



INSIGHT PAPER

An Enrollment Leader's Guide to Yield and Melt Management

Mastering the Post-Admit Phase of Student Recruitment



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Enroll360

Project Director

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Executive Summary

The Report in 6 Conclusions

1

Adverse demographic trends give yield performance outsized importance

Now that many schools can no longer rely on a growing pool of college-goers to shore up their enrollment numbers, attracting a greater share of applicants—and doing an excellent job of converting them—become our main tasks.

2

The “Anxious Generation” is harder to yield and matriculate

Compared to earlier generations, today’s college-goers are less convinced of the value of college, less academically prepared, and more likely to have mental health issues—all of which make converting them more challenging.

3

Make yield a first priority relative to melt

Because the group of admitted students is so much larger than that of committed students, improvements in yield performance deliver commensurately larger downstream enrollment impacts. Make yield your first priority and melt your second priority.

4

Drops in yield rate are no cause for concern—up to a point

Because enrollment growth is profoundly dependent on application and admit growth, some decrease in yield rate is inevitable for most high-performing institutions. The problems start when poor yield practices drive that rate down even further.

5

Yield and melt challenges and opportunities vary by school size

Intensive and highly personalized engagement with admitted students is the surest path to yielding them—an area (perhaps the only area) where small schools have the upper hand relative to their larger counterparts in recruiting students.

6

Marketing and brand management play a key role in yielding students

Yielding students is easier if you’ve built affinity with them throughout their high school years via expertly executed recruitment marketing. A well-managed brand further increases your ability to convert them.

Source: EAB research and analysis.



Understanding Today's Yield and Melt Challenges

PART

1

Defining Yield and Melt

Essential terminology

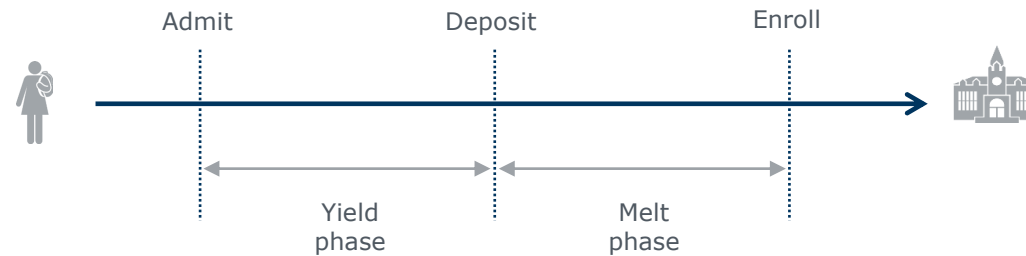
This page defines the terms *yield* and *melt*—a step that will be unnecessary for most readers, but given the crucial importance of the terminology involved, one that we would be remiss in skipping.

As indicated at right, the yield phase is the period of time between when a student is admitted and the time that they deposit or otherwise commit to an institution. The melt phase extends from the time a student commits until they enrol.¹

Variations

The material in this page is something of an oversimplification, and the picture can differ between institutions, if not in the fundamentals, then in the particulars. For example, it is common for two-year institutions to consider the whole period from the time a student is admitted to the time they enroll as the yield phase (there being nothing comparable to a deposit at most such schools). The picture will be similar for four-year institutions whose students tend to wait until the last minute before classes start before committing.

The Yield and Melt Phases Are Defined by Milestones on a Student's Path to Matriculation



Yield and Melt Math

How Yield Rate and Melt Rate Are Calculated

$$\text{Yield rate} = \frac{\text{deposits}}{\text{admits}}$$

$$\text{Melt rate} = \frac{\text{enrollments}}{\text{deposits}}$$

1) Typically, a student is not officially designated as enrolled until they are counted in the census for the year's entering class.

Yielding and Matriculating Students Has Never Been Harder

Five Factors Defining Today's Challenge



An extended yield season

An earlier FAFSA has meant an earlier start to yield season, with no reprieve on the back end, as a growing number of students are depositing/committing well after May 1. This increases the amount of time admission teams must engage the difficult work of yield management and causes it to overlap with other crucial work streams.



An unstable market context

Recent years have seen an increasingly unstable market context (COVID, FAFSA failures, direct admission, executive orders from the White House, etc.). Consequently, the absence of a stable baseline for comparison has made it harder to interpret and predict students' yield behavior.



Student underpreparedness

Students are graduating from high school less academically prepared to succeed in higher education. Many students are fully aware of this fact, and the associated trepidation gives some cold feet with respect to college-going, even after receiving admit offers or depositing. Events such as failing a placement test can exacerbate this.



Families' increased sensitivity to cost

The cost of a student's education often does not really register until they receive their first bill, an occurrence that leads some to pivot to less costly options, such as community college, at the eleventh hour. Factors such as reduced Parent Plus loan availability will likely make this more common.



Students' struggle to persist

Among the things that distinguish today's college-aged students from their predecessors is a reduced ability to persist in the face of obstacles—one of several characteristics of the so-called Anxious Generation. For such students, even slight difficulties encountered in the post-admit phase can cause them to fall off the path to matriculation.

Putting Yield Rate in Context

Crucial background

Given the amount of scrutiny that yield rates tend to get from senior leadership at colleges and universities, and their value as a measure of your team's performance in that important funnel stage, having some sense of where you fall on the spectrum is helpful.

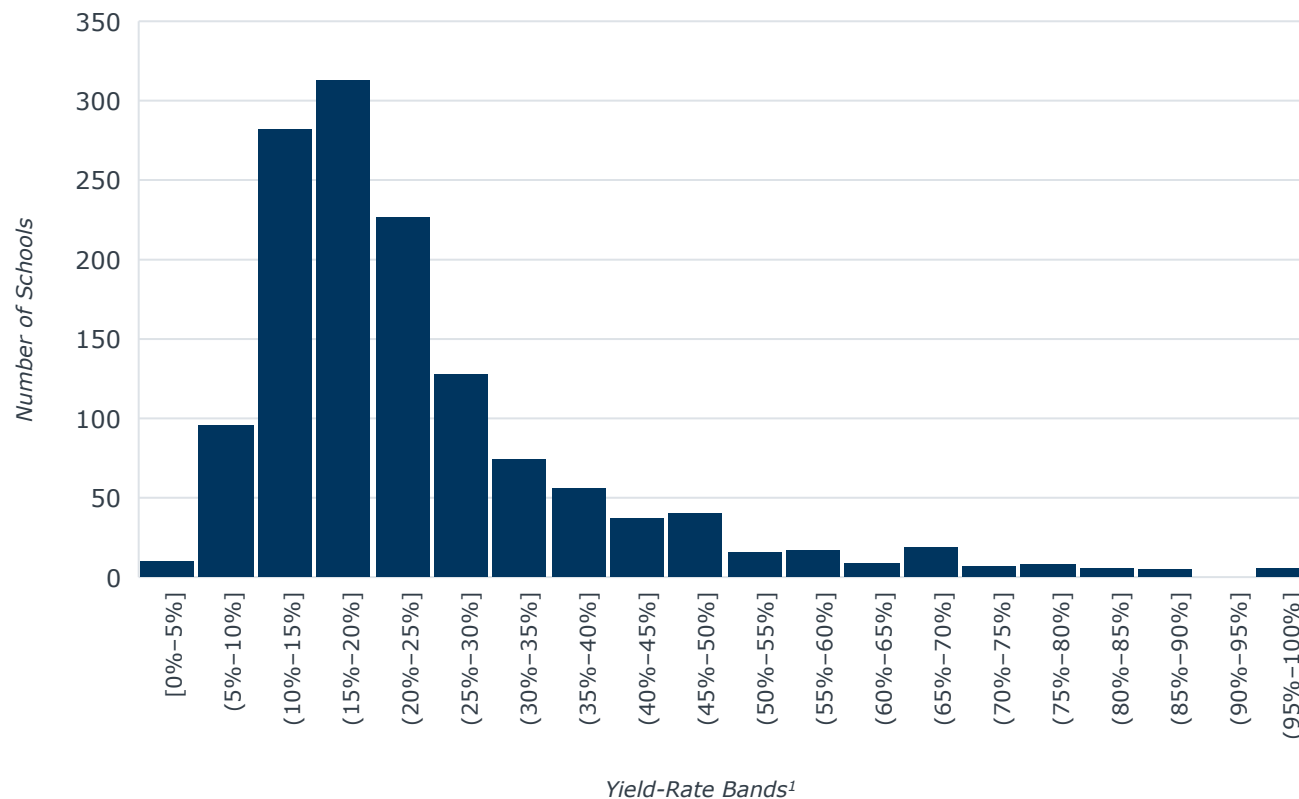
One way of understanding that is shown at right.

