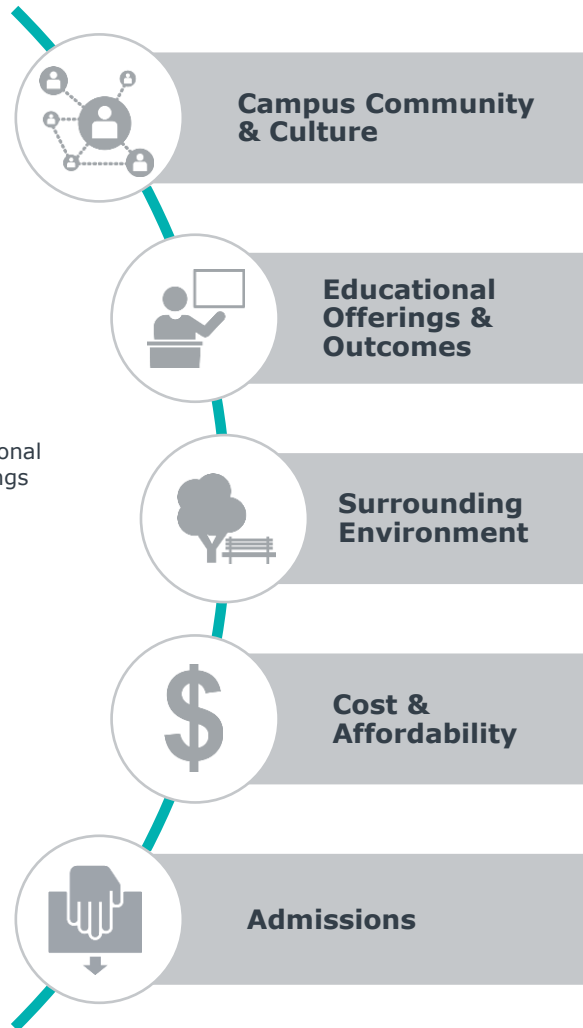
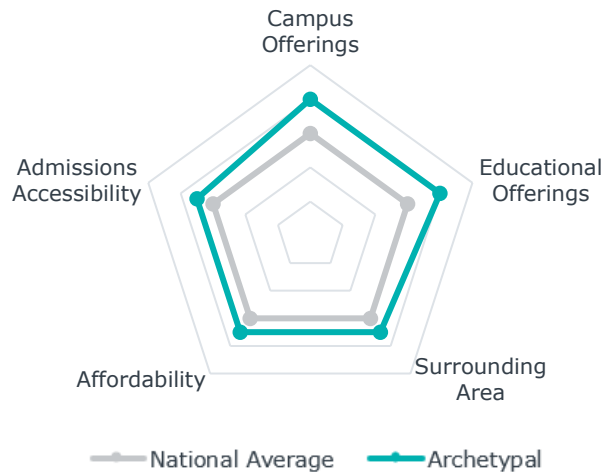
## Vital Statistics<sup>1</sup>

Averages for Institutions in This Category

		<b>Attractor (out of 10)<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>5.6</b>	# undergrads enrolled	<b>7,700</b>	Acceptance rate	<b>80%</b>	% of 4-year schools	<b>13%</b>
Regionality	<b>Nationwide, but mostly in the Southeast</b>	% in-state students	<b>76%</b>	% low-income students	<b>31%</b>	% first-gen students	<b>30%</b>	% part-time students	<b>17%</b>

## Persona Snapshot

Ratings Relative to Median US School



- **Large and vibrant campus life:** These schools typically have 150 student organizations—nearly double the overall average. Greek life also contributes to the social environment.
- **Division I sports:** These schools have 18 teams on average), adding to a dynamic and engaged student body.
- **Many majors offered:** A broad range of 115 majors offered, significantly higher than the average, catering to students with varied academic interests.
- **Above-average career earnings:** Competitive average salary of \$49,700 for graduates six years after graduation, just above the overall benchmark.
- **Primarily in small and growing cities:** Most of these schools are in small, politically conservative cities that are growing across the Southeast.
- **Warm climates:** These schools are typically located in the more temperate areas of the country.
- **Below-average cost:** An average net price of \$18,105, making these schools more affordable than the overall average (\$20,036).
- **A third of need left unmet:** Despite serving many students who receive Pell Grants (31%), a below-average portion of students here (66%) have all their financial need met.
- **Somewhat less stringent application requirements:** Schools of this archetype are not selective (80% acceptance), typically require at most 2 application components, and are test-optional. However, admissions are typically need-aware.

