

**94th percentile on his SAT.  
15th in his class.  
Blue-chip extracurriculars.  
Every college wants him.  
Which one will he choose?**

**A REPORT ON  
HIGH-ACHIEVING SENIORS AND THE COLLEGE DECISION.  
LIPMAN HEARNE KEY INSIGHTS APRIL 2006**

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## A Report on High-Achieving Seniors and the College Decision

### **Looking for clear answers**

As consultants to hundreds of higher education institutions, we at Lipman Hearne know that many colleges and universities have their eye on the very top performers in the current generation of college-bound students. For numerous reasons (rankings, alumni approval, faculty preferences, credit ratings), colleges and universities strive to recruit the most academically capable students, and an extensive amount of trend reporting follows these Millennials (the term coined by Neil Howe and William Strauss) as they vie for admission to the most elite colleges and universities.

Lipman Hearne set out to learn what really drives the most academically competitive students in choosing where to apply and enroll. Is there a shared mindset among these top students? What puts an institution in the application pool and elevates it to the chosen position? How much does money matter? Whose opinion counts? To answer these questions, we mined data from a survey we conducted with a nationally representative sample of college-bound, highly talented high school seniors.

### **About the survey**

Lipman Hearne interviewed students in spring and summer of 2005. All 600 students had combined SAT I scores of 1150 or higher (out of a 1600 scale) and/or ACT composite scores of 25 or higher.

Half of our sample had scores between 1150 and 1290 and half had scores of 1300 or higher. The sample included 266 males and 334 females. Because financial considerations often influence college application and enrollment decisions, we intentionally included students who required financial aid (60 percent of our sample) and those who did not. The study included 18 percent minority students and 13 percent whose parents did not attend college.

Finally, all of the students in our survey had applied and been admitted to multiple institutions—they had choices to make. Three-fourths claimed to have a first-choice college at the time they applied. However, only about half (54 percent) enrolled at their first-choice institution.

We asked the students questions to help us understand how they make their application and enrollment decisions, what sources of information they use, what was most important to them in

their decision making, and what trade-offs they were willing to make. Some of our questions were “aided”—in other words, we supplied the language (reasons or factors for their choices) and asked students to rate them (responses cited in italics).

Other questions were “unaided,” asking students to use their own words (responses cited in quotation marks).

The first chapter provides an overview of the results. Later chapters look at key segments.

### **About Lipman Hearne**

Lipman Hearne is the nation’s leading marketing firm exclusively serving nonprofit institutions. Our clients include many of the nation’s most prestigious universities, foundations, associations, healthcare, and cultural institutions.

With offices in Chicago and Washington, D.C., Lipman Hearne is led by marketing specialists whose backgrounds include tenures in higher education, advertising and branding, market research, fundraising, and public affairs. For further information about this study, its authors, or Lipman Hearne, please contact Elizabeth Drews at [edrews@lipmanhearne.com](mailto:edrews@lipmanhearne.com) or (312) 356-8000.

## High-Achieving Seniors: Who They Are, What They Want

There's no doubt that the hope of a successful adult life motivates good students who are choosing a college. But those who fear that students have become too pre-professional will be pleased to know that our respondents as a group seek a healthy balance among intellectual development, experiencing different points of view, and career preparation.

### **What are their values about college?**

In our study, *broadening your intellectual capabilities* was cited as the most important value (Figure 1), rated higher than *preparing for a career*, and these high-achieving students wanted to attend a college *where many people have different backgrounds and points of view*.

### **What factors do they consider when they apply?**

Respondents were asked to tell us, in their own words, the most important factor in their application decision. These students were sophisticated enough to realize that the reputation or quality of specific programs at a college or university is as important as, if not more important than, the reputation of the institution as a whole. "Availability of a specific program" and "high-quality programs" were two of the most noted factors for these students, and both were mentioned more often than "reputation of college." Location was also frequently mentioned. The most frequently mentioned factors are shown in Figure 2.

Having students tell us in their own words what was important was necessary, but not sufficient. Our experience surveying college-bound high school students has taught us that a series of factors consistently plays a role in the application decision. We presented 16 of these factors and asked students if they played a role in their application decision (we were looking for a "yes/no" response).

The findings from this question, as shown in Figure 3, bolster the conclusion that students really do want to work hard at college. The top-rated factors were an *academically rigorous environment* and a *strong reputation in your major*. The *availability of clubs and activities of interest* was also important.

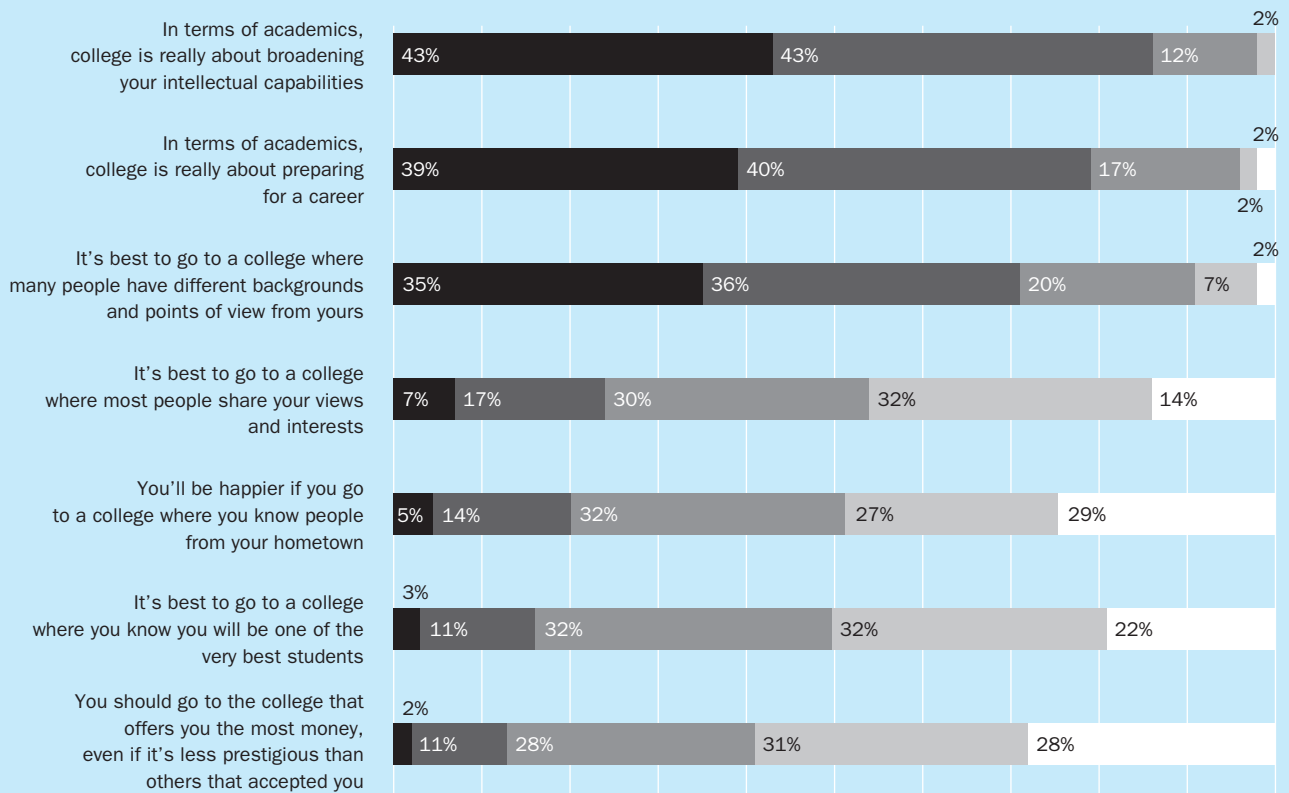
There were several factors that fell to the bottom of the list. These were: *knowing you would be able to play a sport*, the *religious affiliation of the college*, the *party scene*, and *knowing that there are many famous or*

**FIGURE #1**

**Values**

Source: Please indicate how strongly you agree (5) or disagree (1) with the following statements.

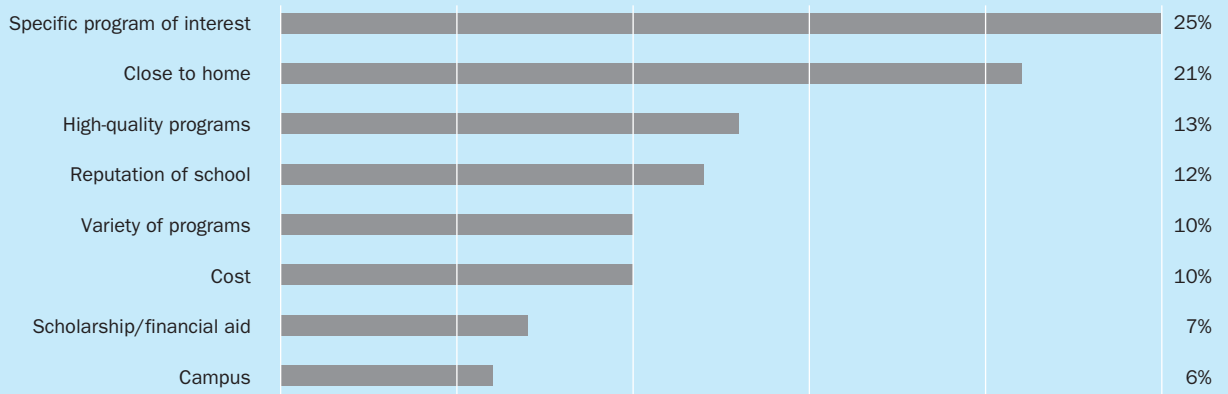
5 (Strongly agree) 4 3 2 1



**FIGURE #2**

**Most important factors in application decision (unaided)**

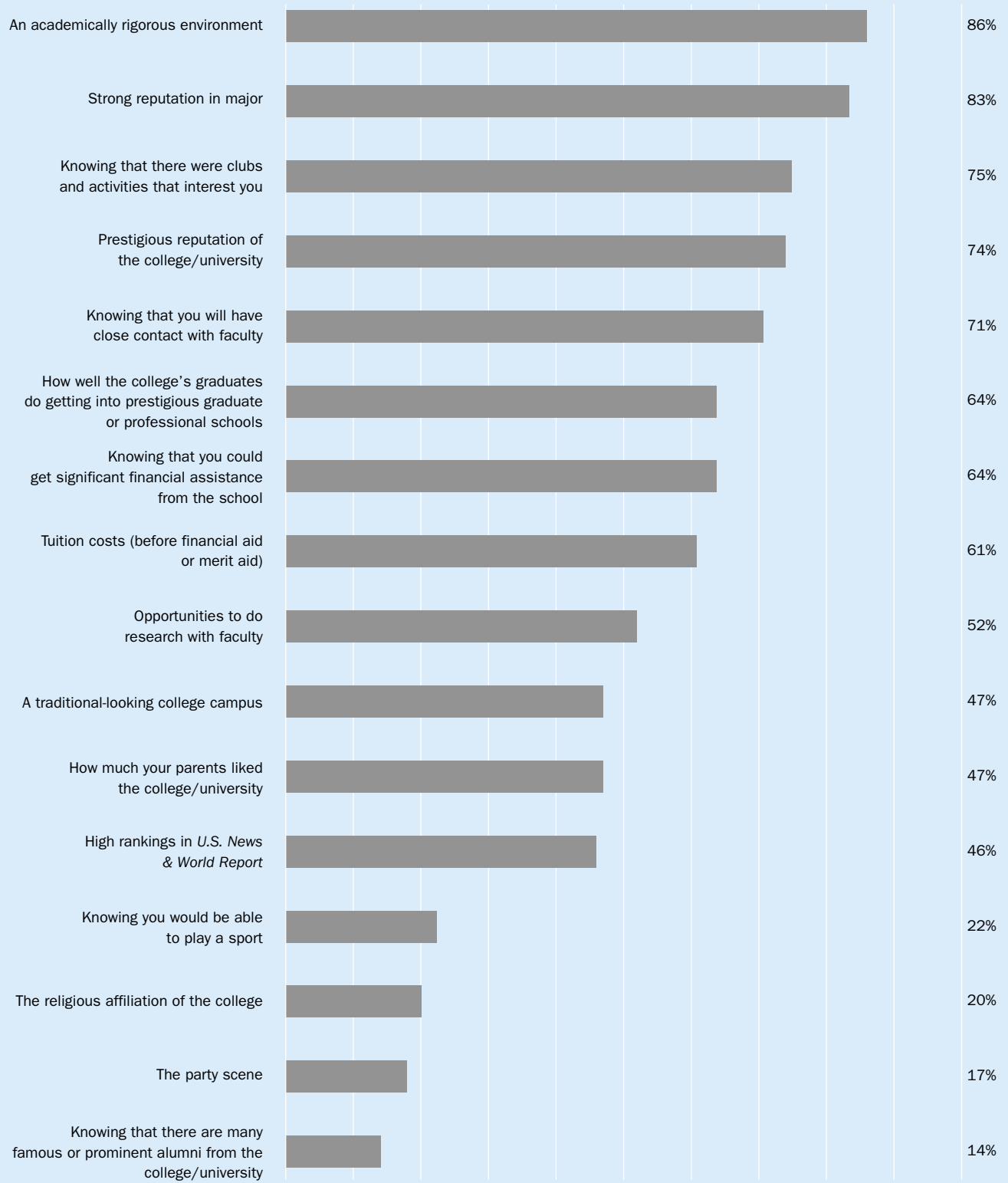
Source: What was most important to you in deciding where to apply?



**FIGURE #3**

**Factors that played a role in application decision (aided)**

Source: Tell me, yes or no, did ... play a role in your decision to apply to a particular college or university.



*prominent alumni from the college or university.* This isn't to say that these factors didn't play a role; they just weren't as important as the others at this stage of the process.

### **What information sources are important?**

We hear from students across the country that they are inundated with information about colleges and universities. We wanted to find out what counts most among information sources, and to get an answer to the question: Do rankings matter?

Lipman Hearne's previous research with thousands of college-bound high school students has taught us that they consider a number of sources. We identified 16 sources of information, including rankings guides, and asked the students to tell us if they used them in deciding where to apply.

It won't be surprising to those in college admissions offices to see that 74 percent of our sample said that the campus visit played a role in the application process (Figure 4). A conversation with a currently enrolled student—another direct information source—was the second most frequently mentioned source.

