

College Bound

ISSUES & TRENDS FOR THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS ADVISOR

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Admissions Watch

Columbia Fields Slightly Fewer ED Apps.

According to the *Columbia Spectator*, Columbia C. and Columbia's School of Engineering and Applied Science attracted 5,872 Early Decision applications for its Class of 2029, 2.28 percent fewer than last cycle. As with other Ivy League schools, Columbia did not release data on how many students were admitted early. Columbia is expected to release those statistics in late March or early April.

However, statistics on the number of minorities admitted last year became available. That was the first class admitted after the U.S. Supreme Court ruling on affirmative action. The number of African American first-year students fell by eight percentage points from 20 percent to 12 percent of the Class of 2028. The number of Asian American and Pacific Islander first-year students rose from 30 to 39 percent.

Fairfield U. Admissions Officers "Have Never Been Busier."

Applications to Fairfield U. in Connecticut topped 21,200 for its Class of 2029, up 15 percent over last year. Early Action applications totaled 15,040. About 28 percent of those students were accepted. Admitted EA students posted a 3.95 GPA in high school. While Fairfield remains test optional, 41 percent of students submitted their scores, with the middle 50 percent of SAT scores falling between 1320 and 1420.

Even though the number of applicants has increased, Corry Unis, vice president for enrollment management, told *The Fairfield Mirror*, "The admissions process hasn't really changed, the quality of applications continues to improve and interest in early decision plans to attend Fairfield is on the rise. Our team of admissions counselors have never been busier!"

George Washington U. Admits 11 Percent EA.

George Washington U. in Washington D.C. attracted 8,254 Early Action applications for its Class of 2029, and admitted 917 of them,

more than last year.

NYU Tops 120,000 Apps. New York U., founded in 1831, received more than 120,000 applications for its Class of 2029, 3 percent more than last year and a school record. Approximately 25,000 of those applications were Early Decision. However, only about 6,500 students will be accepted for next fall's first-year classes in New York, Abu Dhabi and Shanghai. NYU also has programs in 13 other global sites, including London, Paris, Florence, Tel Aviv, Buenos Aires and Accra, plus domestic sites in Washington D.C., Los Angeles and Tulsa.

"NYU's global presence, our wide range of academic offerings, our commitment to excellence and rigor and our efforts at affordability are drawing applicants who want to come to NYU to build bridges to other students from across the U.S. and around the world," said MJ Knoll-Finn, senior vice president of enrollment management and student success.

Northwestern ED Apps Grew by 15 Percent.

Northwestern U., on the northern edge of Chicago along Lake Michigan, received more than 6,000 Early Decision applications for its Class of 2029, 15.5 percent more than the previous year. NU admitted about 20 percent of them. These ED admits account for 55 percent of the expected class of 2,100 students. NU also admitted 140 QuestBridge Scholars. First-generation students account for 16 percent of the new class.

This year's pool of ED applicants included more international students and more from rural areas of the U.S., Liz Kinsley, dean of undergraduate admission, informed *The Daily Northwestern*.

NU's Class of 2028 included 40 percent more students from rural areas and small towns than the previous class. Last year's class

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Financial Matters

Financial Aid To Continue Uninterrupted.

Whatever the outcome of legal challenges to the U.S. Office of Management and Budget's order for a temporary freeze on all federal grants and loans, the U.S. Dept. of Ed assured students, colleges and universities that the order did not apply to Pell Grants and other federal student aid. They will continue uninterrupted. CB will keep you posted.

Debt Forgiveness Era Ends.

After both a U.S. Supreme Court ruling outlawing the Biden Administration's massive across-the-board student debt forgiveness efforts (Congress has to do that by law), and the Inauguration of the Trump Administration that opposes student debt relief, the era of student debt forgiveness has officially come to an end.

The U.S. Dept. of Ed formally announced an end to debt forgiveness on January 3. Students with federal debt will have to take advantage of existing programs, particularly those that tie repayment to their income levels.

Final Biden Debt Forgiveness Actions.

Before leaving office though, the Biden Administration cancelled debt for a final 8,600 student borrowers. The Dept of Ed approved more than \$600 million in debt relief for 4,550 borrowers in the Income-Based Repayment Plan and another 4,100 individual borrowers with defense loans.