The bar chart is a histogram, showing the number of schools that fall into various yield-rate bands. As indicated, the vast majority have rates of 25% or less, with a majority falling in the 10% to 20% range.

Complicating the picture is the fact that a small but significant number of schools have yield rates considerably higher than that—a fact that can cause senior leadership to have unrealistic expectations for their own institutions.

Number of Schools in Each of Various Yield-Rate Bands

Histogram, Competitive-Admission Four-Year Colleges and Universities, United States, Entering Class 2023 (IPEDS)



1) A round bracket means the number is excluded from the range, while a square bracket means it is included.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

The Inexorable Math of Application Growth Versus Yield Rate

More applications per student

Given the contextual factors making it ever more difficult to convert admitted students, it should come as no surprise that many schools are seeing their yield rate drop. That is, however, just part of the story. The other, less troubling factor driving down yield rates is growth in the number of schools students are applying to; between 2017 and 2023 that number increased by 26%.

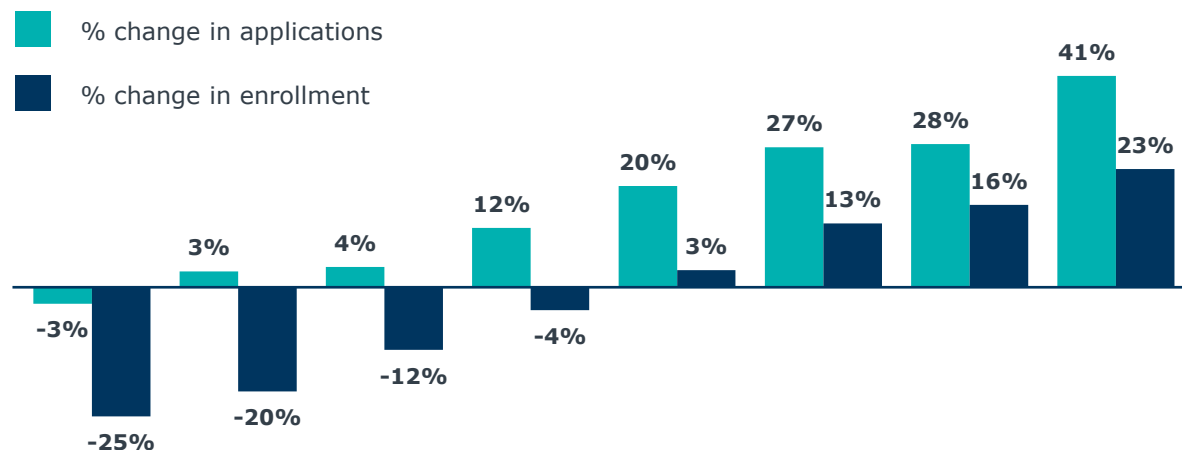
Reduced yield rate unavoidable

That trend is, in turn, attributable to two factors. One is the growing popularity of application aggregators such as the Common App and direct-admission programs, which make it far easier for students to apply to multiple schools. Another is schools' heavier investment in application-generating recruitment marketing programs, spurred on by insights such as the one shown in the bar chart at right—namely that enrollment growth depends on outsized application growth.

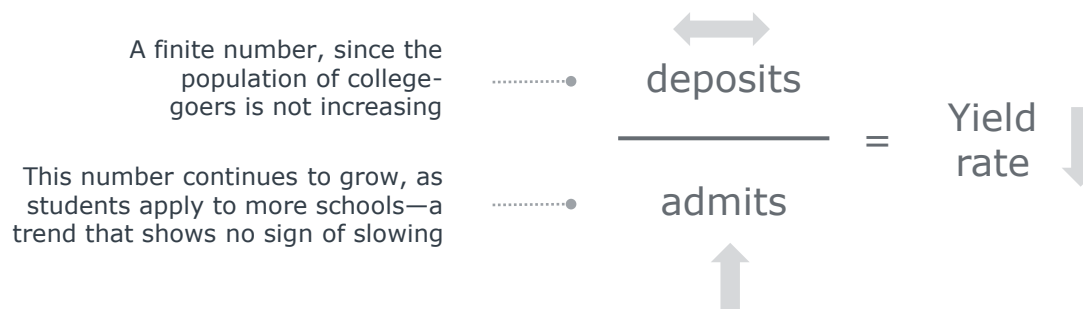
Given that the pool of college-goers is flat or declining nationwide, the math on which yield calculations are based is, unavoidably, showing lower rates with each passing year.

Outsized Application Growth Is a Must in Today's Market

Change in Application Volume and Enrollment, by Enrollment-Growth Decile, Entering Class 2018 to 2023, Competitive Four-Year U.S. Colleges and Universities (IPEDS)



Steady/Increasing Yield Rate Is a Mathematical Impossibility When Considered Across Higher Ed as a Whole



Source: EAB research and analysis.

A Drop in Yield Rate Is Not Necessarily a Cause for Concern

Lower yield ≠ less enrollment

As explained on the preceding page, at least some of the nationwide drop in yield rates reflects a positive underlying trend—namely, growth in applications.

This page offers additional evidence that reductions in yield rate are not necessarily a cause for concern.

As illustrated in the chart, the majority of U.S. colleges and universities that grew enrollment in recent years saw a drop in yield rate, the median proportional decrease being -16%.

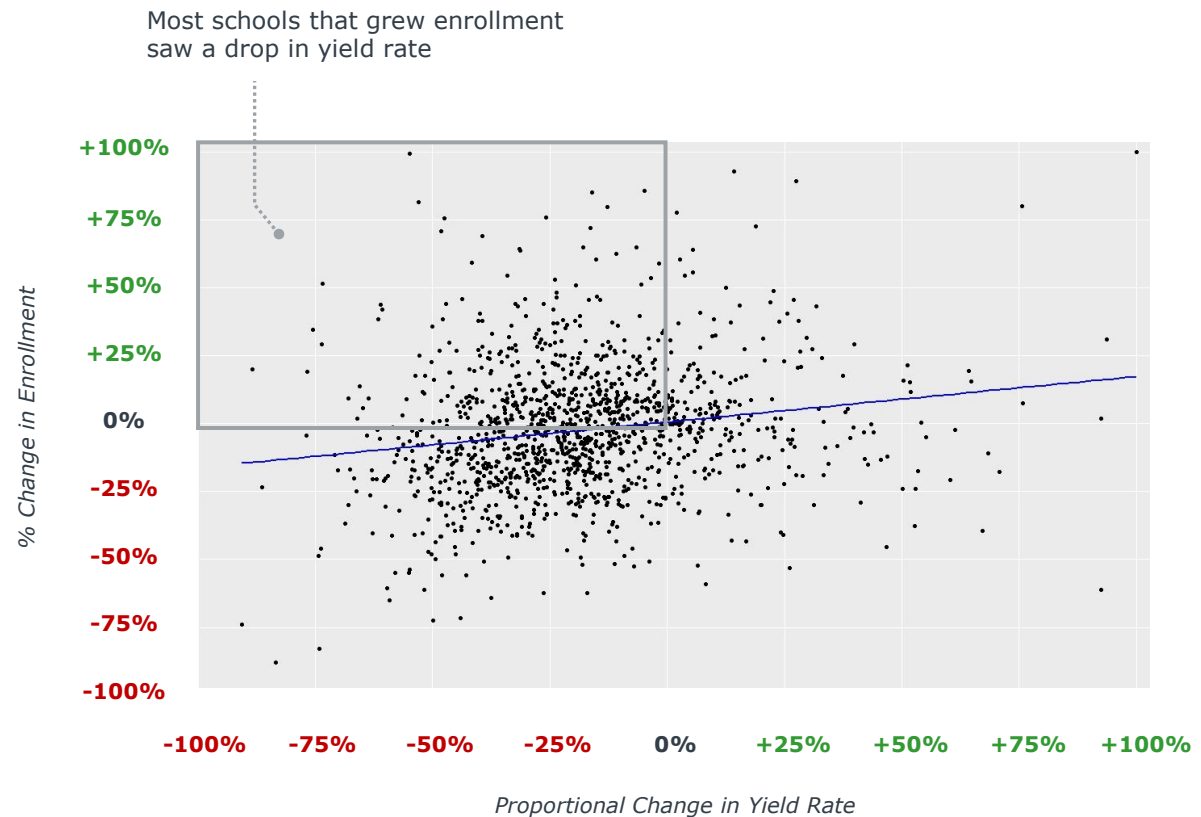
Yield matters

That's not to say that yield performance doesn't matter. Beyond a certain point, falling yield rates do signal underlying trouble and tend to be accompanied by enrollment losses (see page 13).