1) See pages 60-67 for a full table of archetypal characteristics.  
2) Standardized combination of application volume and yield rate.

Sources: EAB analyses of data from American Community Survey (2022), Apply (2024), College Scorecard (2024), Esri (2024), FiveThirtyEight (2022), IPEDS (2022), and USDA (2024).

# Strengths

**What makes “Well-Rounded Education Hubs” attractive to prospective students?** When we examine the characteristics of this archetypal school along with the effects each trait has on a school’s attractiveness, we see that these midsize public schools stand out for their strong campus communities and diverse academic offerings. In addition to that, while not the most selective or affordable, these schools are above-average in those regards, all the while providing a solid all-around educational experience. Regional variations do play a significant role in enhancing their appeal, though, particularly in affordability and postgraduate outcomes.



## Key Differentiators

*Traits that attract a variety of prospects*



Wide Array of Extracurriculars:  
**150 student organizations**



Abundant Athletics:  
**18 teams, Division I**



Many Majors Offered:  
**115**



Below-Average Cost:  
**\$18,105**



Above-Average Salaries:  
**\$49,700**

## Plentiful Campus and Educational Offerings

The wide variety of student organizations and academic majors are key strengths of these schools, making them attractive to students who want a robust and varied college experience. These elements are particularly impactful in boosting overall attractiveness, helping these schools stand out.

Schools of this type in the Midwest lead with an exceptional median of 200 student organizations and 143 majors offered, greatly exceeding the average in other regions to provide the broadest range of options to prospective students (see the table below).

## All-Around Quality in Every Respect

These schools perform well across the board, offering moderate affordability, accessible admissions, and solid postgraduate outcomes. While none of these areas individually stand out, the combination creates a well-rounded experience that appeals to a broad array of students.

However, schools in the Southeast are the most affordable at \$15,860, followed closely by the Midwest at \$16,804. When it comes to career outcomes, though, schools in the Northeast offer the highest average salary (\$58,050)

### Regional Variations

Key Trait	Southeast	Midwest	Northeast
Student Orgs.	140	<b>200</b>	135
Sports Teams	18	19	<b>20</b>
Majors	96	<b>143</b>	111
Cost	<b>\$15,860</b>	\$16,804	\$25,265
Salary	\$46,300	\$49,500	<b>\$58,050</b>

Sources: EAB analyses of data from American Community Survey (2022), Appily (2024), College Scorecard (2024), Esri (2024), FiveThirtyEight (2022), IPEDS (2022), and USDA (2024).

# Weaknesses

**What makes “Well-Rounded Education Hubs” less attractive to prospective students?** These types of schools do not generally have any glaring issues that hold them back from attracting students. The few potential issues noted here, such as need-aware admissions or a lower proportion of financial need met, did not stand out in our analysis. However, while they offer a well-rounded college experience, the lack of any singular standout feature can make it difficult for these schools to differentiate themselves from competitors outside of their primary market. Regional differences in costs and opportunities further add to the complexity of their appeal.



## Key Disadvantages

*Traits that can dissuade prospective students*



Higher Costs (Northeast):  
**\$25,265**



Shrinking Locale (Northeast):  
**No pop. growth**



Unappealing Weather (Midwest):  
**Very cold**



Lack of Differentiation:  
**Well-rounded, but no standout qualities**

## Specific Disadvantages in the Northeast and Midwest

Although these schools are predominantly found in the Southeast, a not insignificant number can also be found in the Northeast and Midwest (see the table below). It is the schools in these regions that face certain disadvantages. In the Northeast, this includes a significantly higher average net price, along with vanishingly small population growth rates in the surrounding area—both of which negatively impact a school’s ability to attract students.

As for the schools located in the Midwest, these tend to occupy the coldest environments. Generally speaking, such environments are negatively associated with a school’s ability to attract students to their campus.