At the application stage, students do consult institutional sources; recruitment publications sent by the college or

university and the institution's website were used by more than half of our respondents. Conversations with those nearest and dearest—mothers, fathers, and friends—were also cited by 50 percent or more of these students. Rankings were not nearly as influential.

### **About rankings**

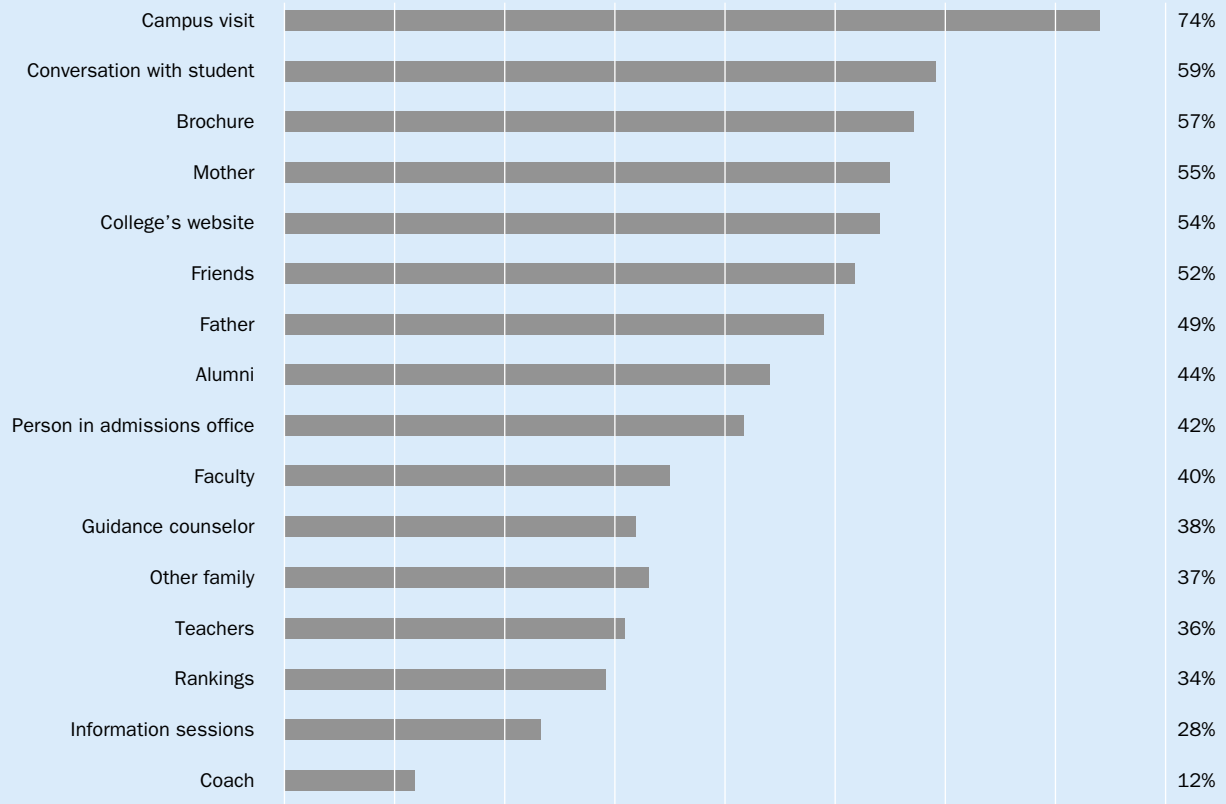
Our research shows that college-bound students rated rankings guides among the least influential of information sources they consider, with "direct sources"—campus visits and conversations with current students and faculty—at the top of their lists. In fact, two-thirds of these students told us that they did not use rankings or guides at all as an information source in the application process.

As many critics of rankings suspect, more students considered a *U.S. News & World Report* ranking an important *attribute* of an institution than an influential *information source*. Still, the fact that an institution had a high ranking was of modest importance to most when considering where to apply. Of the 16 factors included in the survey, a high ranking in *U.S. News & World Report* was 12th on the list and played a role for less than half of the students (Figure 4). However, a notably higher percentage of students in the Mid-Atlantic states—

**FIGURE #4**

### Information sources that played a role in application decision (aided)

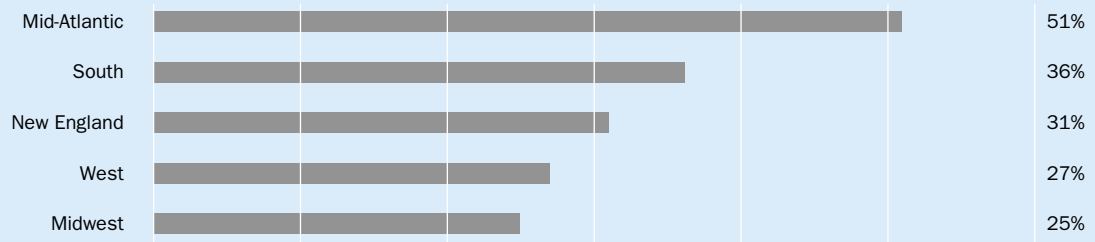
Source: Tell me, yes or no, did ... play a role in determining where you applied.



**FIGURE #5**

### Considered rankings like *U.S. News & World Report* or the *Fiske Guide to Colleges* when considering where to apply

Source: Now I'm going to read a list of information sources that you may or may not have used in determining where to apply. As I read the list, tell me, yes or no, did the information source play a role in determining where you applied.



New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania—considered *U.S. News* rankings a factor (Figure 5).

**In-state or out-of-state? Public or private?**

These students considered many colleges and universities at the application stage. In contrast to recent news about seniors applying to a dozen or more schools, these students applied to, on average, three or four institutions. As shown in Figure 6, most students (70 percent) applied to at least one out-of-state college or university. Fewer than two in ten, however, only applied out-of-state.

Students were also open to applying to both private and publicly funded institutions (Figure 7). Eight in ten respondents applied to at least one publicly funded institution, and seven in ten applied to at least one private institution. With these large numbers, it is no surprise that there was a lot of cross-over between applications to private and publicly funded colleges and universities. One in two students applied to both a private and publicly funded institution.

There was also significant cross-over between applications to institutions of different sizes (Figure 8). Very few stu-

dents—one in ten—applied to institutions of a specific size. (We categorized them as fewer than 5,000 students; 5,000-9,999; 10,000-14,999; 15,000-24,999; 25,000-34,999; and 35,000 or more students.) However, one in five students who applied to a large institution (35,000 students or more) *only* applied to large institutions.

There was also cross-over among the *classification* of institutions to which they applied (Figure 9). One in five students applied only to institutions within a specific category (e.g., bachelor’s, master’s, doctoral, and special-focus). However, of those who applied to only one type of institution, nearly one-third selected research institutions.

**About early decision**

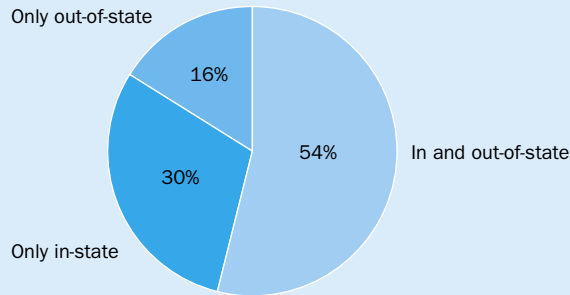
Early decision is a plan that allows students to apply early (usually in November) and get an admission decision from the college well in advance of the usual notification date. Early action is a non-binding version of early decision. The number of both early decision and early action applicants has been steadily rising for the last decade<sup>1</sup>, due in part to the belief that applying early helps students gain admission to

<sup>1</sup> Fallows, J. (2001, September). “The Early-decision Racket.” *The Atlantic Monthly*.

**FIGURE #6**

**Institutions applied to, by location**

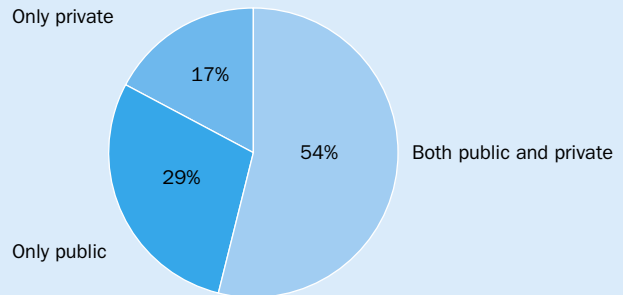
Source: Where did you apply?



**FIGURE #7**

**Institutions applied to, by type**

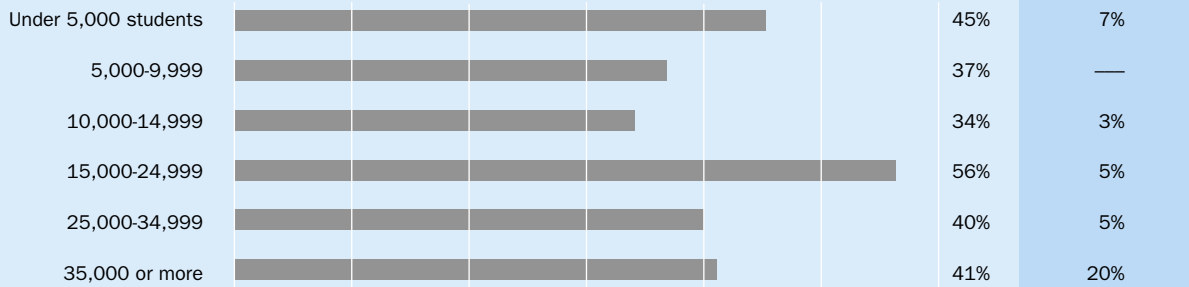
Source: Where did you apply?



**FIGURE #8**

**Institutions applied to, by size**

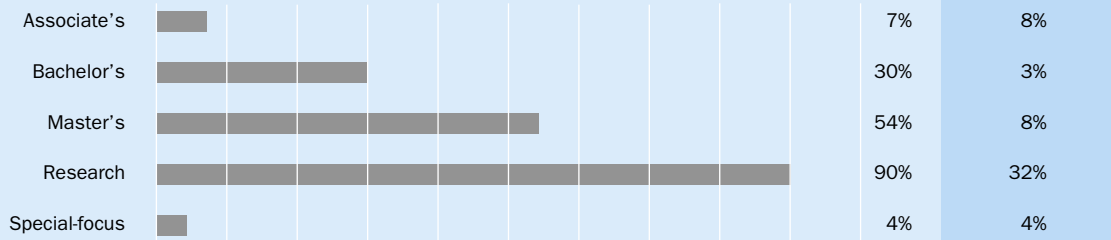
Source: Where did you apply?



**FIGURE #9**

**Institutions applied to, by Carnegie Classification**

Source: Where did you apply?



colleges that might reject them during regular admission. Lipman Hearne took a look at who is applying early and the effect it has on a student's ability to attend their "first choice" college or university.

Geography played a role; as Figure 10 shows, Southerners<sup>2</sup> were more likely to apply early decision (36 percent) than were others (21 percent). There were also some interesting patterns that emerged in the Northeast<sup>3</sup>: males from the Northeast were less likely to have applied early decision than males from outside the Northeast. Meanwhile, females from the Northeast were more likely to apply early action (Figure 11) than their peers from other parts of the country. Finally, students applying only to colleges within their home states were less likely to apply early decision (Figure 12).

Early action candidates applied to more institutions, on average, than students who did not apply early action, and were more likely to attend a privately funded college or university (Table 1).

An interesting finding was that one in

five students who applied early decision or action did not even have a first choice, or "preferred," college or university (Figure 13). This leads us to conjecture that some students are not applying early to increase their chances of being admitted to their preferred college or university; they are applying early because it is expected of them or to shorten the decision-making timeline.

The research also shows that survey participants who required financial aid were not deterred from applying early. As a matter of fact, Figure 14 shows that students who required aid were more likely to apply early than their peers who did not.

### **What factors do they consider when choosing to enroll?**

The enrollment decision is a highly emotional and sometimes irrational one. When asked to tell us, in their own words, what they liked best about the institution to which they had chosen to enroll, respondents were more likely to mention a specific academic program. Yet academic programs were only one of many factors cited. Notably, cost (or

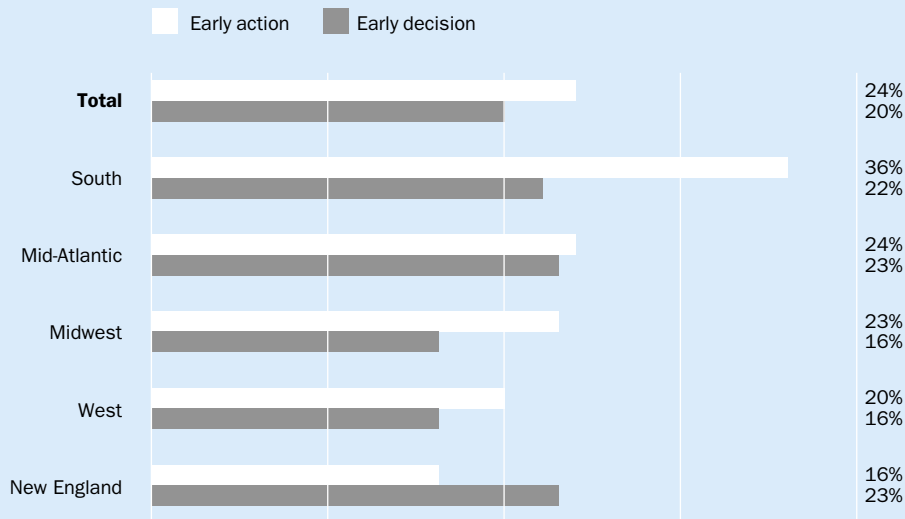
<sup>2</sup> Southern states include Delaware, Maryland, Washington, D.C., West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, and Oklahoma

<sup>3</sup> Northeastern states include Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania

**FIGURE #10**

**Percentage of students applying early**

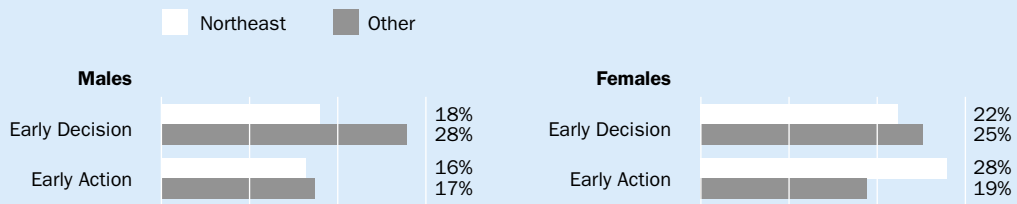
Source: Did you apply early decision to any schools? Did you apply early action to any schools?