In total, the Biden administration left office having approved a cumulative \$188.8 billion in targeted debt forgiveness for 5.3 million borrowers through 33 executive actions, according to DOE. The department also announced

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ADMISSIONS WATCH

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also included more students from historically underrepresented ethnic groups, despite the Supreme Court's ruling against using affirmative action in admissions.

Penn ED Apps Soar. The U. of Pennsylvania fielded over 9,500 Early Decision applications for its Class of 2029, about 1,000 more than last cycle. Like several other Ivy League schools, Penn chose not to disclose its acceptance rate for Early Decision. Last year, Penn attracted a total of 65,236 applicants and admitted 3,508 of them.

"We are thrilled to welcome our newest Quakers, applaud their many accomplishments and eagerly anticipate the arrival of the rest of their classmates in the spring," Whitney Soule, vice provost and dean of admissions, told *The Daily Pennsylvanian*. "Hurrah, hurrah for the Penn Class of 2029!"

Santa Clara Admits 7.5 Percent ED. Santa Clara U. in California attracted a record-high 12,100 Early Decision I applications for its Class of 2029, 7 percent more than last cycle. Santa Clara, which boasts of its rigorous academics, small classes, Jesuit mission and values and Silicon Valley connections, admitted 7.5 percent of them. Admitted students posted a 3.86 high school GPA. International students accounted for 6 percent of those admitted. Ten of the new students are Posse LA Scholars. About 47 percent of the admitted students hail from outside of California.

"This talented group represents an array of lived experiences, achievements and aspirations, and embody the values of curiosity, community and leadership that define SCU," said Francine Davis, dean of undergraduate admission.

With a 106-acre campus in the heart of Silicon Valley, Santa Clara U., founded in 1851, is rated by PayScale in the top 1 percent of universities with the highest-paid graduates.

Tufts Apps Top 33,000. Tufts U. in Massachusetts attracted 33,400 applications to its Class of 2029, a slight decline from last year, according to JT Duck, dean of admissions. However, applications to its School of Engineering were up to 7,600, 100 over the previous cycle. Applications from first-generation students climbed by 700, to 7,700.

International students account for 26 percent of this year's pool, with the most applications coming from China, India, Ghana, South Korea, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Nigeria, Brazil, Turkey and Ethiopia.

"Tufts' admissions staff still finds that Tufts resonates with students looking not only

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ENROLLMENT TRENDS

On Second Look, Freshman Enrollment Actually Increased. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center found a methodological error in its initial calculations of first-year enrollment this past October. On January 13, NSCRC said that it misidentified certain students as dual-enrolled high school students rather than freshmen.

"As a result, the number of freshmen was undercounted" at the 50 percent of higher education institutions NSCRC surveyed. "We deeply regret this error and are conducting a thorough review to understand the root cause and implement measures to prevent such occurrences in the future."

On January 23, NSCRC released corrected calculations. It found that freshman enrollment in Fall 2024 actually rose by 5.5 percent, and was strongest at community colleges, where it grew by 7.1 percent.

Additionally, NSCRC noted that total post-secondary enrollment was up 4.5 percent, 817,000 students. "Undergraduate enrollment neared 16 million students, just one percent below 2019 levels, while graduate enrollment grew by 3.3 percent to 3.2 million students."

Undergraduate certificate program enrollment grew for the fourth consecutive year, up 9.9 percent in Fall 2024 or 101,000 students. Certificate enrollment is now up 28.5 percent above 2019 levels. Enrollment in bachelor's and associate degree programs also increased by 2.9 percent and 6.3 percent respectively, but remain below 2019 levels.

Public two-year institutions with high vocational program focus saw double-digit growth for the second year in a row, 13.6 percent. These schools now encompass 19.5 percent of public two-year enrollment, up from 15.3 percent in 2019."

U. of California Enrollment Up 1.2 Percent. Undergraduate enrollment in the U. of California System increased by 1.2 percent in Fall 2024, to a total of 236,070 students. California residents accounted for 84.2 percent compared to 83.5 percent a year earlier. African American enrollment was up by 4.6 percent across UC's 10 campuses, while Latino enrollment increased 3.1 percent and American Indian student enrollment jumped by 12.9 percent. Some 18,653 California community college students transferred into the UC System, up 4.5 percent from last year. The admit rate at the exclusive UC Berkeley was 11 percent, at UCLA 9 percent.