## A Less Dynamic Surrounding Environment

Though these schools have plenty to offer, they suffer from being “good, but not great” across the board, making it harder for them to differentiate themselves in the competitive higher education market. This will especially hold true when competing for students outside of their immediate area, where proximity comes into play. Their appeal lies in their balance of offerings, rather than excelling in any one area—from affordability to educational quality and campus experiences.

### Regional Variations

Key Trait	Southeast	Midwest	Northeast
Cost	\$15,860	\$16,804	<b>\$25,265</b>
Pop. Growth	64%	37%	<b>1%</b>
Climate	Hot	<b>Very Cold</b>	Temperate

Sources: EAB analyses of data from American Community Survey (2022), Appily (2024), College Scorecard (2024), Esri (2024), FiveThirtyEight (2022), IPEDS (2022), and USDA (2024).

# Strategic Recommendations

While these schools already offer solid educational value, accessibility, and a well-rounded student experience, they can take additional steps to further enhance their attractiveness to prospective students. By marketing their strengths more effectively, finding a key trait with which they can differentiate themselves, and improving financial aid offerings, these schools can increase their appeal in a competitive higher education environment.



## 1 Market Your Accessibility and All-Around Quality

### Emphasize Accessibility

Focus on the high acceptance rates, moderate academic requirements, and more streamlined application processes (e.g., fewer requirements) to attract a wide array of prospective students.

### Underscore the Value of a Well-Rounded College Experience

Promote the diverse academic offerings and extracurricular opportunities that students can enjoy at a mid-sized institution, positioning the school as a place where students get the best of both worlds—broad opportunities at a more intimate scale.

### Market to nontraditional Groups

Showcase how these schools cater to nontraditional students through affordability, flexible admissions processes, and solid career outcomes, creating a strong appeal to a broader audience.

## 2 Differentiate with a High-Impact Lever (e.g., Majors)

To overcome the “Jack of All Trades, Master of None” challenge, these schools should find ways to carve out a niche or specialize in a particular area, whether that’s through academic programs or extracurricular activities.

### Highlight the Student Experience

One of the major strengths of these schools is their exceptional array of extracurricular activities and academic programs. To differentiate themselves from other institutions, these schools should emphasize these strengths, particularly in markets where competition is fierce or where they want to attract students from out of state.

#### Regional Insights

These schools could focus more on differentiating themselves by marketing specific regional advantages. For example, schools in the Southeast could emphasize affordability and growth opportunities, while schools in the Northeast might market the access to higher postgraduate salaries, and those in the Midwest can highlight their wide array of majors and student organizations.

## 3 Improve Financial Aid Offerings

### Expand Financial Aid Packages

Schools should aim to increase the percentage of financial need met for students. Meeting or exceeding the national average of 71% would be an effective strategy to attract more lower-income students and make the institution more competitive in terms of cost.

### Reconsider Need-Aware Admissions

Revisiting admissions policies to either reduce or eliminate need-awareness can help broaden the applicant pool and attract more students who may have financial constraints but possess strong academic potential.

#### Regional Insights

Address the disparities in cost and financial aid by region. For example, schools in the Northeast, which have a higher net price, could develop specific scholarship programs aimed at mitigating these costs to better compete with the more affordable schools in the Southeast.

Sources: EAB analyses of data from American Community Survey (2022), Appily (2024), College Scorecard (2024), Esri (2024), FiveThirtyEight (2022), IPEDS (2022), and USDA (2024).



# Appendices

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APPENDIX



# Which One of the Nine Institutional Personas Best Fits Your School?

This page offers an overview of nine distinct school segments, or “institutional personas,” revealed through our analysis. The pages that follow examine each in terms of key factors that drive students’ school selection—admission requirements, net cost, campus life, educational quality, school setting, etc. Find the persona in the table below that most closely resembles your institution; the corresponding pages listed in the last column will offer guidance most pertinent to your situation. Note that you may not find a perfect fit; choose whichever is the closest match. As you continue to explore this report, you will likely find insights of direct relevance to you under more than one persona, with adjacent personas typically overlapping most (e.g., 1 and 2, 7 and 8).