**FIGURE #11**

**Percentage of students applying early**

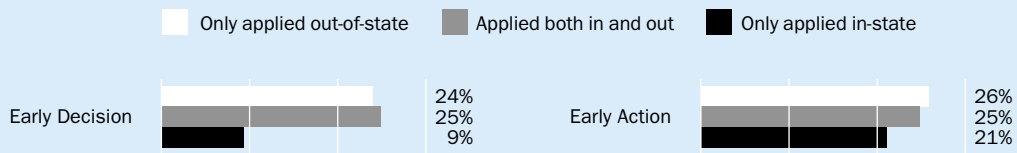
Sources: Did you apply early decision to any schools? Did you apply early action to any schools?



**FIGURE #12**

**Percentage of students applying early**

Sources: Did you apply early decision to any schools? Did you apply early action to any schools?



affordability) was not at the top of this list even when we took financial need into consideration.

- 24% Had specific program I wanted to study
- 21% Close to home or near my family
- 18% Nice campus atmosphere or pretty campus
- 10% Small college
- 9% College had a good reputation
- 7% High-quality programs
- 6% Fraternity/sorority/social opportunities
- 5% Big city or urban location
- 4% Cost/affordability
- 4% Scholarship/financial aid opportunities

When we asked students to rate the importance of items on our predetermined list—in other words, when we reminded students of specific reasons—cost-related factors did indeed play a key role (see Figure 15). *Strong reputation in your major* trumped the *prestigious reputation* of the institution when it was time to choose where to enroll. *Religious affiliation* and *knowing you would be able to play a sport* also moved up dramatically in the decision-making. This wasn't the case for all students, but for a substantial minority, these were important considerations.

### **What information sources played a role in the enrollment choice?**

The key driver for the enrollment decision was the student's direct experience with the university or college. A campus visit and conversations with others played important roles (Figure 16), as well as the perspective of parents. Less influential were recruitment materials as well as friends and peers, a coach, and rankings guides.

### **Did they enroll into their first choice college?**

In the end, more than half of the students surveyed chose to attend their first choice (Figure 17). Ironically, those not attending their first-choice institution (21 percent of the sample) actually scored higher on the SAT (mean score of 1311) than those attending their first choice institution (mean score of 1290). We suspect that this is because these higher-scoring students preferred top-tier institutions (e.g., Stanford, Northwestern, Yale, MIT) or institutions offering strong programs in specific areas (e.g., Georgetown, NYU, Tufts)—in other words, institutions where the competition is stiffer. These students also applied to more schools (4.4 institutions) than those attending their top choice (3.3 institutions). They also had a higher

**TABLE #1**

**Academic profile of early decision/action students**

Sources: What was your combined SAT I score? What was your ACT composite score? Where did you apply? Where do you plan to go to school in the fall? Do you know what you are going to major in?

	Applied early decision (N=143)	Applied early action (N=118)	Did not apply early action or decision (N=385)
Mean SAT score (or ACT equivalent)	1288	1308	1292
Number of institutions applied to (mean)	3.5	<b>4.1<sup>1,3</sup></b>	3.5
<b>Attending...</b>			
Private institution	52%	<b>58%<sup>3</sup></b>	40%
Publicly funded institution	47%	40%	<b>56%<sup>2</sup></b>
Community college	1%	2%	4%
<b>Planning to study...</b>			
Medicine/Physical sciences	30%	28%	29%
Liberal Arts/Social Sciences	22%	24%	20%
Math/Engineering	15%	9%	<b>18%<sup>2</sup></b>
Business	9%	15%	13%
Other	20%	26%	18%
Undecided	9%	5%	6%

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than students who applied early decision

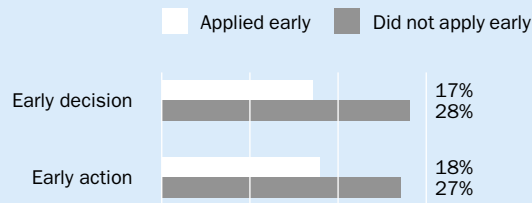
<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than students who applied early action

<sup>3</sup> Significantly greater than students who did not apply early action or decision

**FIGURE #13**

**Percentage that did not have a first choice institution**

Source: Did you have a "first choice" school?

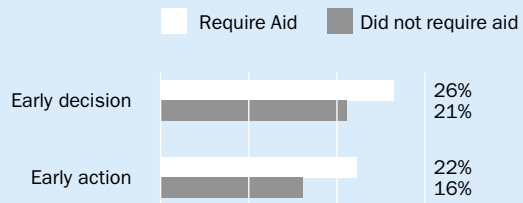


**FIGURE #14**

**Percentage applying early**

Sources: Did you apply early decision to any schools?

Did you apply early action to any schools?



quotient of minorities (27 percent) than those attending their top choice (15 percent).

**Enrollment choice by type of institution**

The majority of survey participants stayed in-state (56 percent), and most

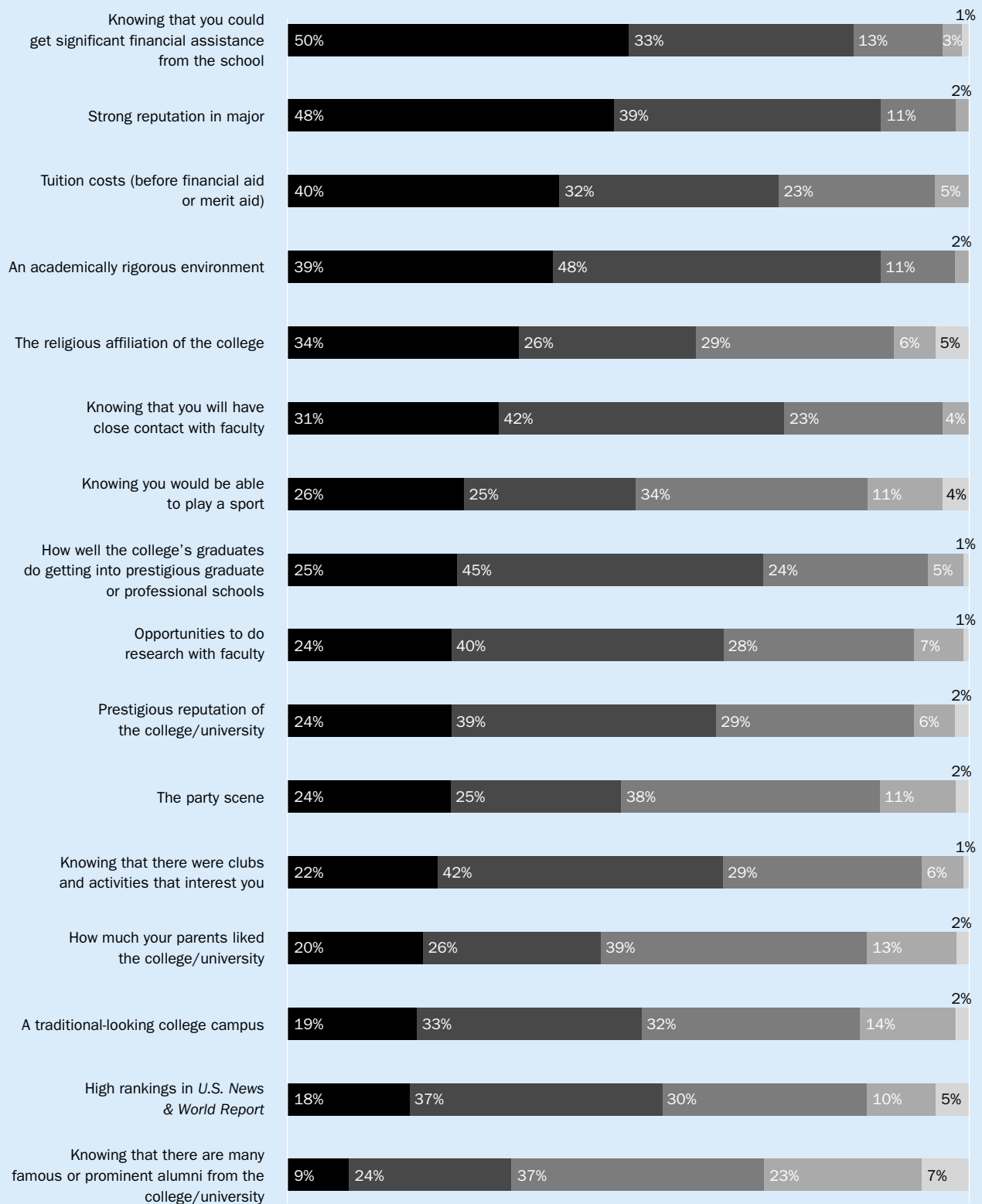
(58 percent) enrolled at a doctorate-granting institution (Figures 18 and 20). There was an even split between public and private colleges (Figure 19), and students attended colleges of all sizes (Figure 21).

**FIGURE #15**

### Importance of enrollment decision

Sources: Using a 5-point scale, where "5" is very important and "1" is not at all important, how important were each of the following in your decision to enroll at [INSTITUTION ATTENDING]?

■ 5 (Very important) ■ 4 ■ 3 ■ 2 ■ 1 (Not at all important)

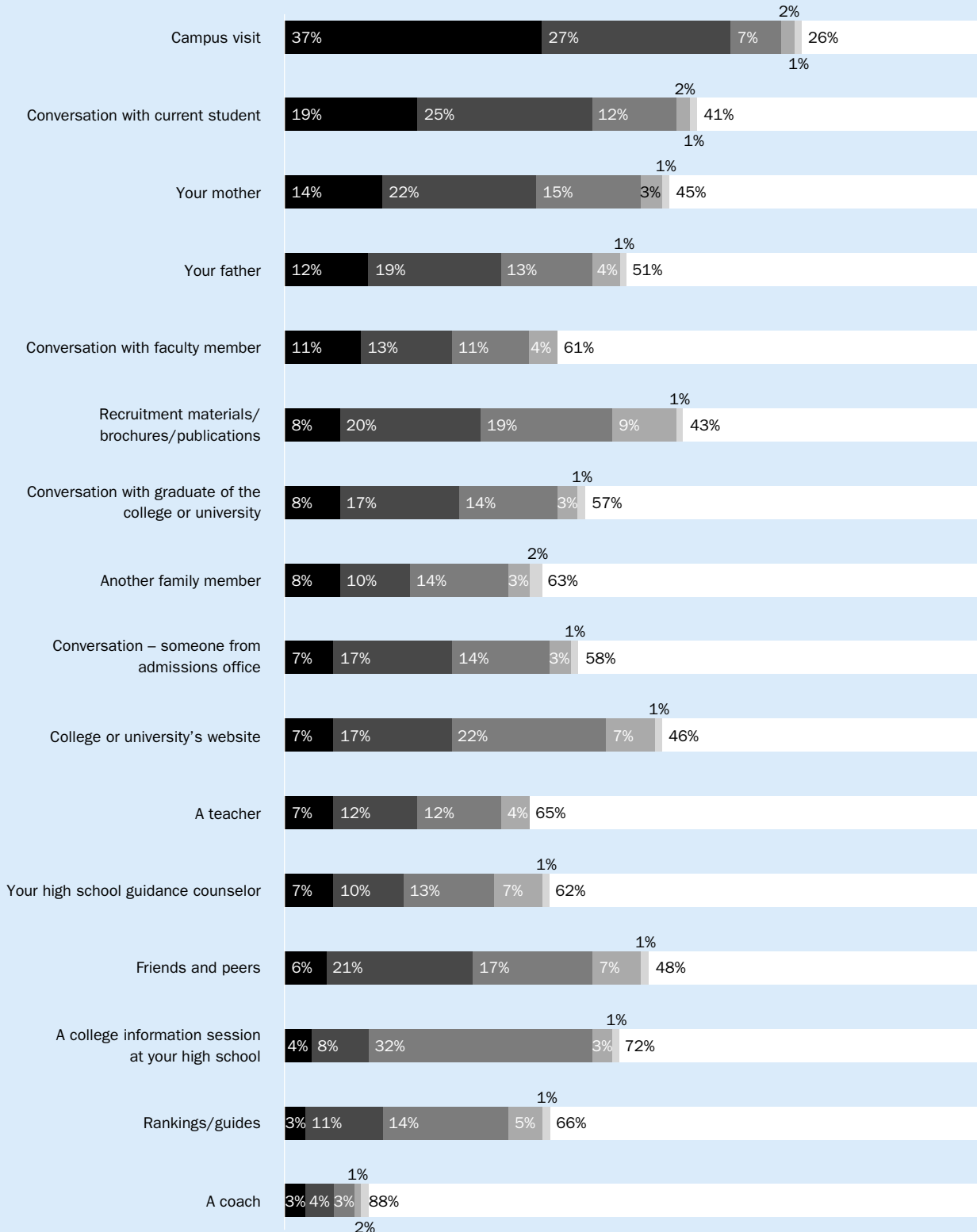


**FIGURE #16**

### Information sources that played a role in enrollment decision

Source: Using a 5-point scale, where "5" is very influential and "1" is not at all influential, how influential were each of the following in your decision to enroll at [INSTITUTION ATTENDING]?

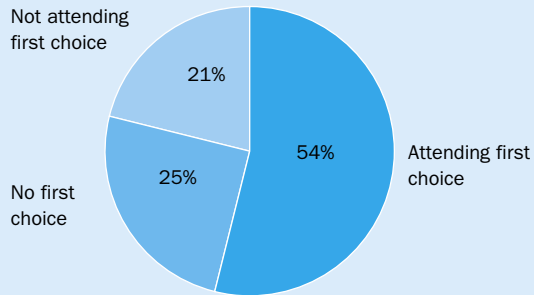
5 (Very influential)
  4
  3
  2
  1 (Not at all influential)
  Did not use



**FIGURE #17**

### Institution attending, by preference

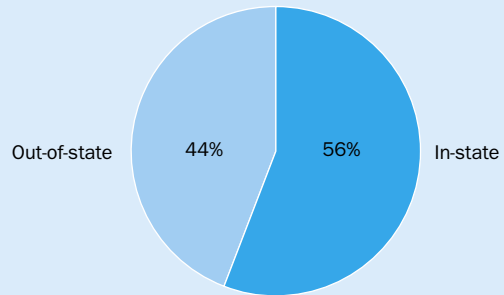
Source: Where do you plan to go to school in the fall?