Furthermore, even if you're not in that danger zone, chances are your institution has running room on how effectively you're converting admitted students into enrollment. In today's hypercompetitive environment, even incremental gains secured via high-performing yield programs can count for a lot.

Change in Yield Rate Versus Change in Enrollment

Entering Class 2018 to 2023, Competitive Four-Year Colleges and Universities, United States (IPEDS)



Source: EAB research and analysis.

A 'Yield Cliff'

Problematic performance

While, as shown on the preceding page, drops in yield rate are not necessarily a cause for concern, that is true only up to a certain point. There is a threshold beyond which they do signal underlying trouble.

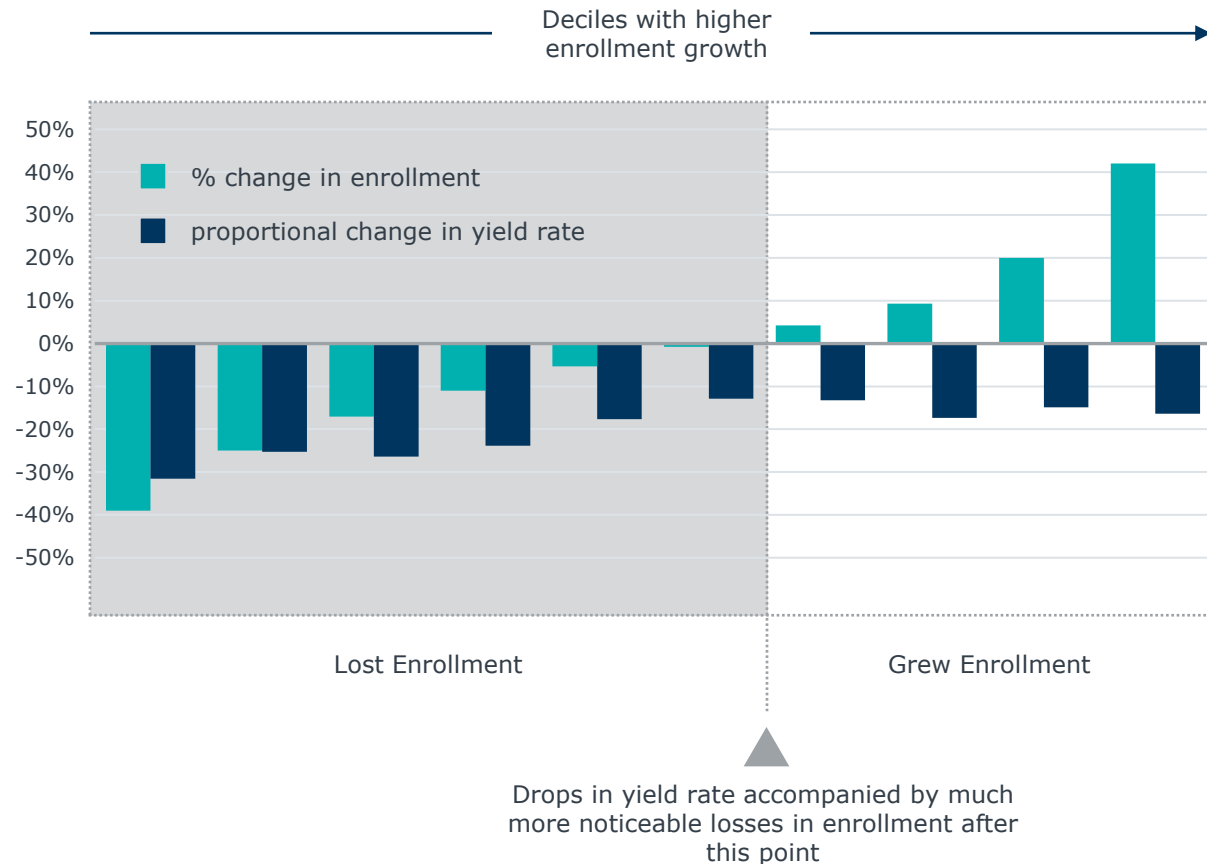
The chart at right illustrates this point, by looking at changes in yield rate and enrollment over a five-year period.

The schools in the analysis were divided into growth deciles, and the change in yield rate was calculated for each. As can be seen, the deciles with positive change in enrollment showed no clear pattern in their yield-rate change, apart from it being negative for each decile and existing within the relatively narrow range of -13% to -17%.

By contrast, the deciles that saw negative changes in enrollment did show a pattern, with greater reductions being associated with greater drops in yield rate. These schools also displayed a much wider range in terms of yield performance than did schools that grew enrollment.

Beyond a Certain Point, Drops in Yield Rate Do Constitute a Danger Sign

Proportional Change in Yield Rate and Enrollment, by Enrollment-Growth Decile, Entering Class 2018 to 2023, Competitive Four-Year U.S. Colleges and Universities (IPEDS)



Source: EAB research and analysis.

Toward a More Complete Understanding of Yield Performance

A problematic yardstick

Some college and university presidents, cabinets, and boards look at yield rate—on its own and out of context—as an absolute measure of the effectiveness of the institution’s enrollment function.

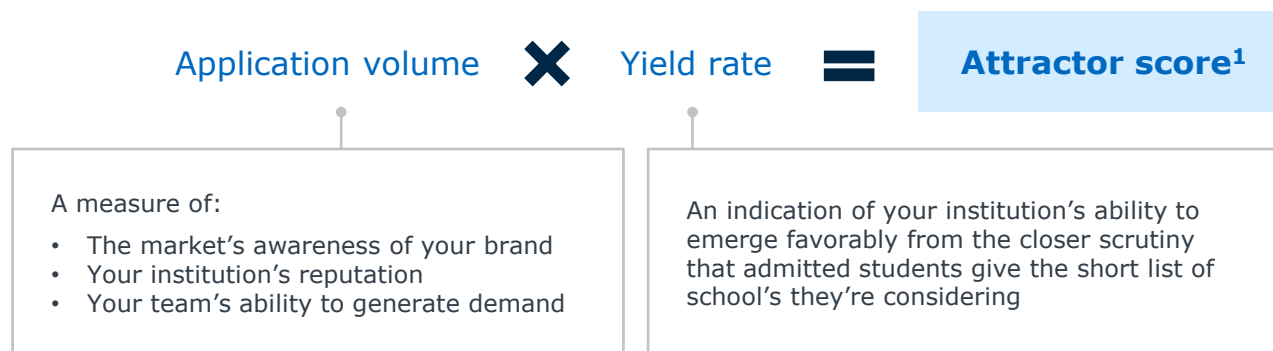
This is problematic for a number of reasons, not least of all because application growth—which, as explained elsewhere in this report, is a precondition for sound downstream enrollment outcomes—is practically guaranteed to reduce yield rate.

A better alternative

The material at right describes an alternate summary metric developed by EAB, which we have dubbed the “attractor score.” Combining application volume and yield rate into a single metric, the score offers a more holistic way of assessing your institution’s ability to draw students. Not incidentally, it also provides a foundation for contextualizing your own institution’s performance with that of a precisely defined peer set.

A Better Summary Metric of Your Institution’s Enrollment Performance

The Attractor Score Is a Balanced Measure of Your Appeal to Prospective Students and the Efficacy of Your Recruitment Efforts



Attractor Score Enables Benchmarking on Things That Matter Most to Students

Three Key Elements of EAB’s Personas System



Large-scale **regression analysis** of U.S. colleges and universities, incorporating their attractor scores, shows which school characteristics most powerfully influence students’ school choice



Cluster analysis groups schools into nine “institutional personas”—sets of schools that resemble each other more than they resemble any other college or university, enabling apples-to-apples comparisons between institutions



Persona-specific averages for key student attractors enable **benchmarking** within institutional personas, helping colleges and universities to better understand their competitive positioning

1) Converted to a 10-point scale, to facilitate comparison between institutions.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Yield Management Begins at the Top of the Recruitment Funnel

Pre-admit activity

Growing competition over students has led many of the nation's colleges and universities to amp up their yield-season activity.