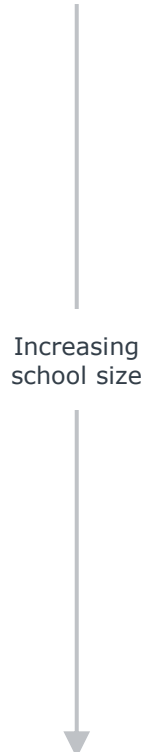
	Persona name	Size	Control	Selectivity	Regionality <sup>1</sup>	Pages
1	<b>The Accessible Education Anchor</b>	Very small	Private	-	Midwest, Southeast, West	20–23
2	<b>The Mission-Driven Learning Community</b>	Small	Private	--	Northeast, Midwest, Southeast	24–27
3	<b>The Boutique Elite Institution</b>	Small	Private	+	Northeast, Midwest	28–31
4	<b>The Inclusive Path to Opportunity</b>	Small	Mixed	-	Southeast	32–35
5	<b>The Quintessential and Accessible College</b>	Small	Private	--	National, Midwest emphasis	36–39
6	<b>The Selective Academic Enclave</b>	Small, mid	Private	++	National, Northeast emphasis	40–43
7	<b>The Well-Rounded Education Hub</b>	Mid	Public	--	National, Southeast emphasis	44–47
8	<b>The Outstanding Opportunity Engine</b>	Large	Public	--	Southwest, Midwest, Southeast	48–51
9	<b>The Rigorous Academic Giant</b>	Large	Private	+	National, Northeast emphasis	52–55

“++” = most selective, “--” = least selective

1) As with the other columns in this table, regionality of any given archetype is based on generalizations; exceptions will exist in all cases.

# At a Glance: What Broadly Defines Each Persona?

While the preceding page helps you locate your school’s persona using familiar dimensions such as size, sector, selectivity, and geographic region, this page offers a concise description of what defines each persona across the broader set of characteristics considered in this research—such as affordability, academic offerings, and campus environment. These summaries provide a snapshot of what makes each persona distinct, helping you understand how your school fits into the higher education landscape.



	Persona name	Description <sup>1</sup>
1	<b>The Accessible Education Anchor</b>	Typically rooted in rural areas, these very small and typically private schools serve as vital resources for local and nontraditional students.
2	<b>The Mission-Driven Learning Community</b>	These small colleges emphasize access and personalized attention, fostering supportive academic and social environments for a well-rounded education.
3	<b>The Boutique Elite Institution</b>	Private colleges providing a rigorous academic environment, distinguished career outcomes, and close faculty-student connections in smaller settings.
4	<b>The Inclusive Path to Opportunity</b>	Focused on accessibility, these community-centered institutions provide affordable education, particularly to low-income and first-generation students.
5	<b>The Quintessential and Accessible College</b>	“Jack of all trades” schools in suburban areas that offer a balanced, traditional college experience, blending accessibility with a strong sense of community.
6	<b>The Selective Academic Enclave</b>	Prestigious small to midsize institutions combine academic rigor, personalized support, and exceptional career outcomes in large and diverse locales.
7	<b>The Well-Rounded Education Hub</b>	Midsize public schools that excel in offering a variety of academic options and a dynamic campus life to students living in the region.
8	<b>The Outstanding Opportunity Engine</b>	Large, urban public schools with strong ties to their state that combine deep affordability with extensive academic options to provide transformative opportunities for a wide range of students.
9	<b>The Rigorous Academic Giant</b>	Very large, urban universities that combine selective admissions, extensive academic opportunities, and dynamic campus cultures to attract high-achieving students from across the nation.

1) As with the other columns in this table, the characteristics of any given archetype are based on generalizations; exceptions will exist in all cases.