**FIGURE #18**

### Institution attending, by location

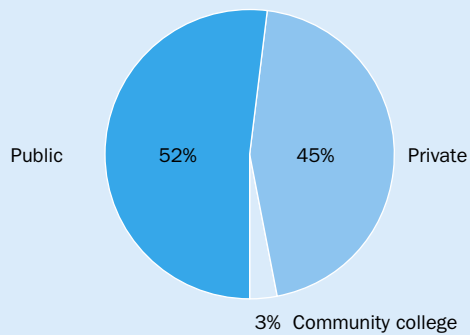
Source: Where do you plan to go to school in the fall?



**FIGURE #19**

### Institution attending, by type

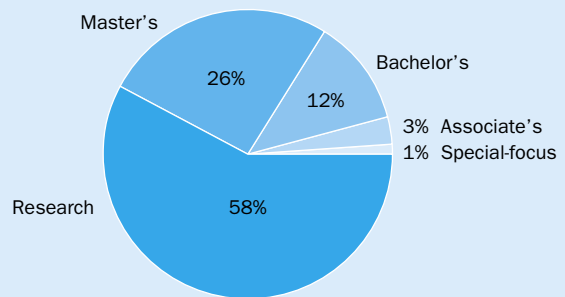
Source: Where do you plan to go to school in the fall?



**FIGURE #20**

### Institution attending, by Carnegie Classification

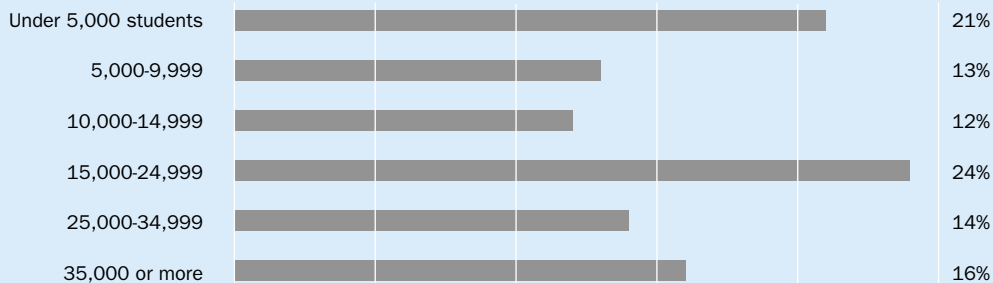
Source: Where do you plan to go to school in the fall?



**FIGURE #20**

### Institutions attending, by size

Source: Where do you plan to go to school in the fall?



## Solid Performers vs. Academic Superstars

Do seniors who score well on the SATs—but not in the top percentile—make different choices about where to attend college than those who score highest on achievement tests? In many cases, the answer is “yes.”

Fifty percent of students we surveyed had SAT I (or ACT equivalent) scores between 1150 and 1290 on a 1600 scale. We called them “**Solid Performers**.” The remainder—named “**Academic Superstars**”—scored above 1300. In the college decision, Solid Performers were significantly more likely to want a college closer to home and to be concerned about tuition costs. Academic Superstars, in contrast, were much more likely to go out-of-state in search of a highly rated academic program.

### **What are their values about college?**

In assessing these students’ values about college, we saw our sample split along the academic achievement line. As shown in Table 1, Solid Performers were more career-minded—and more parochial. Solid Performers were more likely to agree that *it’s best to go to a college where most people share your views and interests* and *you’ll be happier if you go to a college where you know people from your hometown*. And though it was not a highly rated value, Solid Performers were also more likely to want to *go to a college where they will be one of the very best students*.

### **What factors do they consider when they apply?**

Once the list of contenders is chosen, what was most important to both these groups of students when they considered where to apply? Table 2 shows the most often mentioned factors—and these came without any prompting from our interviewers.

Availability of a “specific program” was, unsurprisingly, the most noted factor for these students who are repeatedly queried about their intended major. Many Academic Superstars were also concerned about “high quality programs.”

**TABLE #1**

**Values**

Sources: Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

This question used a 5-point scale where “5” meant strongly agree and “1” meant strongly disagree. The figures shown are mean ratings.

	<b>Academic Superstars</b> (N=300)	<b>Solid Performers</b> (N=300)
In terms of academics, college is really about broadening your intellectual capabilities	4.3	4.2
It's best to go to a college where many people have different backgrounds and points of view from yours	4.0	3.9
In terms of academics, college is really about preparing for a career	4.0	<b>4.2<sup>1</sup></b>
It's best to go to a college where most people share your views and interests	2.6	<b>2.9<sup>1</sup></b>
It's best to go to a college where you know you will be one of the very best students	2.3	<b>2.5<sup>1</sup></b>
You should go to the college that offers you the most money, even if it's less prestigious than others that accepted you	2.2	2.3
You'll be happier if you go to a college where you know people from your hometown	2.2	<b>2.6<sup>1</sup></b>

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than Academic Superstars

**TABLE #2**

**Most important factors in application decision (unaided)**

Source: What was most important to you in deciding where to apply?

	<b>Academic Superstars</b> (N=300)	<b>Solid Performers</b> (N=300)
Had a specific program I wanted to study	21%	28%
Close or near to home	16%	<b>26%<sup>1</sup></b>
High quality programs	<b>18%<sup>2</sup></b>	8%
College had a good reputation	13%	10%
Variety of programs offered	11%	10%
Cost affordability	10%	9%
Scholarship/financial aid opportunities	7%	7%
Nice/pretty campus	6%	6%

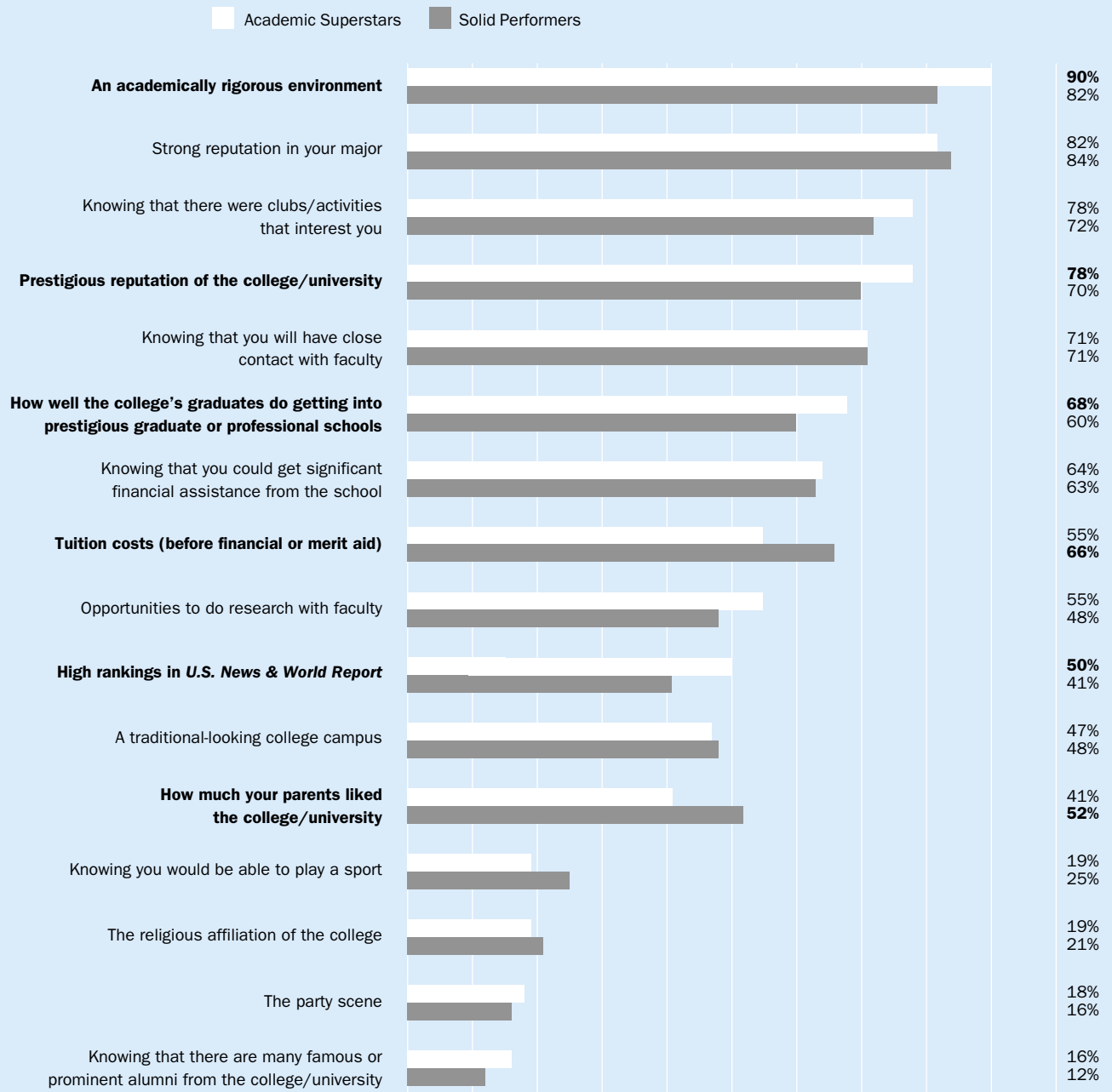
<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than Academic Superstars

<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than Solid Performers

**FIGURE #1**

**Factors that played a role in application decision (aided)**

Source: Tell me, yes or no, did ... play a role in your decision to apply at a particular college or university.



Remaining “close or near home” was important, too, but significantly more so to the Solid Performers. Being near their parents was particularly important to the female Solid Performers—30 percent of these girls mentioned it as an important factor. Digging deeper into the data, we found that minority female Solid Performers identified being “close to home” as important more often (35 percent) than did Caucasian females with comparable test scores (21 percent).

When read a list of features that may have influenced them, both Solid Performers and Academic Superstars were most likely to say that *an academically rigorous environment, strong reputation in major, clubs and activities of interest, and prestigious reputation of the college or university* played a role in where they chose to apply (Figure 1).

But Superstars exhibited strong academic ambitions. *An academically rigorous environment, the reputation of the college or university, how well graduates do getting into prestigious graduate or professional colleges, and high rankings in U.S. News & World Report* were much more likely to play a role in their application decision.

In contrast, Solid Performers were more likely to cite *tuition costs* and *how much*

*your parents liked the college or university* as influential factors in their choice of where to apply.

### **Gender and geography**

Table 3 investigates these differences even further by taking gender and geography into consideration. Superstar high school girls from the Northeast were significantly more likely than their academic peers to consider indicators of quality such as *an academically rigorous environment and strong reputation in their major*. Females Superstars from this region were also more likely to consider an institution’s prestige (*graduates get into prestigious graduate colleges, prestigious reputation, high rankings, and having prominent alumni*).

### **What factors do they consider when choosing to enroll?**

When we asked them to tell us, in their own words, what they liked best about their chosen institution, both groups emphasized the same attribute: the school had a specific program they were interested in. Solid Performers were significantly more likely to mention “close to home,” however (Table 4), while Academic Superstars cited “high quality programs.”

When asked to review the list of attributes they used to determine where they would

**TABLE #3**

**Factors that played a role in application decision**

Source: Tell me, yes or no, did ... play a role in your decision to apply at a particular college or university.

	Academic Superstars				Solid Performers			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	Northeast (N=60)	Other (N=84)	Northeast (N=76)	Other (N=80)	Northeast (N=42)	Other (N=80)	Northeast (N=62)	Other (N=116)
<b>Academic Quality Factors</b>								
Academically rigorous environment	<b>85%</b> <sup>5</sup>	91%	<b>96%</b> <sup>1,4,5</sup>	86%	67%	80%	<b>89%</b> <sup>5</sup>	85%
Strong reputation in major	83%	76%	<b>87%</b> <sup>5</sup>	84%	67%	<b>88%</b> <sup>5</sup>	<b>90%</b> <sup>5</sup>	85%
Close contact with faculty	70%	66%	75%	75%	60%	69%	<b>84%</b> <sup>5,8</sup>	70%
Grads get into prestigious graduate schools	68%	67%	<b>74%</b> <sup>5</sup>	64%	55%	59%	63%	62%
Opportunity to do research with faculty	<b>62%</b> <sup>2,7</sup>	44%	<b>61%</b> <sup>7</sup>	55%	57%	44%	44%	51%
<b>Prestige</b>								
Prestigious reputation of college/university	70%	<b>82%</b> <sup>6</sup>	<b>87%</b> <sup>1,4,5,7</sup>	70%	69%	63%	68%	<b>77%</b> <sup>6</sup>
High rankings in <i>U.S. News &amp; World Report</i>	48%	<b>50%</b> <sup>6</sup>	<b>61%</b> <sup>4,5</sup>	43%	38%	35%	48%	41%
Knowing that there are many famous or prominent alumni from the college/university	13%	18%	<b>22%</b> <sup>4,7</sup>	10%	10%	16%	5%	13%
<b>Non-Academic Factors</b>								
Clubs and activities that interest you	75%	74%	87%	75%	71%	64%	81%	74%
Traditional-looking college campus	43%	42%	49%	54%	50%	43%	48%	50%
Your parents liked the college	33%	38%	46%	46%	41%	50%	<b>61%</b> <sup>1,5</sup>	52%
The religious affiliation of the college	5%	<b>17%</b> <sup>1</sup>	<b>17%</b> <sup>1</sup>	<b>33%</b> <sup>2,3</sup>	10%	<b>28%</b> <sup>5</sup>	10%	<b>26%</b> <sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than male Academic Superstars from the Northeastern region of the country

<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than male Academic Superstars from the other regions of the country

<sup>3</sup> Significantly greater than female Academic Superstars from the Northeastern region of the country

<sup>4</sup> Significantly greater than female Academic Superstars from the other regions of the country

<sup>5</sup> Significantly greater than male Solid Performers from the Northeastern region of the country

<sup>6</sup> Significantly greater than male Solid Performers from the other regions of the country

<sup>7</sup> Significantly greater than female Solid Performers from the Northeastern region of the country

<sup>8</sup> Significantly greater than female Solid Performers from the other regions of the country

TABLE #4

Most important in deciding where to enroll

Source: What do you like best about [INSTITUTION ATTENDING]?