Grand Canyon's 75th Year Marked with Record Enrollment. Grand Canyon U. in Phoenix, "the largest Christian university in

the country," marked its 75th Anniversary with about 25,000 students enrolled in its ground locations and 100,000 enrolled online. GCU's expansion has been driven by focus on high-growth fields such as engineering, computer science, cybersecurity and business, as well as areas of national workforce shortage such as teaching, nursing, counseling and some trade industries.

GCU has expanded its palm tree-lined campus from 100 to over 300 acres, and added 72 new buildings and major renovations, while freezing tuition at its Phoenix campus for 16 straight years and limiting tuition increases online to 1 percent a year. Grand Canyon U. says it graduates about 30,000 students per year.

Minnesota Enrollment Gains. Minnesota colleges posted undergraduate enrollment gains in Fall 2024 after years of decline, according to a recent *Minneapolis Star* report. Enrollment was up 8 percent in Minnesota State institutions and up 2 percent among Minnesota Private College Council schools. Freshman enrollment soared by 12 percent at Minnesota State, 7 percent in the U. of Minnesota system and 3 percent at the state's private colleges. College officials said that new scholarships such as the North Star Promise and more student support that led to higher retention rates were likely reasons for the increases.

However, the number of Minneapolis 18-year-olds who matriculated in-state and at out-of-state colleges plunged by 12 percent compared to Fall 2023, according to initial analysis of data by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. But those numbers are being revised, and college administrators told the paper they weren't surprised, given the problems with FAFSA last year. Also, fewer students graduated last year from Minnesota high schools, part of the national demographic dip.

Mississippi Enrollment Up. According to the *Mississippi Business Journal*, Fall 2024 enrollment at the state's eight universities increased by nearly 3,000 students, reaching 79,817. The U. of Mississippi enrolled 27,124 students across its seven campuses, about 11 percent higher than the previous year. Old Miss' first-year class was the largest in school history. Its new students posted an average ACT score of 24.3 and high school GPA of 3.52.

Mississippi State U. was the top destination for in-state high school graduates. MSU's first-year class of 2,000 grew for the third year in a row. Additionally, 1,916 students transferred into MSU. ■

Challenges Ahead

Counselor Burnout. The American School Counselor Association recommends a 250-1 student-to-counselor ratio. But in the 2022-2023 school year, it said the average national ratio was 385-1. Only New Hampshire (199-1) and Vermont (177-1) had caseloads below the recommended average.

Perhaps that's why 76 percent of counselors in the United States said that they experienced burnout within the past four years, according to a survey conducted by Appily.com.

The survey also found that counselors worldwide only spend 35 percent of their time on college admissions counseling, while 20 percent is spent helping students select and schedule courses, 17 percent on counseling personal needs of students, 8 percent on academic testing, 8 percent on teaching, 6 percent on occupational counseling and job placement and 6 percent on non-counseling activities such as lunch duty.

AT COLLEGES

The Risks Facing Colleges. The most recent Top 10 Risks reported by 194 colleges responding to United Educators' annual Top Risks Survey are (in order): Enrollment, Data Security, Operational Pressures, Recruitment and Hiring, Regulatory and Legal Compliance, Facilities and Deferred Maintenance, Student Mental Health, Funding, Public Safety, General Premises Safety, and, tied for 10th, Title IX and Political and Societal Pressures.

To see explanations and strategies of mitigating efforts for each category, go to www.ue.org.

Stop Campus Hazing Act. At the end of last year, President Biden signed the Stop Campus Hazing Act, which requires colleges to twice-a-year collect and publish information about hazing incidents. Hazing will be added to other statistics on public safety that colleges are required to publish under the Clery Act. The new law also requires colleges to offer hazing prevention programs for its students and faculty.

"Spiritual and Mental Health in Higher Education" offers training to mental health counselors and spiritual care providers (college chaplains) who serve students in higher education institutions across Massachusetts. Up to 33 teams from participating schools will be trained annually in four-week sessions before returning to work with students on their own campuses. The program has been piloted at Brandeis and Northeastern universities.

According to a survey conducted by Healthy Minds, more than 60 percent of college students experience at least one mental health challenge during their time on campus.