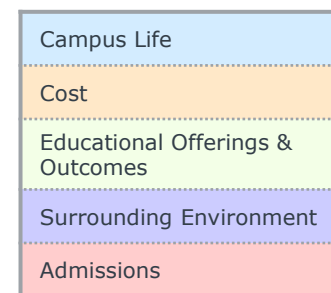
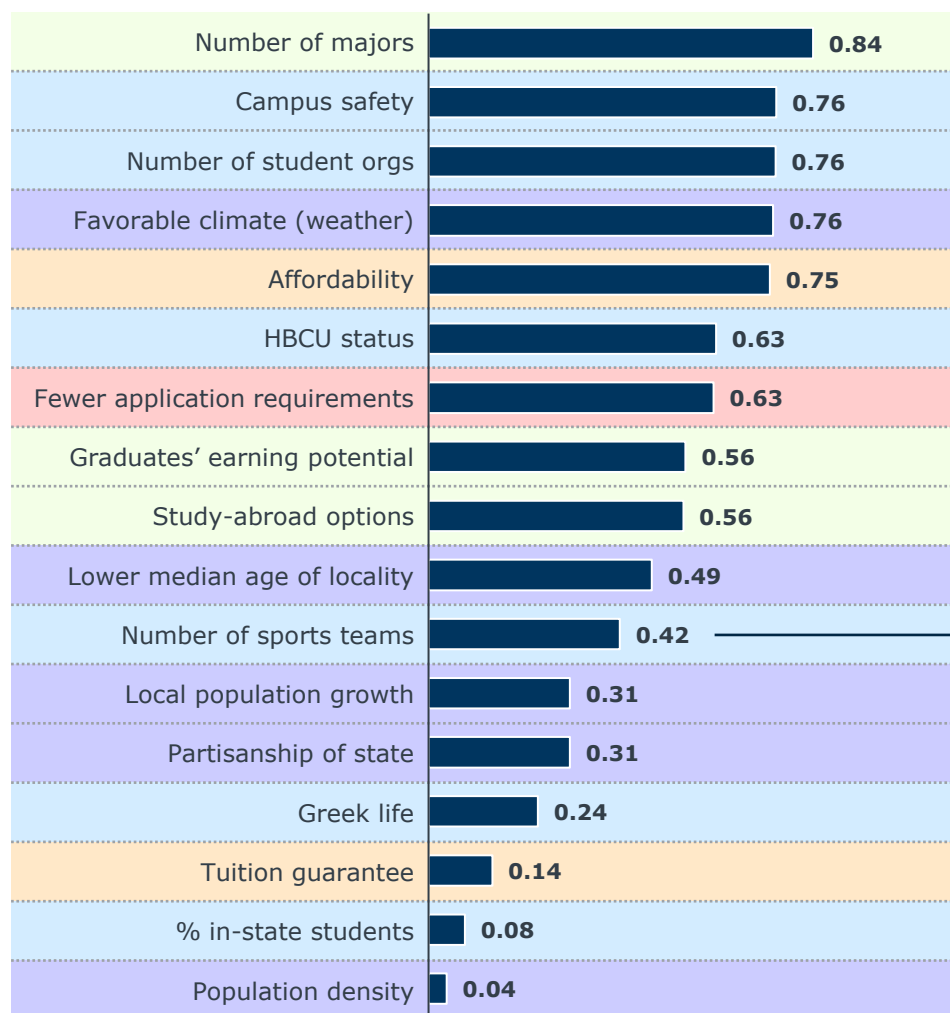
# Which School Characteristics Matter Most?

This analysis examined over 80 variables to identify the factors that most strongly influence attraction across US four-year colleges. Out of these, 17 characteristics were statistically significant drivers of student attraction. Some effects are expected and intuitive, while others reveal new insights into how schools can differentiate themselves. For example, while traditional drivers such as affordability are indeed quite important, elements of campus life (e.g., the number of student organizations) and features of the surrounding environment (e.g., a favorable climate or population growth) also have a considerable impact on the student-attractor.

It's important to note that certain variables, such as institution size, selectivity, and student traits (e.g., percentage of first-generation students, average GPA of admitted students), do not appear in this chart. These elements serve as control variables and help segment the analysis across different types of schools, allowing us to isolate the effects of other characteristics. They will be discussed in more detail in the following pages, where we explore how the effects of these drivers shown on the right differ for specific types of institutions.

## Contribution<sup>1</sup> of Significant Traits to a School's Overall Student-Attractor Score

Average for All Four-Year US Institutions, 10.0 = Maximum Student-Attractor Score



E.g., all other things being equal, a school with the most<sup>1</sup> sports teams will have a score that's 0.42 higher than those with the least.

1) Each factor's impact on the student draw score is measured by taking the difference in draw between the largest and smallest values of that factor, excluding outliers (i.e., extreme cases like a school with 500 majors or 10 application requirements) that are rare and distort the magnitude of these effects.

Sources: EAB analyses of data from American Community Survey (2022), Apply (2024), College Scorecard (2024), Esri (2024), FiveThirtyEight (2022), IPEDS (2022), and USDA (2024).

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