	Academic Superstars (N=300)	Solid Performers (N=300)
Had a specific program I wanted to study	21%	28%
Close to home/near my home	16%	<b>26%<sup>1</sup></b>
High quality programs	<b>18%<sup>2</sup></b>	8%
School had a good reputation	13%	10%
Variety of programs offered	11%	10%
Cost/affordability	10%	9%
Had scholarship/financial aid opportunities	7%	7%
Nice campus atmosphere/pretty	6%	6%
Size of the campus (unspecified)	3%	3%
Small school	1%	3%
Religious institution	2%	2%
High quality faculty	3%	1%
Big city/urban	2%	2%
Far away from home	1%	2%
Had friends/family attend	1%	2%
Sports	2%	2%

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than Academic Superstars

<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than Solid Performers

apply to school and rate each attribute’s importance again in the enrollment decision, both groups again cited quality of academics but also mentioned financial assistance (Figure 2).

**What sources of information are most influential?**

When considering where to apply to college, Solid Performers were significantly more likely than Academic Superstars to cite *conversations with admissions office representatives, college information sessions, and coaches* as influential sources of information (Table 5).

When it came time to make the enrollment decision (Table 6), Solid Performers again looked to their parents and college staff more often than did their Superstar peers.

**Choice of institutions by type**

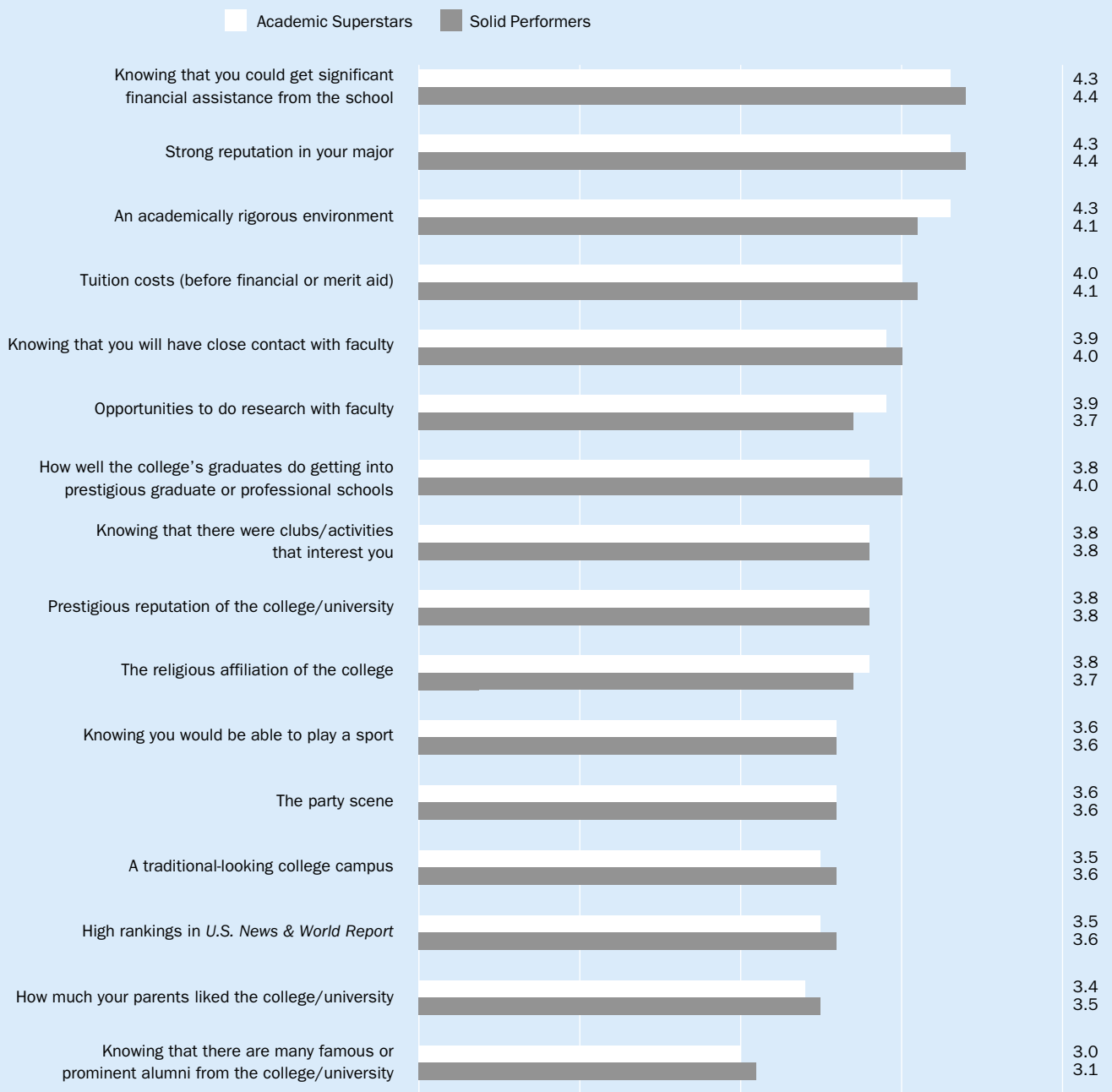
In the end, Solid Performers were more likely to enroll in-state and at a publicly funded institution (Table 7). Academic Superstars were more likely to enroll out-of-state and at a private institution—even if they needed financial aid (see Table 8).

As shown in Table 8, only 37 percent of Academic Superstars with the need for

**FIGURE #2**

### Importance in enrollment decision

Source: Using a 5-point scale, where "5" is very important and "1" is not at all important, how important were each of the following in your decision to enroll at [INSTITUTION ATTENDING]?



**TABLE #5**

**Information sources that played a role in the process**

Source: Now I am going to read a list of information sources that you may or may not have used in determining where to apply. As I read the list, tell me, yes or no, did the information source play a role in determining where you applied.

	<b>Academic Superstars</b> (N=300)	<b>Solid Performers</b> (N=300)
Campus visit	75%	78%
Conversation with currently enrolled student	59%	62%
Recruitment materials	60%	58%
Mother	55%	58%
College/University website	54%	56%
Friends/peers	50%	57%
Father	53%	48%
Conversation with an alumnus	44%	46%
Conversation with someone from admissions office	39%	<b>47%<sup>1</sup></b>
Conversation with faculty member	37%	45%
High school guidance counselor	38%	40%
Other family member	35%	42%
High school teacher	36%	37%
Rankings/guides	38%	32%
College information session at high school	22%	<b>36%<sup>1</sup></b>
Coach	8%	<b>17%<sup>1</sup></b>

<sup>1</sup> Significantly higher than Academic Superstars

**TABLE #6**

**Influence of information sources on the enrollment decision**

Source: Using a 5-point scale, where "5" is very influential and "1" is not at all influential, how influential were each of the following in your decision to enroll at [INSTITUTION ATTENDING]?

	<b>Academic Superstars</b> (N=300)	<b>Solid Performers</b> (N=300)
Campus visit	4.3	4.3
Conversation with currently enrolled student	4.0	4.0
Mother	3.7	<b>3.9<sup>1</sup></b>
Father	3.6	<b>3.9<sup>1</sup></b>
Conversation with faculty member	3.8	3.8
Conversation with an alumnus	3.7	3.7
Conversation with someone from admissions office	3.5	<b>3.7<sup>1</sup></b>
High school teacher	3.5	3.7
A coach	3.5	3.6
Friends/peers	3.4	3.5
Other family member	3.4	3.6
Recruitment materials	3.4	3.5
College/University website	3.3	3.5
High school guidance counselor	3.3	3.4
College information session at high school	3.2	<b>3.5<sup>1</sup></b>
Rankings/guides	3.2	3.4

<sup>1</sup> Significantly higher than Academic Superstars

**TABLE #7**

**Institution attending**

Source: Where do you plan to go to school in the fall?

	<b>Academic Superstars</b> (N=300)	<b>Solid Performers</b> (N=300)
In-state	48%	<b>65%<sup>1</sup></b>
Out-of-state	<b>51%<sup>2</sup></b>	34%
Public	46%	<b>57%<sup>1</sup></b>
Private	<b>52%<sup>2</sup></b>	37%
Community college	1%	<b>5%<sup>1</sup></b>
First choice	49%	<b>59%<sup>1</sup></b>

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than Academic Superstars

<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than Solid Performers

**TABLE #8**

**Institution attending**

Source: Where do you plan to go to school in the fall?

	<b>Academic Superstars</b>		<b>Solid Performers</b>	
	<b>With Need</b> (N=163)	<b>Without Need</b> (N=137)	<b>With Need</b> (N=146)	<b>Without Need</b> (N=104)
In-state	44%	53%	64%	67%
Out-of-state	56%	45%	34%	36%
Public	37%	<b>57%<sup>1</sup></b>	58%	55%
Private	<b>61%<sup>2</sup></b>	40%	39%	34%
Community college	1%	2%	3%	9%
First choice	52%	45%	61%	56%

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than Academic Superstars requiring financial assistance

<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than Academic Superstars not requiring financial assistance

financial aid said they intended to enroll in a publicly funded institution. In contrast, 58 percent of Solid Performers requiring aid planned to do so. These data seem to indicate that Academic Superstars are more willing to take on the greater debt associated with a private institution.

**About early decision**

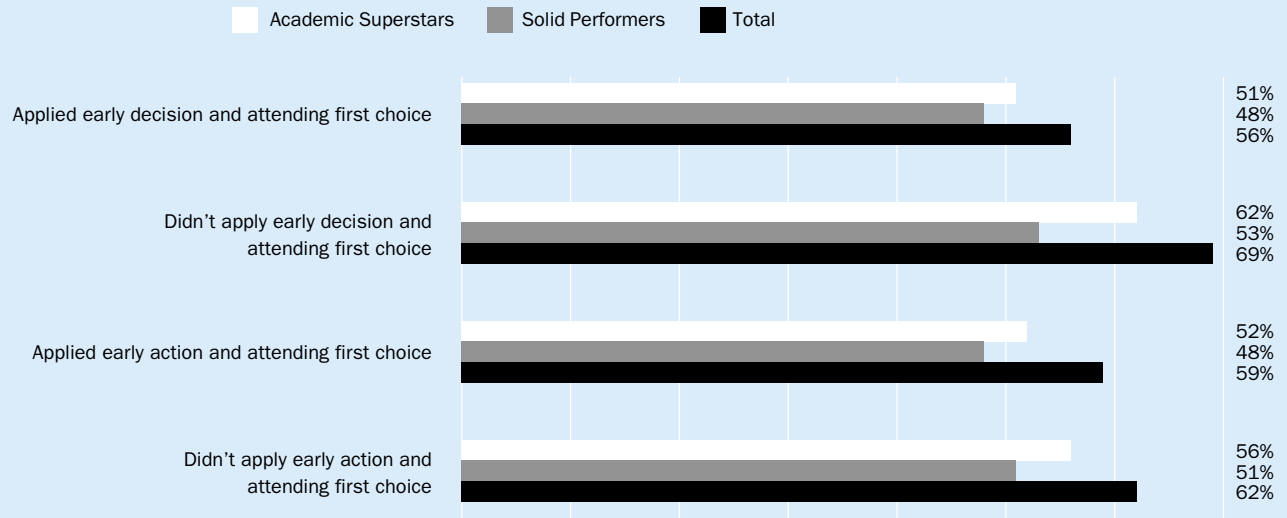
Intuitively, we might think that applying

early would benefit the students with the highest test scores, who are the most competitive, and perhaps most sought after by many colleges and universities. These findings, shown in Figure 3, demonstrate that, while applying early did not help the Academic Superstars gain admission, it did aid the Solid Performers. Close to 70 percent of these Solid Performers who applied early decision are attending their

**FIGURE #3**

**Percentage attending first-choice college**

Sources: What was your first-choice school? Where do you plan to go to school in the fall? Did you apply to any schools early decision? Did you apply to any schools early action?



top choice compared to 56 percent of their academic peers who did not apply early decision. More striking is the finding that many fewer of the Academic Superstars who applied early decision are attending their first-choice institution (53 percent).

**Making sense of the data**

There are notable differences between Academic Superstars and the Solid

Performers. Solid Performers appear to be exemplifying what has been said about Millennials—they do look to authority figures for advice, and they are more heavily focused on their jobs right out of college. The Academic Superstars, on the other hand, appear to be more focused on the college experience itself and how they will benefit from it, but not just in terms of a job.

## Top Students of Color and the College Decision

Providing a learning environment that attracts student diversity is a priority for many higher education institutions today. In our study, we found that high-achieving students of color were much more likely to want to remain closer to family and friends than others, and no more likely to be worried about tuition costs.

Of the 600 students surveyed, 106 (18 percent) were not Caucasian. The single largest ethnic group represented in this minority population was Asians, with 42 individuals. There were also 23 African American students, 20 Hispanic students, 5 Native American students, 12 multi-racial students, and 4 students who chose to classify themselves “other.”

### **What are their values about college?**

When we asked these minority students about their values, we found that they were similar to the Caucasian students in seeking a balance between preparing for a career and broadening their intellectual capabilities (Table 1). Differences were seen in that minority students placed a higher premium on *diverse perspectives*, *being thought of as one of the brightest students*, and having the comfort of *knowing others* when they got to campus.

### **What factors do they consider when they apply?**

When asked, without any prompting, what was most important when considering where to apply, being “close/near to home”

was mentioned most often (Table 2).

[This attribute appeared to be particularly important to the minority female Solid Performers. One in three identified being “close/near to home” as important, but this figure is only based on 40 interviews and therefore should be interpreted with caution.] Asian students were also more likely to consider “specific program I wanted to study,” “had scholarship/financial aid opportunities,” and “had scholarship a college’s overall prestige,” “opportunities to conduct research with faculty,” and “college rankings” when deciding where to apply.

### **Financial aid**

As a whole, these respondents were not

**TABLE #1**

**Values**

Source: Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.