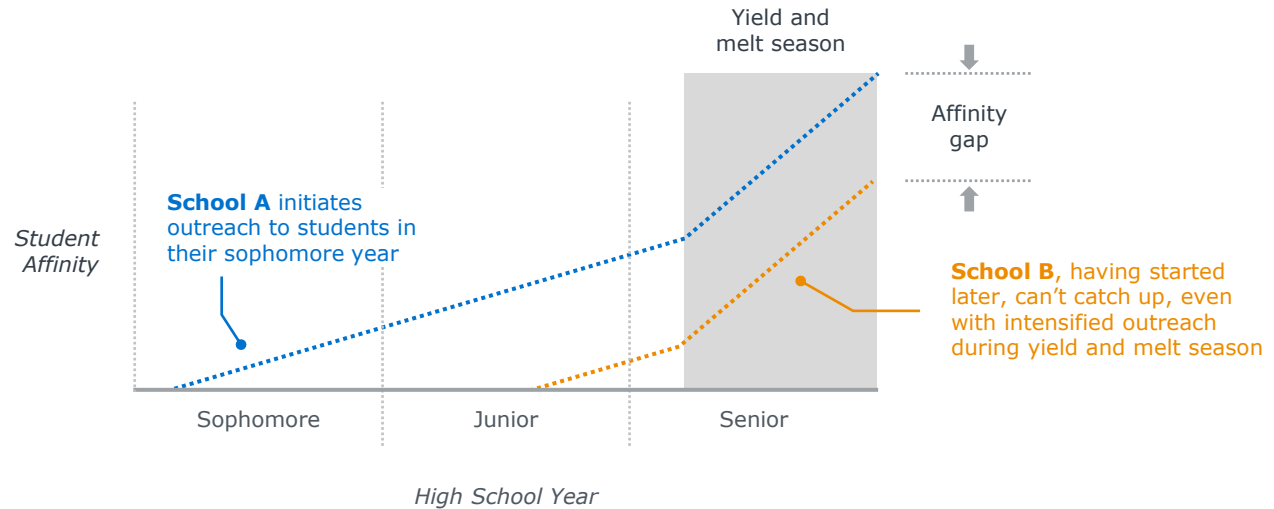
Fewer fully appreciate the degree to which their ability to convert admitted students depends on a host of other things they do with students well in advance of them being admitted.

Extended affinity-building

As indicated in the bar charts at right, the earlier you start recruiting students, the greater is their likelihood of applying and depositing. And the effect is not small; students recruited in their first three years of high school convert at rates at least twice as high as students first recruited as seniors.

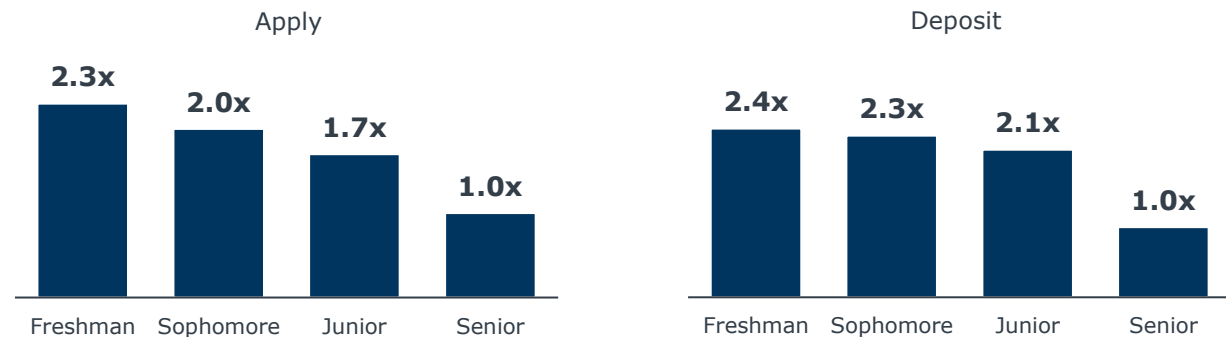
Affinity Level of Prospective Students

Early Versus Late Initiation of Recruitment-Marketing Outreach



Relative Likelihood to Apply and Deposit, by High School Year of First Recruitment-Marketing Contact

Versus Students First Contacted as Seniors, Entering Class 2025, EAB Partner Institutions



Source: EAB research and analysis.

What Does Top-Notch Recruitment Marketing Look Like?

Execution Excellence Is in the Details

As discussed on the preceding page, the affinity that you build with college-bound students—all across the recruitment funnel, from the moment of your first contact with them—pays dividends in the post-admit phase, giving you a set of prospects with a higher propensity to convert and reducing the amount of work you have to do to convert them.

That is true, however, only to the extent that your recruitment-marketing outreach is executed to a high standard. If you're wondering how your own practice stacks up, consult the material on this and the facing page, which lists hallmarks of well-executed recruitment marketing—practices that, taken together, are strong indicators of robust performance.

Hallmarks of Well-Executed Recruitment Marketing

List-Source Strategy

- ❑ Deep zip code analysis
- ❑ List-source diversification and saturation
- ❑ Look-alike zip code model for new markets
- ❑ Proactive adjustments based on list-source volatility
- ❑ Subscription strategy

Email Deliverability

- ❑ Creation of dedicated domain to protect .edu
- ❑ Domain warming
- ❑ Dynamic email-audience modulation
- ❑ Ongoing monitoring and risk management
- ❑ Tracking and triage

List Acquisition and Management

- ❑ Subscription management
- ❑ Segment setup and ordering
- ❑ Name de-duplication and data cleaning
- ❑ National change-of-address processing
- ❑ Ongoing monitoring of available counts
- ❑ Monthly deployment to new names across all channels
- ❑ Identification of new list opportunities

Parent Audiences

- ❑ Collection of parent data from students
- ❑ Getting parent info from consumer databases
- ❑ Creating parent-specific content for email campaigns
- ❑ Multilingual translation option for parents
- ❑ Creating dedicated landing pages for parents
- ❑ Running paid social ad campaigns for parents
- ❑ Informed-delivery parent targeting

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Management of Paid Social and App Ads

- ☐ Meta, Snapchat, and TikTok account management
- ☐ College Board Connections account management
- ☐ Creation of static and motion ads
- ☐ List-match coordination with overall campaign
- ☐ Image- and copy-based performance optimization

Reporting

- ☐ Full-funnel year-over-year dashboards
- ☐ Real-time campaign performance data
- ☐ Filtering by counselor and lead score
- ☐ Historical benchmarking data
- ☐ First-source attribution analysis (prospect to deposit)

Creative Development

- ☐ Multiple paper-mailer variants
- ☐ 60+ student-email variants
- ☐ 15+ paid social ad variants
- ☐ Informed-delivery ad set
- ☐ College Board Connections message set
- ☐ Customized landing pages
- ☐ Programming of landing pages for pre-populated data
- ☐ Ensuring seamless, instant login
- ☐ Placing trigger pixels on .edu to for content customization

Management of Omni-Channel Deployment

- ☐ Drip-style inclusion of new inquiries and prospects
- ☐ Recurring name acquisition, including monthly new launches
- ☐ Channel synchronization and alignment
- ☐ Ongoing data processing and cleaning
- ☐ Inquiry and application data capture
- ☐ CRM data return
- ☐ Proofreading of copy across channels
- ☐ QA testing for functionality and accuracy
- ☐ Response management

Lead and Yield Scoring

- ☐ Annually revised decision-tree model for likelihood to inquire
- ☐ Annually revised decision-tree model for likelihood to apply
- ☐ Annually revised decision-tree model for likelihood to enroll
- ☐ Integration of student behavioral data
- ☐ Weekly refresh
- ☐ Quintile analysis

Global Insights

- ☐ Benchmark against comparable institutions and market segments
- ☐ Analyze market trends and opportunities
- ☐ Adjust campaigns based on shifts in student behavior
- ☐ Optimize campaigns on the fly, based on in-cycle performance
- ☐ Test email variants
- ☐ Innovation pilots on emerging channels



Associated EAB offerings: Enroll360 **Cultivate**, Enroll360 **Apply**

Source: EAB research and analysis.