WITH TESTING

Miami Reinstates Standardized Testing. The U. of Miami will require students who are applying during the 2026 undergrad admissions cycle to submit scores from the SAT or ACT.

"The University's undergraduate admissions counselors will still use a holistic process to review each applicant, carefully considering and contextualizing a student's academic record, extracurricular activities, including community involvement and work, personal statement, and standardized test scores," one admissions officer explained. Recently, Dartmouth C., Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Johns Hopkins U. have reinstated the standardized testing requirement. Meanwhile, Oakland U. in Rochester, Michigan, reaffirmed its test-optional policy for incoming first-year students.

NATIONALLY

The Nation's Report Card for Grades Four and the Eight. NAEP, the National Assessment of Education Progress, recently reported on the progress for Grades 4 and 8 since 2022:

- Average scores increased in mathematics in grade 4, but showed no progress in grade 8;
- The average scores in reading declined in both grades 4 and 8;
- There was no significant change for most states in both subjects and grades;
- The percentage of students who were absent five days or more in both subjects and grades decreased.

Moody's Projections. Moody's Ratings projects a 4 percent revenue growth in higher education this year, with "modest growth in net tuition" and "favorable philanthropy and still supportive state funding." However, it also cited potential problems with cybersecurity threats, climate change, geopolitical tensions, governance concerns, legal issues and changing government policies which could add financial strains.

Moody's managing director also noted, "While the Outlook for overall sector credit conditions is stable, about a third of private colleges and a fifth of the public universities will face more considerable headwinds."

S&P Global Ratings warned that "in the next year, we expect to see further consolidations, and also closures, as operational struggles escalate for small, regional private institutions. We also anticipate seeing more partnerships, particularly in areas that might not be core to a school's mission (for example, utilities, student parking, faculty housing, etc.)." ■

COUNSELOR'S BOOKSHELF

The Times Good University Guide 2025: Where to go and what to study by The Times editor Zoe Thomas, Times Books, ISBN-10 0008679177, \$24.30, "The essential guide to British universities... Objective and authoritative."

Hands-On Career Preparation: Experiential learning to engage students and meet employers' needs; The Chronicle of Higher

Education, \$179; see the Chronicle's online source store.

Postsecondary Success Recognition.

Under former U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardosa's Raising the Bar on College Excellence and Equity program, the Dept. of Ed released information on 200 colleges that are "innovative, affordable and inclusive and

that help students from all backgrounds graduate and find a career."

You can find DOE's top 100 primarily bachelor degree granting institutions with these characteristics at: www.ed.gov/media/document/postsecondary-success-program-eligibility-list-bachelors-institutions-2024.

And for 100 predominantly associate's or certificate granting institutions, see www.ed.gov/media/document/postsecondary-success-program-eligibility-list-associate-certificate-institutions. ■

FINANCIAL

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that it has completed the income-driven repayment account adjustments and that borrowers now will be able to see their updated and accurate income-driven repayment counters when they log into their accounts at www.StudentAid.com.

Finally, DOE announced that it made students who did not complete their programs from certain (mostly for-profit) schools that closed, eligible for "student loan discharge."

LOCALLY SPEAKING

Colby Expands Help For Middle Class Families. Colby C. in Maine announced a new program to cap tuition, room and board expenses "at multiple income levels." An anonymous \$10 million alumnus gift allows Colby to expand its Fair Shot Fund. Students from families earning \$75,000 or less will pay nothing. The Colby Commitment already meets 100 percent of demonstrated need, without loans. The new initiative is aimed at "families on the higher and lower end of the middle-income spectrum...."

Concord's Last Dollar Makes Tuition Free. Concord U. in Athens, West Virginia, makes tuition free for W.V. Pell Grant students with its last dollar CU Free program. "If you are eligible for Pell Grants, you are eligible for a free education at Concord University," said Tammy Brown, chief enrollment management officer. "Concord University is already very affordable, but the CU Free program ensures that every individual seeking a higher education can access it here," Brown added.

The Elms Promise. The C. of Our Lady of the Elms in Springfield, Massachusetts, announced its Elms Promise. It guarantees full tuition to first-year students from families earning \$85,000 or less. Massachusetts students must also be accepted by May 1, post a 3.5 high school GPA and have completed the FAFSA. The Elms Promise is a "last-dollar" scholarship.