This question used a 5-point scale where “5” meant strongly agree and “1” meant strongly disagree. The figures shown are mean ratings.

	<b>Caucasian</b> (N=492)	<b>Asian</b> (N=42)	<b>Other</b> (N=64)
In terms of academics, college is really about broadening your intellectual capabilities	4.3	4.2	4.4
In terms of academics, college is really about preparing for a career	4.1	4.2	4.1
It's best to go to a college where there are many people who have different backgrounds and points of view from yours	3.9	4.1	<b>4.3<sup>1</sup></b>
It's best to go to a college where most people share your views and interests	2.7	2.8	2.9
It's best to go to a college where you know you will be one of the very best students	2.4	2.7	<b>2.7<sup>1</sup></b>
You'll be happier if you go to a college where you know people from your hometown	2.3	<b>2.9<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>2.8<sup>1</sup></b>
You should go to the college that offers you the most money, even if it's less prestigious than others that accepted you	2.3	2.5	2.5

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than Caucasian students

**TABLE #2**

**Most important factors in deciding where to apply**

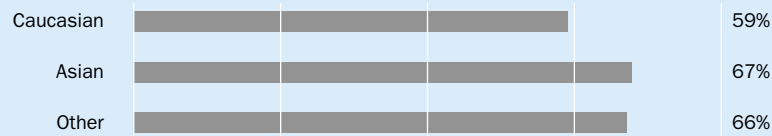
Source: What was most important to you in deciding where to apply?

	<b>Caucasian</b> (N=492)	<b>Asian</b> (N=42)	<b>Other</b> (N=64)
Had a specific program I wanted to study	26%	21%	19%
Close to home/near my home	20%	31%	27%
High-quality programs	13%	12%	11%
School has a good reputation	<b>12%<sup>1</sup></b>	5%	13%
Variety of programs offered	10%	7%	13%
Cost/affordability	9%	10%	16%
Nice campus atmosphere/pretty	6%	2%	6%
Had scholarship/financial aid opportunities	6%	17%	9%
Size of campus (unspecified)	3%	-	-
Small school	3%	-	-
Religious institution	3%	-	-
Friends/family attended	2%	-	-
Big city/urban	2%	-	-
Far away from home	2%	-	2%
Sports	2%	-	2%
High-quality faculty	1%	5%	3%

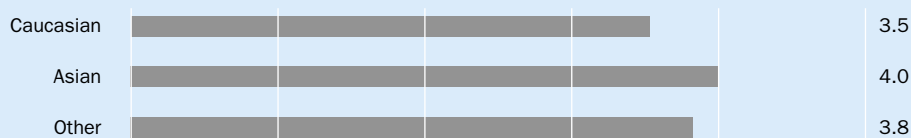
<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than Asian students

**FIGURE #1****Require financial aid**

Source: Will you require need-based financial aid to go to college in the fall?

**FIGURE #2****Number of applications submitted (mean)**

Source: Where did you apply?

**TABLE #3****Information sources used in deciding where to apply**

Source: Tell me, yes or no, did the information source play a role in determining where you applied.

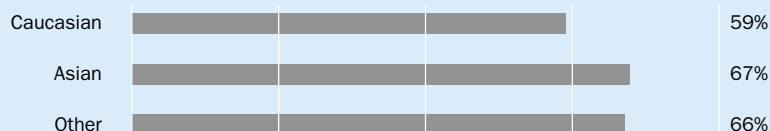
	Caucasian (N=492)	Asian (N=42)	Other (N=64)
A campus visit	76%	67%	66%
A conversation with a currently enrolled student at the college or university	59%	60%	55%
Recruitment materials/brochures/publications sent by the college or university	57%	52%	63%
Your mother	54%	60%	63%
College or university's website	52%	55%	63%
Friends and peers	49%	<b>71%<sup>1</sup></b>	58%
Your father	49%	<b>64%<sup>1,3</sup></b>	41%
A conversation with a graduate of the college or university	44%	43%	41%
A conversation with someone from the admissions office at the college or university	41%	33%	<b>53%<sup>2</sup></b>
A conversation with a faculty member at the college or university	39%	31%	47%
Another family member	36%	36%	44%
Your high school guidance counselor	36%	48%	44%
A teacher	35%	41%	39%
Rankings/guides (like <i>U.S. News &amp; World Report</i> or <i>The Fiske Guide to Colleges</i> )	31%	<b>48%<sup>1</sup></b>	42%
A college information session at your high school	26%	33%	<b>41%<sup>1</sup></b>
A coach	<b>13%<sup>2</sup></b>	5%	8%

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than Caucasian students<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than Asian students<sup>3</sup> Significantly greater than students of an other race or ethnicity

**FIGURE #1**

**Require financial aid**

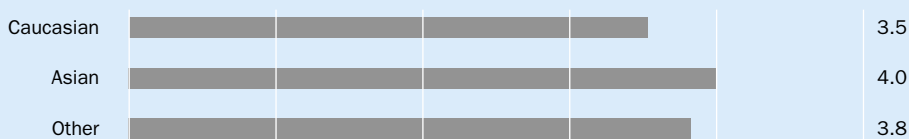
Source: Will you require need-based financial aid to go to college in the fall?



**FIGURE #2**

**Number of applications submitted (mean)**

Source: Where did you apply?



significantly more likely to require need-based financial aid than were others (Figure 1). This theme can be seen throughout the analysis; monetary concerns (tuition cost, financial aid, etc.) were no different for minority students than they were for Caucasian students.

**Application numbers**

These minority students—again, primarily the Asian students—applied to more colleges, on average, than did the Caucasian students (Figure 2).

**What sources of information are most influential?**

When asked where they get the information they used to decide where to enroll, Caucasians were more likely to rely on first-hand experience (*campus visit*) while Asians were a bit more likely to rely on third-party sources such as *friends*,

*rankings or guides*, and *information sessions* (Table 3). *Print materials produced by the institution* and *websites* were equally important to both groups.

**Where do they choose to enroll?**

We noticed some interesting patterns when we compared the factors in deciding where to enroll provided by males and females of different ethnic backgrounds (Table 4). Minority males rated *prominent alumni*, *research opportunities with faculty*, and *graduate/professional school placement rates* as much more important in their enrollment decision than did their Caucasian counterparts. On the other hand, African American females (not Hispanic or Asian American) rated *clubs and activities*, *close contact with faculty*, and *parents' opinion* much more important than did Caucasian females.

**TABLE #3**

**Information sources used in deciding where to apply**

Source: Tell me, yes or no, did the information source play a role in determining where you applied.

	<b>Caucasian</b> (N=492)	<b>Asian</b> (N=42)	<b>Other</b> (N=64)
A campus visit	76%	67%	66%
A conversation with a currently enrolled student at the college or university	59%	60%	55%
Recruitment materials/brochures/publications sent by the college or university	57%	52%	63%
Your mother	54%	60%	63%
College or university's website	52%	55%	63%
Friends and peers	49%	<b>71%<sup>1</sup></b>	58%
Your father	49%	<b>64%<sup>1,3</sup></b>	41%
A conversation with a graduate of the college or university	44%	43%	41%
A conversation with someone from the admissions office at the college or university	41%	33%	<b>53%<sup>2</sup></b>
A conversation with a faculty member at the college or university	39%	31%	47%
Another family member	36%	36%	44%
Your high school guidance counselor	36%	48%	44%
A teacher	35%	41%	39%
Rankings/guides (like <i>U.S. News &amp; World Report</i> or <i>The Fiske Guide to Colleges</i> )	31%	<b>48%<sup>1</sup></b>	42%
A college information session at your high school	26%	33%	<b>41%<sup>1</sup></b>
A coach	<b>13%<sup>2</sup></b>	5%	8%

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than Caucasian students

<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than Asian students

<sup>3</sup> Significantly greater than students of an other race or ethnicity

**Choice of institutions by type**

As shown in Table 5, minority students were more likely than their Caucasian counterparts to attend large (35,000 or more students), publicly funded, and doctorate-granting institutions.

**Making sense of the data**

There is no doubt that this data is skewed by the relatively large proportion of Asians in our minority sample, which prevents us

from making any generalizations about these findings. Nevertheless, we can say that prestige is important, and the factors supporting it play important roles (e.g., prominent alumni, graduate/professional school placement rates). In many ways, the attitudes of these high-performing minority students are quite similar to those of their Caucasian peers. Yet, in the end they were much more likely to land at larger institutions and at publicly funded institutions.

**TABLE #4**

**Factors in deciding where to enroll**

Source: Using a 5-point scale, where “5” is very important and “1” is not at all important, how important were each of the following in your decision to enroll at [INSTITUTION ATTENDING]?

	Caucasian		Asian		African American		Hispanic	
	Male (N=223)	Female (N=269)	Male* (N=22)	Female* (N=20)	Male* (N=8)	Female* (N=15)	Male* (N=9)	Female* (N=11)
Strong reputation in major	4.3	4.4	4.4	4.3	4.2	4.4	4.3	4.3
Knowing you could get significant financial assistance from the school	4.2	4.3	4.2	4.4	4.4	4.7	4.0	4.6
Academically rigorous environment	4.2	4.3	4.3	4.2	3.8	4.2	4.3	4.3
Tuition costs (before financial or merit aid)	3.9	4.1	4.1	4.3	4.0	4.0	4.1	4.0
Knowing that you will have close contact with faculty	3.9	<b>4.0<sup>1</sup></b>	4.0	3.9	4.0	<b>4.6<sup>2,3</sup></b>	4.0	4.4
The religious affiliation of the college	3.8	3.8	4.0	2.5	3.0	4.0	4.0	4.5
The party scene	3.8	3.4	4.0	2.8	3.7	3.5	4.0	3.7
How well the college's graduates do getting into prestigious graduate or professional schools	3.8	3.9	4.1	4.1	4.5	4.1	4.3	4.3
Prestigious reputation of the college/university	3.8	3.8	<b>4.0<sup>3</sup></b>	3.5	3.6	<b>4.2<sup>3</sup></b>	4.2	3.8
Knowing that there were clubs and activities that interest you	3.7	<b>3.9<sup>1</sup></b>	3.9	3.9	3.7	<b>4.4<sup>2</sup></b>	3.6	3.8
Opportunities to do research with faculty	3.7	3.5	3.2	3.3	4.0	3.7	3.5	4.5
A traditional-looking college campus	3.6	<b>3.8<sup>1</sup></b>	4.0	4.2	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0
High ranking in <i>U.S. News &amp; World Report</i>	3.5	3.6	3.3	3.4	2.8	3.7	4.5	3.4
How much your parents liked the college/university	3.4	3.6	3.7	3.7	3.7	4.1	4.2	3.8
Knowing that there are many famous or prominent alumni from the college/university	3.0	2.8	3.6	3.0	5.0	4.0	3.5	3.5

\* Low base size; interpret with extreme caution

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than Caucasian male students

<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than Caucasian female students

<sup>3</sup> Significantly greater than Asian female students

TABLE #5

Where they enrolled

Source: Where do you plan to go to school in the fall?

	Caucasian (N=492)	Asian (N=42)	Other (N=64)
<b>Type of institution</b>			
Associate's institution	3%	–	2%
Bachelor's institution	14%	5%	9%
Master's institution	23%	12%	22%
Research institution	55%	<b>83%<sup>1</sup></b>	67%
Special-focus institution	1%	–	–
Community college	3%	–	2%
Private	47%	31%	36%
Publicly funded	49%	<b>67%<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>63%<sup>1</sup></b>
<b>Size of institution</b>			
Under 5,000 students	<b>22%<sup>2</sup></b>	7%	16%
5,000-14,999	27%	19%	17%
15,000-24,999	23%	29%	23%
25,000-34,999	13%	19%	14%
35,000 or more	14%	<b>30%<sup>1</sup></b>	24%

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than Caucasian students

<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than Asian students

## The First-Generation Student

Research indicates that students whose parents did not attend college are more likely to be unfamiliar with how to apply for college and financial aid than students whose parents did attend college<sup>5</sup>. Our study confirmed this, and we also learned that first-generation students are much more likely to need financial assistance than others.

Of the 600 students surveyed, 76 (13 percent) were first-generation students—students whose mother and father had not attended college. Most of these parents stopped their education after high school, but a few enrolled at a technical or vocational school. The first-generation students were equally prominent in suburban and rural areas. Four in ten of them came from rural areas (Table 1), including 49 percent of males. Only 21 percent of Americans live in rural areas<sup>6</sup>.

### **What do first-generation students value about college?**

When we asked these students about their values, we found that they differed only slightly from the sample of students as a whole (Table 2). These students seek a balance between preparing for a career and broadening their intellectual capabilities (as do the other students), but they also were more likely to agree *you'll be happier if you go to a college*

*where you know people from your hometown and believe you should go where you get the most money.*

### **What factors are important in their decision making?**

As shown in Table 3, the first-generation students were also significantly more likely to require financial aid than their peers. More than eight in ten of the first-generation students required financial

<sup>5</sup> Tym, C. et al (2004, November). *First generation students: A Literature Review*

<sup>6</sup> United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. *Understanding Rural America*

**TABLE #1**

**Urban/rural classification of hometown**

Source: What is your zip code?

	First generation (N= 76)	Non-first generation (N= 513)
Suburban	42%	<b>56%<sup>1</sup></b>
Rural	<b>40%<sup>2</sup></b>	28%
Urban	18%	17%

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than first-generation students

<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than students who are non-first-generation

**TABLE #2**

**Values**

Source: Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

This question used a 5-point scale where “5” meant strongly agree and “1” meant strongly disagree. The figures shown are mean ratings.

	First generation (N= 76)	Non-first generation (N= 513)
In terms of academics, college is really about broadening your intellectual capabilities	4.2	4.3
In terms of academics, college is really about preparing for a career	4.2	4.1
It’s best to go to a college where many people have different backgrounds and points of view from yours	3.8	4.0
It’s best to go to a college where most people share your views and interests	2.8	2.7
You’ll be happier if you go to a college where you know people from your hometown	<b>2.7<sup>1</sup></b>	2.3
It’s best to go to a college where you know you will be one of the very best students	2.6	2.4
You should go to the college that offers you the most money, even if it’s less prestigious than others that accepted you	<b>2.5<sup>1</sup></b>	2.3

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than students who are non-first-generation

**TABLE #3**

**Financial aid need**

Source: Will you require need-based financial aid to go to college in the fall?