An Overview of Today's Melt Landscape

Melt in brief

There is of course, another critical stage in admitted students' progress toward matriculation besides the yield phase, namely the time that elapses between a student committing to their chosen institution and showing up for classes once school starts.

Melt rate, the metric describing a school's performance in this funnel stage, is the inverse of yield rate, in that it assesses the portion of students who *do not* convert, as opposed to those who do. In further contrast to yield rate, there is no scenario in which an adverse change in melt rate indicates anything other than worsening performance.

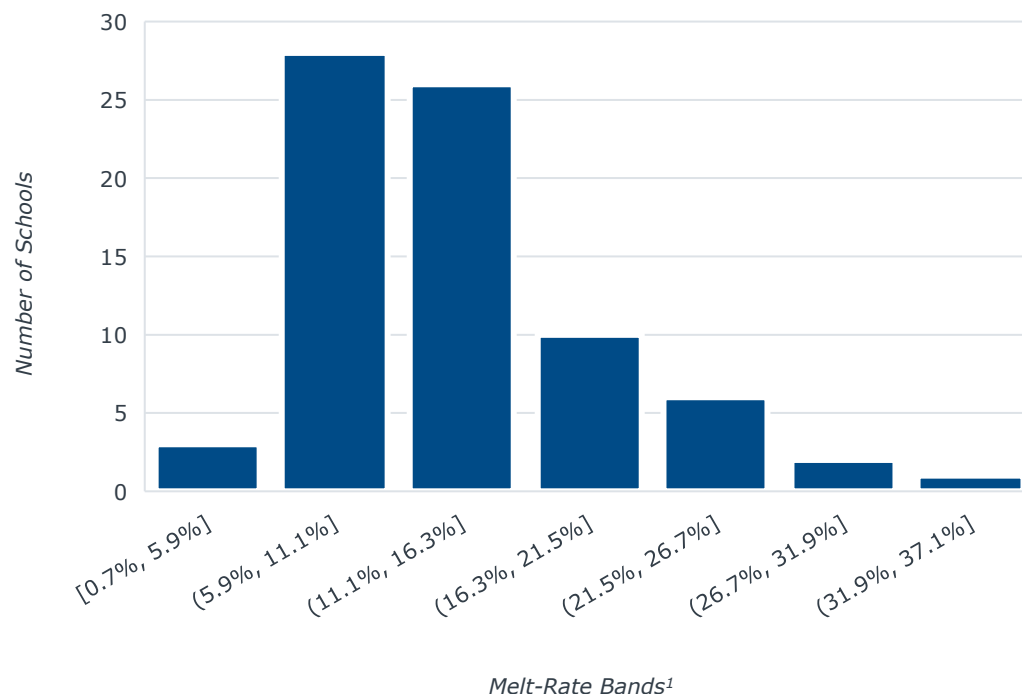
Contextualizing your rate

So what constitutes acceptable melt performance?

Robust benchmarks are hard to come by, due to limited availability of the necessary data in large public sources. That said, information from a more limited survey of the nation's colleges and universities can still prove helpful. In that spirit, the chart at right shows the melt-rate distribution of more than 100 schools we sampled.

Number of Schools in Designated Melt-Rate Bands

Histogram, Four-Year Competitive Admission U.S. Colleges and Universities, Entering Class 2025, n=102



1) A round bracket means the number is excluded from the range, while a square bracket means it is included.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

A Trend Toward Increased Melt

Is melt getting worse?

Many enrollment leaders and industry watchers talk about melt being a growing problem. While it's hard to confirm this definitively, due to the lack of large publicly available datasets that would support related analyses, what data is available does suggest that they are right.

Confirming an adverse trend

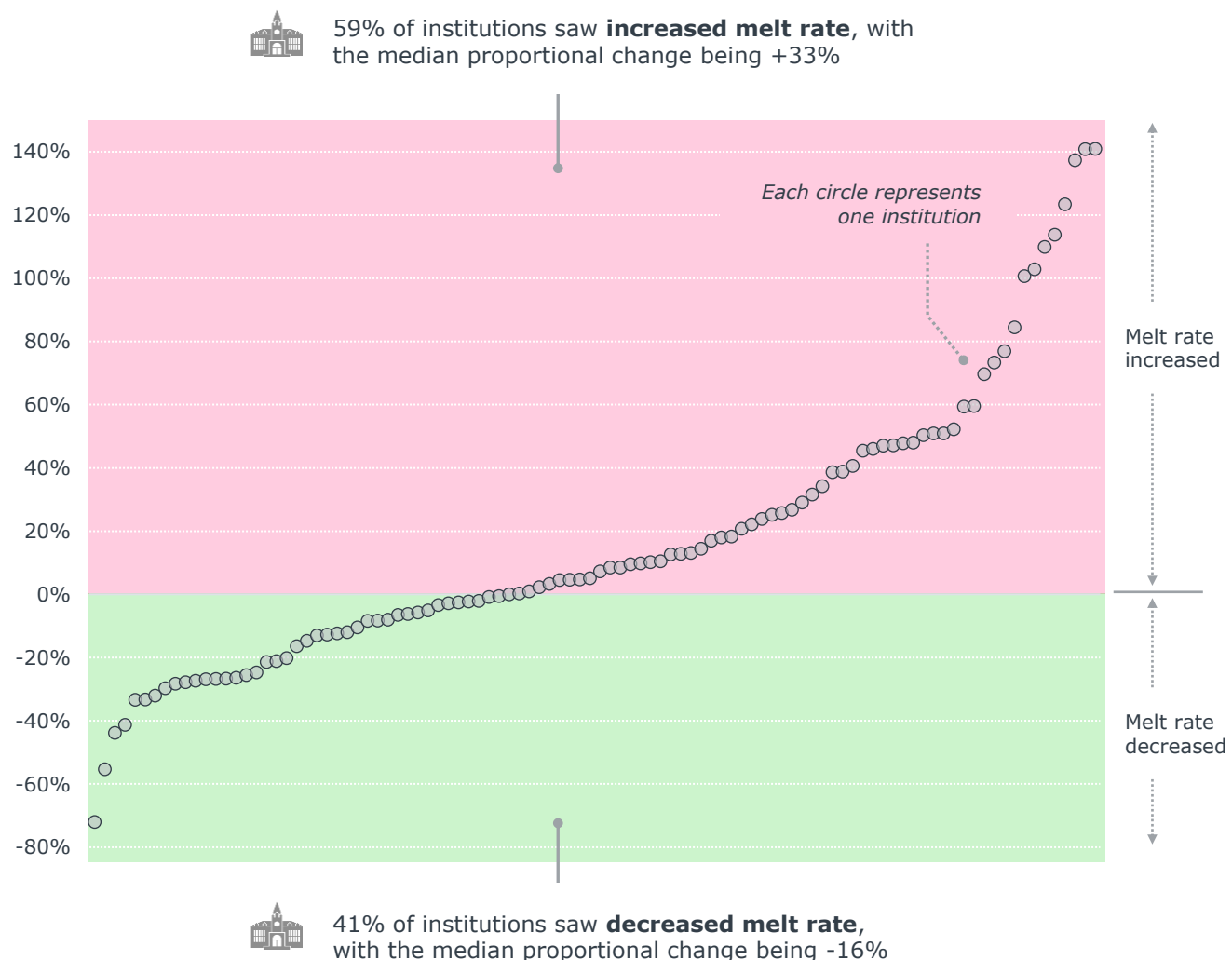
This page shows the change in melt rate between 2022 and 2025 for 97 institutions for which EAB was able to gather the requisite data. (While the sample set was not vetted statistically for representativeness, it did include a mix of institution types, in proportions reflective of their prevalence among competitive-admission four-year institutions as a whole.)

As illustrated, a sizable majority of schools saw their melt rate increase between 2022 and 2025.

Furthermore, the median change in melt rate for institutions that saw an increase was more than double the change for institutions that saw a decrease.