"Elms College was founded to empower those students least likely to afford a top-rate college education, with knowledge, skills and values they need to make a lasting impact in the world," said Harry Durnay, president.

St. Olaf's Makes Commitment to Indigenous Student Affordability. St. Olaf C. announced a new financial aid initiative for indigenous students from Minnesota who are members of the federally recognized American Indian Nation or Canadian First Nation.

"The new Indigenous Student Affordability Commitment is an important step toward

turning our land acknowledgment statement into meaningful action," said Chris George, associate vice president and dean of admissions and financial aid.

STATE PROGRAMS

Hawai'i Expands Hawai'i Promise. The Hawai'i Promise, which has shown strong results in academic outcomes for participants at community colleges, has been expanded this year to cover students at three four-year campuses, UH Mānoa, UH Hilo and UH O'ahu. Last year, the program awarded \$5.5 million in scholarships to 3,446 students in seven U. of Hawai'i community colleges.

Michigan's Tuition Program Under-Used. Research by the U. of Michigan's Education Policy Initiative at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy found that even though the state's Tuition Incentive Program provides roughly \$94 million in financial aid to about 32,000 students across the state, many eligible students don't participate. In fact, a third of all Michigan high school students are eligible for assistance, but only 14 percent take advantage of TIP. And only 29 percent of community college students do so.

Why? Researchers cite complexity of the application process, lack of information on eligibility and details, and the hassle and stigma associated with the process. They recommend that the state annually provide a list of all eligible students to participating institutions, especially community colleges, so the program is included in financial aid packages by default.

South Carolina's Tuition Freeze. In an address to the state, South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster said, "This year marks the sixth consecutive year that I will propose that we freeze college tuition for in-state students in exchange for an appropriation to a number of institutions of higher education of \$29.9 million."

For the fourth consecutive year, the governor's budget also includes \$80 million in state lottery funds for needs-based grants "so that every South Carolinian who qualifies for financial aid, as measured by federal Pell Grants, has sufficient state financial assistance to attend any in-state public college, university or technical college."

Illinois Tech Purpose Scholarship. Illinois Institute of Technology offers "a life-changing opportunity for high-achieving students across Illinois." Illinois students who are in the top 10 percent of their class, with a minimum 3.7 GPA, from a family earning \$75,000 or less are eligible. Learn more at admission@iit.edu. ■

Transition Matters

Illinois Transfers Guaranteed. Students who want to transfer from anywhere in the state are now guaranteed admission into any of the U. of Illinois System locations through The U of I Transfer Guarantee, if they meet the campus' requirements.

Students must have earned a minimum of 36 graded, transferable semester hours at the time of their application, attained a minimum GPA of 3.0 in all transferable coursework and satisfy the university's English language proficiency requirement. They are not guaranteed admission to specific colleges or majors.

The U. of Illinois Urbana-Champaign currently educates 35,000 undergraduate students, with a 19:1 student-to-faculty ratio in 150 majors and 11 academic communities.

The U. of Illinois Chicago currently educates 22,000 undergraduate students, with an 18:1 student-to-faculty ratio in 94 majors and 16 academic colleges.

And the U. of Illinois Springfield educates 2,300 undergraduate students with a 12:1 student-to-faculty ratio in 60 programs of study in four academic colleges.

Marist Takes A Step Up. After 95 years, Marist C. in Poughkeepsie, New York, has become Marist University, with 5,000 undergraduate and 1,000 graduate students.

Marist is known for its Liberal Arts, pre-professional training and its highly-rated study abroad programs, including a branch in Florence, Italy.

Miles C. Purchases Birmingham Southern C. Campus. Miles C., a HBCU Liberal Arts school in Fairfield, Alabama, has purchased BSC's 192-acre campus. Miles C. was founded in 1898 by the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.

The National Science Foundation recently announced that Miles will lead a \$3 million collaborative grant with Howard U., Tennessee State U., Morgan State U. and Winston Salem U. to launch a Center for Innovation, Commercialization & Growth. ■

ADMISSIONS

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for academic excellence, but opportunity to grow. Our leadership and civic education, our research opportunities and our interdisciplinary strengths across the Liberal Arts and Engineering continue to attract impressive young people from around the world," said JT Duck. ■

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