	First generation (N= 76)	Non-first generation (N= 513)
Require financial aid	<b>83%<sup>2</sup></b>	57%
Do not require financial aid	17%	<b>43%<sup>1</sup></b>

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than first-generation students

<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than students who are non-first-generation

**TABLE #4**

**Number of applications submitted**

Source: Where did you apply?

	<b>First generation</b> (N= 76)	<b>Non-first-generation</b> (N= 513)
2	36%	28%
3	36%	31%
4	12%	17%
5 or more	17%	24%
Mean	3.2	<b>3.6<sup>1</sup></b>

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than first-generation students

**TABLE #5**

**Institutions applied to, by location**

Source: Where did you apply?

	<b>First generation</b> (N= 76)	<b>Non-first-generation</b> (N= 513)
In and out-of-state	49%	55%
Only in-state	<b>42%<sup>2</sup></b>	28%
Only out-of-state	8%	<b>17%<sup>1</sup></b>

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than first-generation students

<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than students who are non-first-generation

**TABLE #6**

**Information sources that played a role in the application process**

Source: Tell me, yes or no, did ... play a role in your decision to apply to a particular college or university.

	<b>First generation</b> (N= 76)	<b>Non-first-generation</b> (N= 513)
Campus visit	75%	75%
Recruitment materials	57%	57%
College/university website	55%	53%
Conversation with currently enrolled student	54%	60%
Friends/peers	51%	52%
Conversation with admissions officer	47%	41%
High school guidance counselor	45%	37%
Mother	41%	<b>58%<sup>1</sup></b>
Conversation with faculty member	37%	40%
Father	33%	<b>52%<sup>1</sup></b>
Conversation with an alumnus	33%	<b>45%<sup>1</sup></b>
Another family member	33%	38%
Teacher	33%	36%
Information session at high school	28%	28%
Rankings/guides	22%	<b>35%<sup>1</sup></b>
Coach	16%	12%

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than first-generation students

TABLE #7

Where they enrolled

Source: Where do you plan to go to school in the fall?

	First generation (N= 76)	Non-first-generation (N= 513)
<b>Type of institution</b>		
Associate's institution	5%	2%
Bachelor's institution	15%	11%
Master's institution	<b>38%<sup>2</sup></b>	25%
Research institution	41%	<b>61%<sup>1</sup></b>
Special-focus institution	1%	1%
Community college	7%	2%
Private	45%	45%
Publicly funded	49%	52%
<b>Size of institution</b>		
Under 5,000 students	<b>32%<sup>2</sup></b>	19%
5,000-14,999	29%	25%
15,000-24,999	18%	25%
25,000-34,999	12%	14%
35,000 or more	9%	<b>17%<sup>1</sup></b>

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than first-generation students

<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than students who are non-first-generation

aid compared to 57 percent of the students whose parents attended a college or university.

On average, first-generation students applied to fewer colleges and universities (3.2) than their non-first-generation counterparts (3.6), as indicated in Table 4.

Table 5 shows that first-generation students were also significantly more likely to have only applied in-state (42 percent compared to only 28 percent of their counterparts).

**What sources of information are most influential?**

When deciding where to apply, first-

generation students were not as worried about what their parents thought as were their non-first-generation counterparts. They were also less likely to use their *mother or father or conversations with alumni* (Table 6) as a source of information. Perhaps this indicates the absence of a “network” to aid them in their decision.

Rankings such as those prepared by *U.S. News & World Report* were also used less by first-generation students (both as a factor in deciding where to apply and as an information source).

**Where do they choose to enroll?**

In the end, first-generation students are more likely to enroll in a smaller college

**TABLE #8**

**What students like best about their enrollment choice**

Source: What do you like best about [INSTITUTION ATTENDING]?

	<b>First generation</b> (N= 76)	<b>Non-first-generation</b> (N= 513)
Small school	<b>22%<sup>2</sup></b>	8%
Close to home	21%	21%
Nice campus	20%	18%
Had a specific program I wanted to study	17%	<b>25%<sup>1</sup></b>
Student/teacher ratio	<b>11%<sup>2</sup></b>	3%
School has a good reputation	8%	9%
Scholarship/financial aid	8%	4%
Big city/urban	7%	5%
Cost/affordability	7%	4%
Sports	7%	3%
High-quality faculty	7%	3%
Large school	4%	4%
Size of school	4%	3%
High-quality programs	3%	<b>8%<sup>1</sup></b>
Fraternity/sorority	1%	<b>6%<sup>1</sup></b>
Variety of programs offered	1%	3%

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than first-generation students

<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than students who are non-first-generation

**TABLE #9**

**Intended area of study**

Source: Do you know what you are going to major in?

	<b>First generation</b> (N= 76)	<b>Non-first-generation</b> (N= 513)
Medicine/Health science	<b>41%<sup>2</sup></b>	27%
Liberal arts/Social science	18%	21%
Math/Engineering	16%	16%
Business	12%	13%
Other	10%	<b>21%<sup>1</sup></b>
Don't know	5%	6%

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than first-generation students

<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than students who are non-first-generation

or university (Table 7). A disproportionate number decided to enroll in institutions granting associate's, bachelor's, or master's degrees rather than in larger research institutions.

**Reasons for enrollment choice**

First-generation students were significantly more likely than others to prefer a small school and one with a low student/teacher ratio (Table 8). They were much less likely to cite quality of academic programs or the draw of a specific program.

**Choice of majors**

A disproportionate number of first-generation students plan to study medicine or a health science (Table 9).

**Making sense of the data**

First-generation college students appear to seek the care and support of smaller institutions that allow them to tread ground not previously explored by their parents. Without a support system to guide them through the process, they appear to make “safe” choices, staying close to home—though they are less likely to consult their parents for advice in these decisions.

## Leaving Home: Geography and the College Decision

To increase diversity on campus, many colleges and universities have initiated intensive marketing efforts to attract students from across the nation. We found that high-achieving students who are most likely to respond to these campaigns are risk takers who relish academic challenges and new experiences—and who score especially well on SATs/ACT equivalent.

### **Values and risk taking**

Of the 600 students surveyed, almost half (255) decided to leave their home state for college. We asked students about their values—specifically those related to the academic experience—and, by performing cluster analysis, found two distinct groups of students: Risk Takers and Risk Averse students (Table 1).

Risk Takers were significantly more likely to agree that *it's best to go to a college where there are many people that have different backgrounds and points of view from yours; in terms of academics, college is really about preparing for a career; and in terms of academics, college is really about broadening your intellectual capabilities*. In their choice of colleges, Risk Takers were just as likely to enroll out-of-state as they were to enroll in-state. They also scored significantly higher on SATs/ACT equivalent than those identified as Risk Averse.

Risk Averse students, in contrast, were significantly more likely to agree that *it's best to go to a college where you know you will be one of the very best students, it's best to go to a college where most people share your views and interests, and you'll be happier if you go to a college where you know people from your hometown*. Risk Averse students were more likely to enroll in-state (62 percent, compared to 37 percent of students who enrolled out-of-state).

### **What do they consider when applying in-state vs. out-of-state?**

When asked to tell us, in their own words, what was most important in deciding where to apply, those who only applied in-state were more likely to mention “close to home” while those who applied to at least one out-of-state college were more likely to mention “high-quality programs” (Table 3).

There were also some differences between Risk Takers and the Risk Averse.

**TABLE #1**

**Values**

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

This question used a 5-point scale where “5” meant strongly agree and “1” meant strongly disagree. The figures shown are mean ratings.

	Enrolling		Cluster	
	In-State (N=339)	Out-of-State (N=255)	Risk Taker (N=333)	Risk Averse (N=267)
In terms of academics, college is really about broadening your intellectual capabilities	4.2	4.3	<b>4.5<sup>3</sup></b>	4.0
In terms of academics, college is really about preparing for a career	4.1	4.2	<b>4.3<sup>3</sup></b>	4.0
It's best to go to a college where many people have different backgrounds and points of view from yours	3.9	4.20	<b>4.5<sup>3</sup></b>	3.3
It's best to go to a college where most people share your views and interests	2.7	2.7	2.3	<b>3.3<sup>2</sup></b>
You'll be happier if you go to a college where you know people from your hometown	<b>2.7<sup>1</sup></b>	2.1	2.0	<b>2.9<sup>2</sup></b>
It's best to go to a college where you know you will be one of the very best students	<b>2.5<sup>1</sup></b>	2.3	2.2	<b>2.7<sup>2</sup></b>
You should go to the college that offers you the most money, even if it's less prestigious than others that accepted you	2.3	2.2	2.2	2.3

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than students enrolling out-of-state

<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than Risk Takers

<sup>3</sup> Significantly greater than Risk Averse students

**TABLE #2**

**SAT/ACT equivalent score**

Sources: What was your combined SAT 1 score? What was your ACT composite score?

	Enrolling		Cluster	
	In-State (N=339)	Out-of-State (N=255)	Risk Taker (N=333)	Risk Averse (N=267)
1150-1199	<b>35%<sup>2</sup></b>	20%	21%	38%
1200-1299	28%	23%	23%	29%
1300-1399	25%	<b>36%<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>37%<sup>3</sup></b>	21%
1400-1499	10%	16%	<b>15%<sup>3</sup></b>	9%
1500+	2%	6%	4%	3%
MEAN	1279	<b>1316<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>1312<sup>3</sup></b>	1273

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than students enrolling in-state

<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than students enrolling out-of-state

<sup>3</sup> Significantly greater than Risk Averse students

**TABLE #3**

**Most important factor in deciding where to apply (top mentions)**

Source: What was most important to you in deciding where to apply?

	Applied		Cluster	
	Only In-State (N=182)	Out-of-State (N=418)	Risk Taker (N=333)	Risk Averse (N=267)
Close to home/near my home	<b>32%<sup>2</sup></b>	17%	18%	<b>25%<sup>3</sup></b>
Had a specific program I wanted to study	25%	24%	26%	23%
Cost/affordability	11%	9%	8%	12%
College had a good reputation	10%	12%	<b>15%<sup>4</sup></b>	8%
Variety of programs offered	10%	11%	11%	9%
Had scholarship/financial aid opportunities	9%	6%	<b>9%<sup>4</sup></b>	4%
High-quality programs	7%	<b>15%<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>15%<sup>4</sup></b>	10%

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than students who only applied in-state

<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than students who applied out-of-state

<sup>3</sup> Significantly greater than Risk Takers

<sup>4</sup> Significantly greater than Risk Averse students

**TABLE #4**

**Factors that played a role in decision to apply**

Source: Tell me, yes or no, did ... play a role in your decision to apply to a particular college or university.

	Applied		Cluster	
	Only In-State (N=182)	Out-of-State (N=418)	Risk Taker (N=333)	Risk Averse (N=267)
Strong reputation in major	85%	83%	<b>87%<sup>3</sup></b>	79%
An academically rigorous environment	81%	<b>89%<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>90%<sup>3</sup></b>	80%
Prestigious reputation of the college/university	73%	74%	76%	71%
Knowing that there were clubs/activities that interest you	71%	77%	<b>81%<sup>3</sup></b>	68%
Knowing that you will have close contact with faculty	68%	73%	<b>77%<sup>3</sup></b>	64%
Tuition costs (before financial or merit aid)	65%	59%	55%	<b>68%<sup>2</sup></b>
How well the college's graduates do getting into prestigious graduate or professional colleges	64%	64%	<b>68%<sup>3</sup></b>	59%
Knowing that you could get significant financial assistance from the college	59%	66%	62%	66%
Opportunities to do research with faculty	50%	52%	<b>58%<sup>3</sup></b>	44%
Traditional-looking college campus	45%	48%	49%	45%
How much your parents liked the college/university	44%	48%	49%	43%
High rankings in <i>U.S. News &amp; World Report</i>	35%	<b>50%<sup>1</sup></b>	49%	41%
Knowing you would be able to play a sport	20%	23%	22%	22%
The religious affiliation of the college	16%	21%	18%	22%
The party scene	16%	18%	18%	16%
Knowing that there are many famous or prominent alumni from the college/university	12%	15%	14%	14%

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than students who applied only in-state

<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than Risk Takers

<sup>3</sup> Significantly greater than Risk Averse students

**TABLE #5**

**Information sources that played a role in decision of where to apply**

Source: Tell me, yes or no, did the information source play a role in determining where you applied.

	Applied		Cluster	
	Only In-State (N=182)	Out-of-State (N=418)	Risk Taker (N=333)	Risk Averse (N=267)
A campus visit	70%	76%	<b>81%</b> <sup>3</sup>	66%
A conversation with a currently enrolled student at the college or university	58%	59%	60%	57%
Friends and peers	57%	50%	49%	55%
Recruitment materials/brochures/publications sent by the college or university	55%	58%	<b>63%</b> <sup>3</sup>	51%
Your mother	53%	56%	57%	52%
College or university's website	50%	56%	<b>58%</b> <sup>3</sup>	48%
Your father	49%	49%	<b>53%</b> <sup>3</sup>	44%
A conversation with a graduate of the college or university	45%	43%	46%	41%
A conversation with a faculty member at the college or university	45%	37%	42%	36%
Your high school guidance counselor	42%	36%	38%	37%
Another family member	41%	35%	39%	35%
A conversation with someone from the admissions office at the college or university	40%	43%	45%	38%
A college information session at your high school	<b>37%</b> <sup>2</sup>	24%	26%	30%
A teacher	34%	36%	<b>40%</b> <sup>3</sup>	30%
Rankings/guides ( <i>U.S. News &amp; World Reports, Fiske Guide to Colleges</i> )	21%	<b>39%</b> <sup>1</sup>	<b>39%</b> <sup>3</sup>	27%
A coach	12%	12%	12%	12%

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than students who applied only in-state

<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than students who applied out-of-state

<sup>3</sup> Significantly greater than Risk Averse students

Risk Takers were more likely to mention “high-quality programs,” “college had good reputation,” or “scholarship/financial aid opportunities” as most important in deciding where they applied. Risk Averse students were more likely to mention “close to home/near home” as most important in deciding where to apply.

When presented with a list of 16 factors known to play a role in the application decision, we found that *U.S. News &*

*World Report rankings* and *academically rigorous environment* played a bigger role in decisions to apply to colleges for students going out-of-state (Table 4).