Proportional Change in Melt Rate, Entering Class 2022 versus 2025, by Institution

Competitive-Admission Four-Year U.S. Colleges and Universities, n = 97



Source: EAB research and analysis

A Central Role for Enrollment Teams in Melt Prevention

A post-deposit handoff

In the past, it has not typically been the practice of admission teams to continue courting admitted students after they have deposited; rather, students have been handed off to the various college and university departments charged with getting them to take the steps required for matriculation.

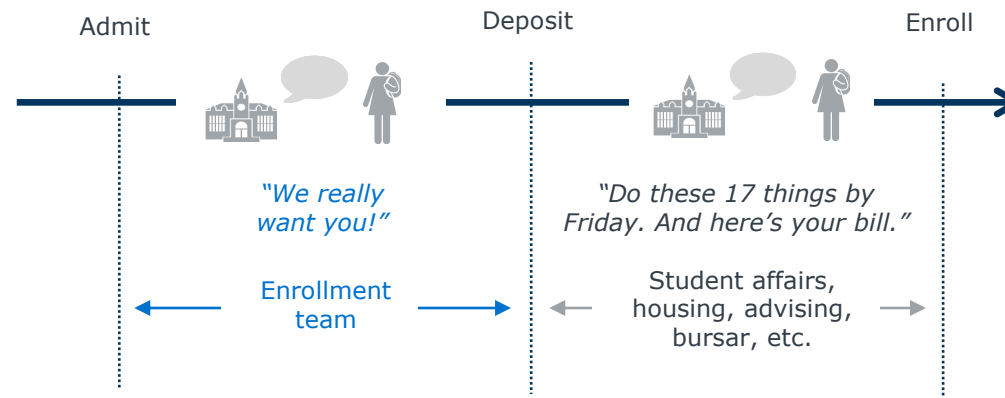
Extended engagement

Current market conditions have created an imperative for admission teams to carry the crucial work of winning over prospective enrollees into the post-deposit phase, right up to the point of matriculation.

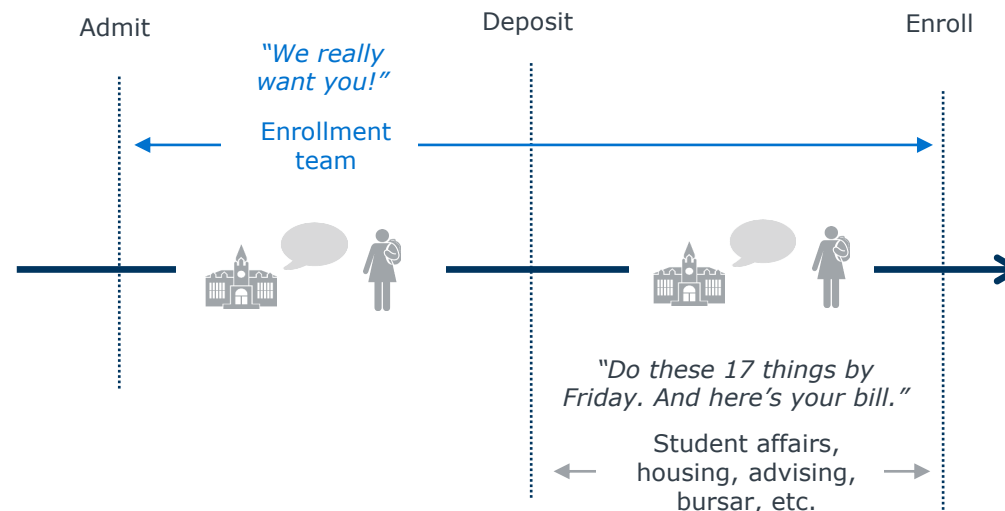
One of those market conditions is the Anxious Generation phenomenon. The current generation of college-goers is at greater risk of balking in the face of challenges encountered after they commit and are in greater need of reassurance and positive reinforcement than were students of the past. Another is that some schools continue to recruit students who have not committed to them right through melt season—including ones who may have already deposited at other institutions.

Getting Beyond the Transactional Pivot

Post-Admit Communications, circa 2020



Post-Admit Communications, circa 2025



Source: EAB research and analysis.

Yield Versus Melt

Where to focus?

When enrollment teams are looking to improve student engagement in the post-admit phase, they face the decision of how much effort and resources to invest in the yield and melt portions of it.

A numbers game

This is a complex question that hinges on considerations such as where invested efforts are likely to make the greatest difference.

But any such considerations should be understood in the context of the greatly differing numbers of students involved, with the group of admitted students being much larger than the group of committed students. As illustrated in the table at right, the same change in yield rate will tend to have a much bigger impact on downstream enrollment than will an identical proportional improvement in melt rate. (The more pronounced color gradient for yield in the table at right is an indication of this.)

The right answer for most institutions will be to devote proportionally more effort to their yield work, while not ignoring melt management.

Relative Downstream Impact on Enrollment Growth

For Proportionally Identical Changes in Yield and Melt Rate, a Hypothetical/Illustrative Model

			Yield Rate					
Proportional change			0%	5%	10%	15%	20%	25%
New rate			25%	26.3%	27.5%	28.8%	30.0%	31.3%
Melt Rate	Proportional change	New rate						
	0%	10%	0%	5%	10%	15%	20%	25%
	-5%	9.5%	1%	6%	11%	16%	21%	26%
	-10%	9%	1%	6%	11%	16%	21%	26%
	-15%	8.5%	2%	7%	12%	17%	22%	27%
	-20%	8%	2%	7%	12%	18%	23%	28%
	-25%	7.5%	3%	8%	13%	18%	23%	28%

A 25% proportional increase in yield rate boosts downstream enrollment by 25%, while the same proportional decrease in melt rate increases enrollment by only 3%

Increase in enrollment

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Yield and Melt Management in the AI Era

A scalability challenge

One of the most difficult challenges facing admission teams when it comes to yield and melt management is the need to scale intensive and highly personalized outreach across increasingly larger admit pools.

AI aspiration vs. reality

In this regard, the arrival of generative AI on the scene could not have been more timely.

Chatbots are already greatly extending colleges’ ability to field questions from admitted students, while placing little additional burden on admission staff.

That said, enrollment leaders everywhere report being inundated with pitches from AI vendors, which, while often painting a truly compelling vision of new capabilities just over the horizon, are also often vague as to specifics. The material at right offers some generalized assessments as to the state of maturity of various sorts of AI admission tools you’ve probably been hearing about. See also the next two pages, which offer guidance on how to assess AI investments you might be considering.

AI Use Cases with the Greatest Relevance for Yield and Melt Management

By Maturity Level

Maturity	Enrollment Use Cases
	Chatbots Chatbots automatically field all manner of queries, greatly increasing the number of students getting answers to their questions while also freeing up staff capacity
	Enrollment analytics Enrollment data is fed into an AI, which generates insights such as particular students’ likelihood to enroll and predicted aggregate enrollment outcomes
	Manual AI-assisted content creation Admission staffers use ChatGPT or similar tools to draft communications with prospective students, enabling them to produce better content more quickly
	Autonomous agentic AI recruiter AI system initiates and manages comm flows with prospective students, adapting messaging, cadence, channel, etc. on the fly based on data gathered on students

Fully mature



Hypothetical/nascent

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Evaluating Potential AI Deployments

Four Categories of Questions to Discuss with AI Vendors You're Considering

Distinguish between capabilities that actually exist (and work as advertised) and ones that are planned or are in development/testing

1	Capabilities and functionality AI chatbot knowledge and accuracy - What kinds of questions from prospective students can the vendor's chatbot answer on its own? How does the vendor ensure those answers are accurate and up to date? Personalized multichannel outreach - Based on which data/analyses does the AI system personalize communication for each student? Across which channels (.edu, email, SMS, phone calls) does it operate? Are content, timing, audience, and channel of messages decided autonomously by the AI, or are those things managed via non-AI techniques (e.g., rule-based marketing automation)? Enrollment analytics - Does the system include AI-enabled predictive analytics (e.g., for assessing individual students' likelihood to yield)? How is the accuracy of related predictions assessed? How capable are the system's models of delivering accurate analyses amid large shifts in market context (e.g., your state public system's introduction of a direct-admission program)?
2	Implementation and integration Integration with existing systems - How does the platform integrate with your current systems (CRM, SIS, etc.), and what data exchange is required? Will you need to regularly import/export data, or does the system offer real-time sync via APIs? Ask the vendor to outline the technical steps required to implement data integration—involvement of your IT department, data mapping, etc. Initial setup and training needs - Ask your vendor for an onboarding plan showing how long it will take to implement and train the AI for your school and the specific tasks that that work will comprise. Clarify your team's responsibilities with respect to tasks such as authoring material for the AI's knowledge base, verifying the AI's responses during training, labeling data, setting up decision rules, etc. Ongoing maintenance and content updates - After launch, what ongoing work will be required from your staff to ensure that the AI remains effective? How will the AI integrate updates to the content on your .edu? Does the vendor have a plan according to which they offer periodic reviews of your AI's performance and related retraining? If not, does your team have the capacity to do that yourselves?

Source: EAB research and analysis.

3	Data privacy and compliance Student data - Which data on prospective students will the AI use, where will it be stored, and how will student privacy be protected? Ask if the vendor is FERPA-compliant and SOC-2-certified for data security. If the AI uses third-party large language models or cloud services, seek confirmation from the vendor that personal data is not being sent to services that might retain it. Content moderation and sensitive topics - Determine how the platform prevents the AI from giving students information that is inaccurate or that is inappropriate in terms of content or tone. Ask if the system can be configured to use preapproved knowledge sources, to set boundaries on certain topics (e.g., if a particular student asks about their chance of being admitted), and to identify and hand off sensitive queries to a human staffer. Ask if your staff can review logs of conversations between the AI and students.
4	Vendor dependability Proven results and references - Ask your prospective vendor for evidence that their AI tool improves enrollment outcomes and/or efficiency (e.g., data on increased funnel conversion rates). Ask for references; contact and interview them. Transparency on AI - Ask your vendor to distinguish between parts of their service that are powered by AI and parts that entail other, non-AI forms of automation or that entail human work behind the scenes. Support and ongoing partnership - Ask the vendor what post-sale support they provide and how they would partner with your team over time. Ask if they offer a dedicated account manager and/or regular check-ins to review performance of the system. Ask if they will assist with optimizing the AI's behavior on an ongoing basis. Cost and additional investment - Ask the vendor to explain their pricing model. Are there any additional costs for implementation, extra features, or scaling up usage? Is the pricing based on a flat-fee subscription model, on a per-student basis, or on some other model? Be wary of systems that require a lot of add-ons or additional software to work as advertised.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

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A Strong Brand Is a Force Multiplier for Your Yield and Melt Efforts

Engagement infrastructure

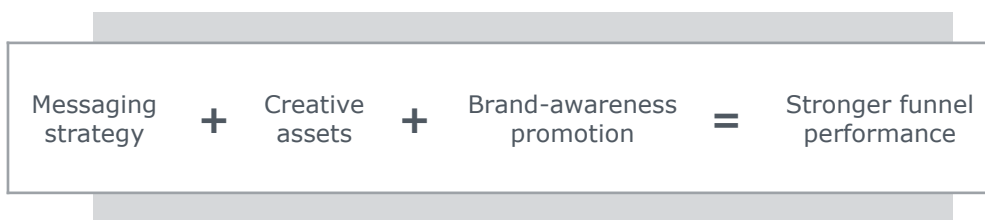
One underappreciated aspect of effective brand management is the degree to which it enhances everything else you do to attract and convert prospective students, not least of all in the post-admit phase.

Three ways that it does this are shown at the top of this page. First, a strong brand is based on a carefully considered messaging strategy that connects things students care most deeply about with things that your institution is demonstrably great at. Second, well-executed brand work gives that messaging a form of creative expression that boosts its emotional resonance with students. And third, effective brand management increases awareness of those messages among key audiences.

The kind of impact that work can have, in terms of shifting student perceptions and improving enrollment outcomes, is suggested by the data at right.

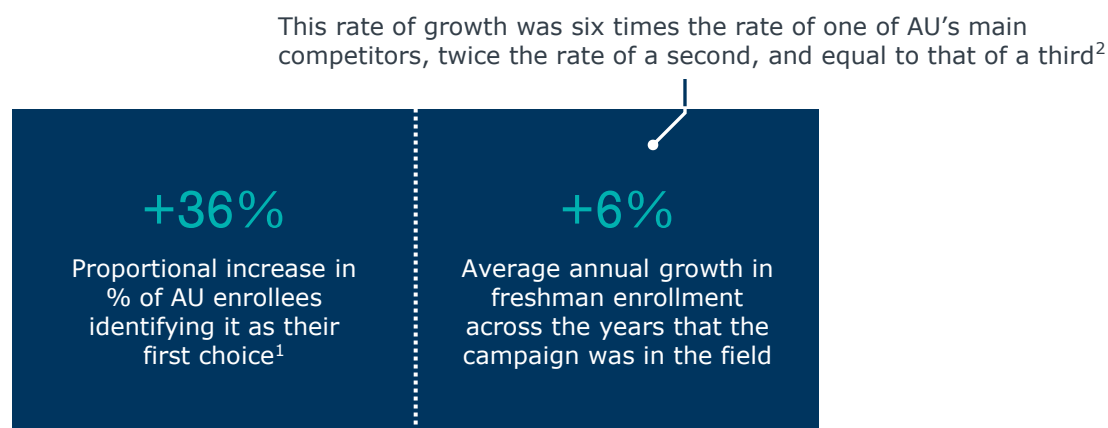
See the following pages for more detailed elaboration on the points mentioned above, including implementation guidance.

Components of Brand Work That Boost Conversion Rates



Yes, It Does Work

Case in Point: Results Associated with Launch of a New Brand Campaign at American University



1) It grew from 45% to 61%.

2) The institution that matched AU's rate of growth undertook its own very successful brand overhaul, seven years before AU did.

Sources: EAB research and analysis; Theresa Flannery, *How to Market a University*.