Risk Takers were more likely to claim that many considerations played a role in their decision to apply to a particular college or university:

- *Academically rigorous environment*
- *Strong reputation in major*
- *Knowing that there were clubs and*

*activities that interest you*

- *Knowing that you will have close contact with faculty*
- *Opportunities to do research with faculty*
- *How well the college's graduates do getting into prestigious graduate or professional schools*

Risk Averse students also viewed these as important factors, but they were significantly more likely to mention *tuition costs* as a critical application factor.

#### **What sources of information are most influential?**

Students who applied to at least one out-of-state college were significantly more likely to cite *rankings or guide books* as sources of information (Table 5), while those enrolling only in-state more likely mentioned *information sessions at their high school*.

Risk Takers were more likely to rely on *fathers, rankings/guides, campus visit, college websites, college brochures, and teachers* to decide where to apply. Risk Averse students, meanwhile, rated their *friends* as more influential in deciding where to apply.

#### **Geography and choice**

The type of community (urban, suburban,

or rural) that students grew up in influenced their application behavior (Table 6).

Students living in rural areas applied to fewer colleges, were more likely to require financial aid, were less likely to attend a private college, and in the end were less likely to enroll out-of-state. Those from the suburbs were less likely to enroll in-state. As a matter of fact, close to two-thirds of all suburban students enrolled out-of-state. However, these same students were less likely than others to enroll at their first choice institution.

#### **Northeast vs. the nation**

When we analyzed the data by region, we noticed that students from the Northeast were different from those in other parts of the country. Students from this region applied to more colleges and were more likely to enroll out-of-state (Table 7).

We then looked at the Northeast's two geographic components—New England and the Mid-Atlantic—and found that New Englanders, two-thirds of whom attended a private college or university, were more likely to require financial aid (Table 7).

#### **Area of study and choice**

Area of study also played a role in where some students decided to enroll (Table 8). Survey respondents who planned to study medicine and/or the physical sciences

**TABLE #6**

**Academic profile of students from different areas**

Sources: What was your combined SAT I score? What was your ACT composite score? Will you require need-based financial aid to go to college in the fall? Where do you plan to go to school in the fall?

	Type of area reside in		
	Urban (N=105)	Suburban (N=323)	Rural (N=172)
Mean SAT score (or ACT equivalent)	1273	<b>1306<sup>1</sup></b>	1286
Require financial aid	60%	56%	<b>67%<sup>2</sup></b>
Number of institutions applied to (mean)	<b>3.7<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>3.8<sup>3</sup></b>	3.2
<b>Enrolling...</b>			
In-state	59%	49%	<b>69%<sup>2</sup></b>
Out-of-state	38%	<b>50%<sup>1,3</sup></b>	31%
<b>Attending...</b>			
First-choice institution	<b>61%<sup>2</sup></b>	49%	<b>59%<sup>2</sup></b>
Private institution	<b>48%<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>49%<sup>3</sup></b>	35%
Publicly funded institution	46%	48%	<b>62%<sup>1</sup></b>
Community college	4%	3%	3%

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than students from an urban area

<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than students from a suburban area

<sup>3</sup> Significantly greater than students from a rural area

**TABLE #7**

**Academic profile of Northeasterners**

Sources: What was your combined SAT I score? What was your ACT composite score? Will you require need-based financial aid to go to college in the fall? Where do you plan to go to school in the fall?

	Northeast			Outside of the Northeast
	Total (N=240)	New England (N=120)	Mid Atlantic (N=120)	Total (N=360)
Mean SAT score (or ACT equivalent)	1302	1301	1302	1290
Require financial aid	64%	<b>73%<sup>3,4</sup></b>	56%	57%
Number of institutions applied to (mean)	<b>3.9<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>4.0<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>3.8<sup>4</sup></b>	3.4
<b>Enrolling...</b>				
In-state	45%	42%	49%	<b>64%<sup>1,2,3</sup></b>
Out-of-state	<b>55%<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>58%<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>49%<sup>4</sup></b>	35%
<b>Attending...</b>				
Private institution	<b>58%<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>67%<sup>3,4</sup></b>	<b>48%<sup>4</sup></b>	36%
Publicly funded institution	40%	32%	48%	<b>60%<sup>1,2,3</sup></b>
Community college	2%	1%	3%	<b>4%<sup>2</sup></b>

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than students from the Northeast

<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than students from New England

<sup>3</sup> Significantly greater than students from the Mid-Atlantic

<sup>4</sup> Significantly greater than students from outside of the Northeast

**TABLE #8**

**Institution enrolling, by area of study**

Where do you plan to go to school in the fall?

	Area of Study					
	Medicine/ Physical Sciences (N=174)	Liberal Arts/ Social Sciences (N=125)	Math/ Engineering (N=97)	Business (N=76)	Other (N=118)	Undecided (N=40)
In-state	<b>70%</b> <sup>2,3,4,5,6</sup>	44%	54%	54%	54%	53%
Out-of-state	30%	<b>56%</b> <sup>1,5</sup>	<b>44%</b> <sup>1</sup>	<b>45%</b> <sup>1</sup>	<b>43%</b> <sup>1</sup>	<b>47%</b> <sup>1</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than respondents planning to study medicine or a physical science
- <sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than respondents planning to study liberal arts or a social science
- <sup>3</sup> Significantly greater than respondents planning to study math or engineering
- <sup>4</sup> Significantly greater than respondents planning to study business
- <sup>5</sup> Significantly greater than respondents planning to study another subject
- <sup>6</sup> Significantly greater than respondents undecided about their area of study

**TABLE #9**

**Institution enrolling, by enrollment size**

Where do you plan to go to school in the fall?

	Number of students enrolled					
	Under 5,000 (N=123)	5,000- 9,999 (N=79)	10,000- 14,999 (N=70)	15,000- 24,999 (N=141)	25,000- 34,999 (N=82)	35,000 or more (N=98)
In-state	50%	42%	<b>60%</b> <sup>2</sup>	<b>57%</b> <sup>2</sup>	<b>65%</b> <sup>1,2</sup>	<b>69%</b> <sup>1,2</sup>
Out-of-state	<b>50%</b> <sup>5,6</sup>	<b>58%</b> <sup>3,4,5,6</sup>	40%	43%	35%	31%

- <sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than respondents enrolling at an institution with fewer than 5,000 students
- <sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than respondents enrolling at an institution with 5,000-9,999 students
- <sup>3</sup> Significantly greater than respondents enrolling at an institution with 10,000-14,999 students
- <sup>4</sup> Significantly greater than respondents enrolling at an institution with 15,000-24,999 students
- <sup>5</sup> Significantly greater than respondents enrolling at an institution with 25,000-34,999 students
- <sup>6</sup> Significantly greater than respondents enrolling at an institution with 35,000 or more students

were most likely to enroll in-state. Those who planned to study in the liberal arts or social sciences were most likely to enroll out-of-state.

**Size of institution**

Students enrolling at larger institutions were more likely to enroll in-state as were those enrolling in publicly funded institutions (Table 9). Those enrolling at private institutions (often smaller) were more likely

to enroll out-of-state (Tables 9 and 10).

When it came time to make the enrollment decision, respondents enrolling out-of-state were more likely to be influenced by a visit to the campus (Table 11), while in-state students depended on their friends and peers. Once again, Risk Takers aligned with out-of-state students in their choice of information sources, and Risk Averse students with in-state students.

**TABLE #10**

**Institution enrolling, by type**

Where do you plan to go to school in the fall?

	Type		
	Publicly funded (N= 310)	Private (N=267)	Community College (N=17) **
In-state	<b>75%</b> <sup>2</sup>	36%	<b>77%</b> <sup>2</sup>
Out-of-state	25%	<b>64%</b> <sup>1,3</sup>	23%

\*\* Small base size; interpret with extreme caution

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than students attending a publicly funded institution

<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than students attending a private institution

<sup>3</sup> Significantly greater than students attending a community college

**TABLE #11**

**Influence of information sources in enrolling**

Source: Using a 5-point scale, where “5” is very influential and “1” is not at all influential, how influential were each of the following in your decision to enroll at [INSTITUTION ATTENDING]?

	Enrolling		Cluster	
	In-State (N=339)	Out-of-State (N=255)	Risk Taker (N=333)	Risk Averse (N=267)
A campus visit	4.2	<b>4.5</b> <sup>1</sup>	<b>4.4</b> <sup>4</sup>	4.2
A conversation with a currently enrolled student at the college or university	3.9	4.0	4.0	3.9
Your mother	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.9
Your father	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.8
A conversation with a faculty member at the college or university	3.7	3.9	3.9	3.7
A conversation with a graduate of the college or university	3.7	3.6	3.6	3.8
A conversation with someone from the admissions office at the college or university	3.6	3.6	3.7	3.6
A teacher	3.7	3.5	3.6	3.6
A coach	3.7	3.4	3.6	3.5
Friends and peers	<b>3.6</b> <sup>2</sup>	3.2	3.4	<b>3.6</b> <sup>3</sup>
Another family member	3.5	3.4	3.4	3.6
Recruitment materials/brochures/publications sent by the college or university	3.4	3.5	3.5	3.4
College or university’s website	3.5	3.3	3.4	3.4
Your high school guidance counselor	3.4	3.3	3.5	3.3
A college information session at your high school	3.4	3.3	3.3	3.5
Rankings/guides ( <i>U.S. News &amp; World Reports, Fiske Guide to Colleges</i> )	3.1	3.4	3.3	3.2

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than students enrolling in-state

<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than students enrolling out-of-state

<sup>3</sup> Significantly greater than Risk Takers

<sup>4</sup> Significantly greater than Risk Averse students

**TABLE #12**

**What students liked best about their enrollment choice (unaided)**

Source: What do you like best about [INSTITUTION ATTENDING]?

	Enrolling		Cluster	
	In-State (N=339)	Out-of-State (N=255)	Risk Taker (N=333)	Risk Averse (N=267)
Close to home	<b>27%<sup>2</sup></b>	13%	18%	25%
Had a specific program I wanted to study	25%	24%	24%	25%
Nice campus	20%	17%	19%	17%
Small school	12%	8%	7%	<b>13%<sup>3</sup></b>
College had good reputation	7%	11%	11%	7%
Cost/affordable	5%	4%	4%	5%
Large college	5%	4%	5%	3%
Scholarship/financial aid	4%	4%	4%	4%
High-quality programs	4%	<b>11%<sup>1</sup></b>	9%	5%
Fraternity/sorority	4%	<b>8%<sup>1</sup></b>	6%	6%
Variety of programs offered	4%	3%	3%	3%
Student/teacher ratio	4%	4%	4%	4%
Sports	3%	4%	4%	3%
Friends/family attended	3%	2%	1%	<b>4%<sup>3</sup></b>
High-quality faculty	3%	3%	3%	3%
Big city/urban	3%	<b>8%<sup>1</sup></b>	6%	3%

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than students enrolling in-state

<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than students enrolling out-of-state

<sup>3</sup> Significantly greater than Risk Takers

**TABLE #13**

**What students liked best about location of institution attending (top mentions)**

Source: What do you like best about the location of [INSTITUTION ATTENDING]?

	Enrolling		Cluster	
	In-State (N=339)	Out-of-State (N=255)	Risk Taker (N=333)	Risk Averse (N=267)
Close to home	<b>49%<sup>2</sup></b>	15%	30%	<b>41%<sup>3</sup></b>
Urban setting	14%	<b>28%<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>26%<sup>4</sup></b>	13%
Suburban setting	9%	12%	<b>13%<sup>4</sup></b>	7%
Rural setting	7%	11%	8%	5%

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than students enrolling in-state

<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than students enrolling out-of-state

<sup>3</sup> Significantly greater than Risk Takers

<sup>4</sup> Significantly greater than Risk Averse students

**TABLE #14**

**What would you have done differently (top mentions)**

Source: Now that you have made your decision, is there anything you would have done differently in your college application and decision-making process?

	Enrolling		Cluster	
	In-State (N=339)	Out-of-State (N=255)	Risk Taker (N=333)	Risk Averse (N=267)
Started applying earlier	24%	23%	23%	23%
Applied to more colleges	<b>21%<sup>2</sup></b>	12%	18%	16%
Research more scholarship opportunities	7%	7%	8%	7%
Research more about the colleges I applied to	5%	6%	5%	6%
Visited more colleges	5%	3%	6%	3%
Applied to fewer colleges	2%	<b>6%<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>5%<sup>4</sup></b>	2%
Applied to different colleges	1%	<b>3%<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>3%<sup>4</sup></b>	<1%
Nothing	37%	41%	35%	<b>43%<sup>3</sup></b>

<sup>1</sup> Significantly greater than students enrolling in-state  
<sup>2</sup> Significantly greater than students enrolling out-of-state  
<sup>3</sup> Significantly greater than Risk Takers  
<sup>4</sup> Significantly greater than Risk Averse students

**What they liked about their college choice**

When asked, unaided, what they liked most about their choice of schools, out-of-state students were significantly more likely to mention high-quality programs and the presence of a fraternity or sorority. In-state students were significantly more likely to cite “close to home” as their reason for liking their college (Table 12). Risk Averse students were significantly more likely to mention that they liked their choice of a smaller school and one where family and friends had attended.

**The attraction of an urban setting**

Among top mentions, Risk Takers and those who applied to at least one out-of-state college were more likely to mention “urban setting” as a positive attribute for their new college (Table 13). In-state

and Risk Averse students were pleased to be “close to home.”

**Do they have any regrets?**

An interesting finding, shown in Table 14, was when asked, in hindsight, if they would have done anything different, respondents enrolling in-state were significantly more likely to say they would have applied to more colleges.

**Making sense of the data**

There is a tug of war going on among many institutions of higher education today. In order to prevent “brain drain,” states—and the institutions within them—work very hard to keep their best students from leaving. Some even offer attractive financial aid incentives to keep them in-state. Other states, often where the high school age population is declining, work hard to

attract academically motivated students—especially those interested in the sciences and technological fields.

This research suggests that states have the opportunity to keep high-ability students by maintaining strong academic programs at their public institutions, which many students prefer because they are close to home and affordable. In states with declining graduation rates—a phenomenon occurring throughout the Upper Midwest and Northeast—both public and private institutions must seek ways to attract Risk Takers drawn to new experiences, high quality academics, and the opportunity to continue to learn and succeed after graduation.



## A research white paper

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