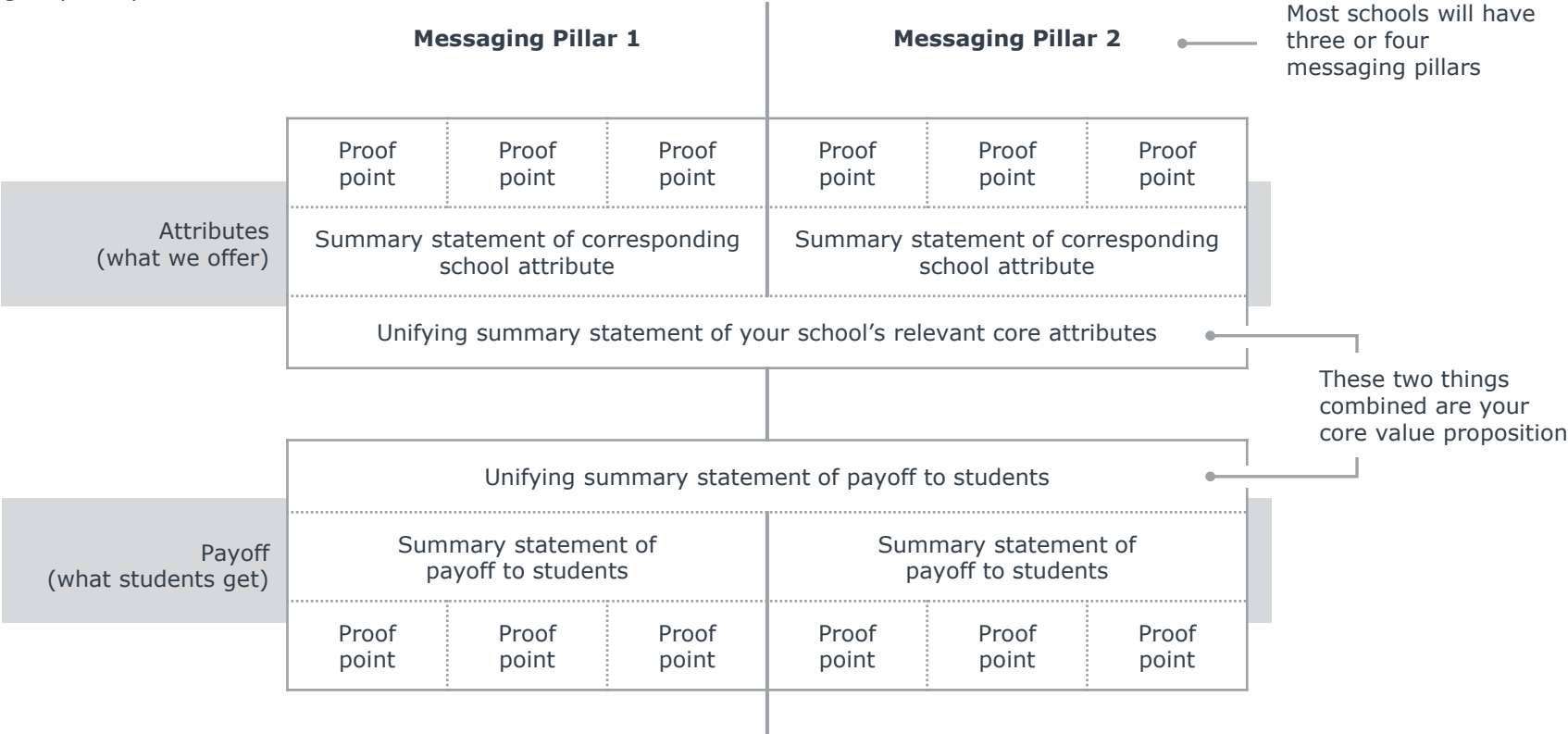
A Brand-Messaging Map

A Powerful Tool for You and Your Campus Community

Cheat sheets for key elements of your brand can serve as powerful tools for you and your internal stakeholders. This and the facing page show one example—a messaging-strategy map. Its purpose is to lay out information from your brand platform in a way that makes more readily apparent possible hierarchies of messaging in your communication with students. The material below shows the sorts of information contained in the various parts of the map, while the facing page shows an actual example. The messaging-strategy map serves as a touchstone for outward expressions of your brand.

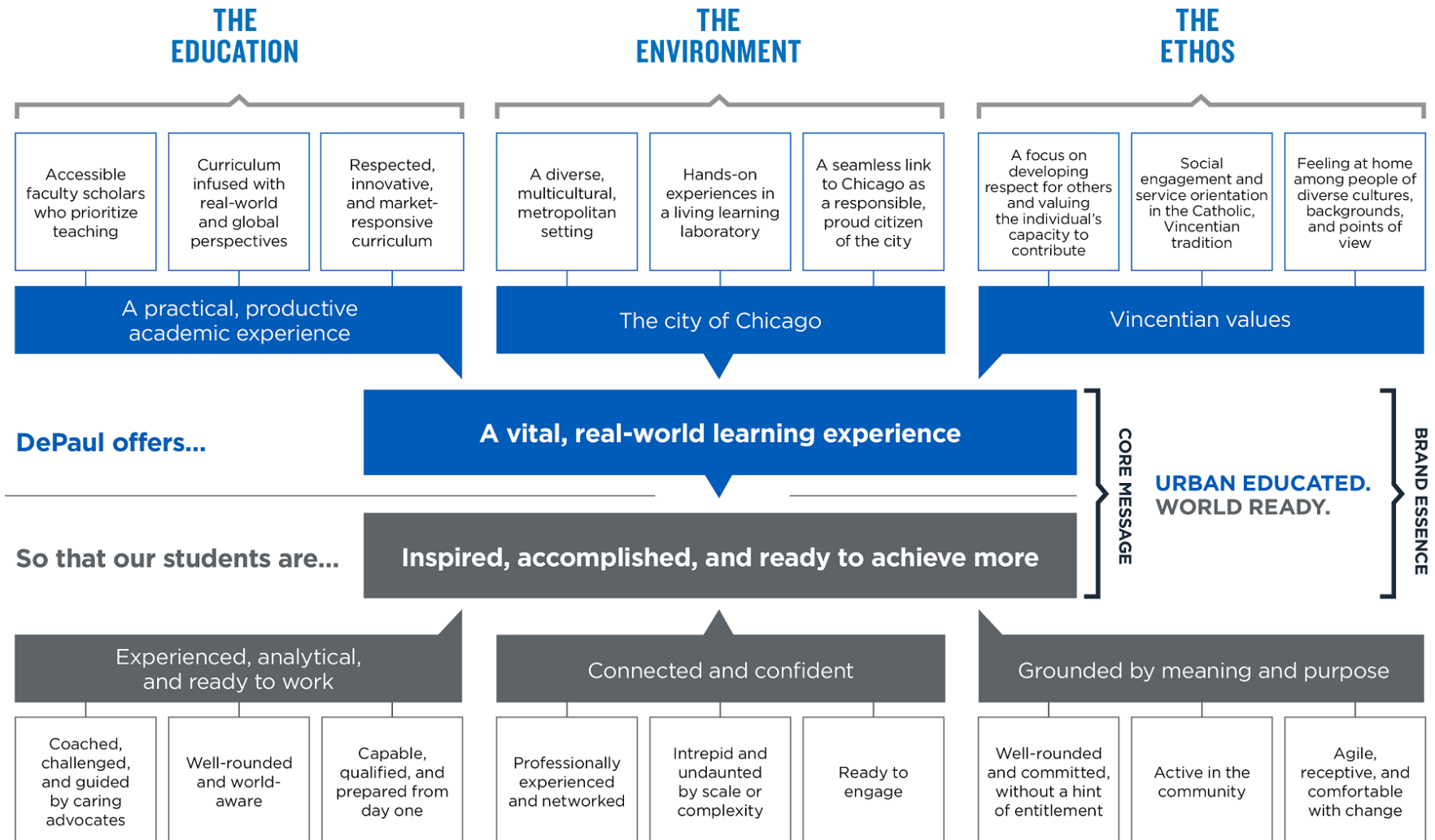
A Detailed Overview of Your Messaging Hierarchy

Messaging-Map Template



Source: EAB research and analysis.

An Example from DePaul University



Source: <https://resources.depaul.edu/brand/our-brand/Pages/Our-Message.aspx>.

Sound Brand Management Activates Your Campus Community

Empowering the Main ‘Purveyors’ of Your Brand to Better Engage Admitted Students

On-campus experiences are widely acknowledged to be a linchpin of schools’ yield efforts. So, more generally, are prospective students’ interactions with current students, faculty, your admission team, and other members of your campus community. The best way to make those interactions consistently positive and impactful is to ensure that your brand suffuses your institution’s culture at every level—something that is accomplished by education and training on your brand. The goal here is not just to make sure members of your community stay on-message in their communications with prospective students; having a deep understanding of your brand helps them to *live* it, embodying it in all related interactions.

Guidance on Five Key Aspects of Brand Education and Training

1	Purpose and aims	Build awareness:	Ensure that members of the campus community are familiar with the institution’s brand narrative, voice, visual identity, and values
		Promote consistency:	Enable consistent messaging and design across departments, platforms, and communications; repetition builds equity in your brand
		Empower advocacy:	Equip employees, students, and other stakeholders to speak confidently and accurately about the institution
		Enhance recruitment:	Ensure that your admission team takes full advantage of the brand-expression assets you’ve created, which will boost the efficacy of your recruitment outreach
		Support strategic goals:	Tie your brand-building efforts explicitly to institutional goals, including those outlined in your strategic plan and those of individual departments
2	Participants	Units:	Admissions and enrollment, advancement, alumni relations, marketing and communications, academic departments, student affairs, athletics, human resources, career services, executive leadership
		Roles and titles:	Directors and associate directors, communication specialists and content writers, faculty who engage externally, those managing department newsletters or webpages, student ambassadors and resident advisors, social media managers, graphic designers and videographers, departmental web editors

Source: EAB research and analysis.

3	Curriculum	Introduction to brand principles: Overview of branding concepts and their significance in higher education
		Institutional mission and values: Deep dive into the institution's core principles and how they inform the brand
		Visual identity guidelines: Proper use of logos, color schemes, typography, and other visual elements
		Messaging framework: Key messages, tone and personality, storytelling techniques
		Case studies: Examples of effective brand application within and outside the institution
		Practical guidance: Practice applying brand guidelines to real-world scenarios
		Feedback mechanisms: Ways for participants to provide input on brand materials and training
4	Frequency	New employees: During onboarding (within first 60 days)
		Existing employees: Annual refresher or biannual workshop
		Major brand updates: Special onetime or rolling training sessions
		Unit-level sessions: By request, on rotation (especially for comms-heavy units)
5	Delivery formats	In-person workshops: Ideal for interactivity and questions
		Live virtual training: Accessible by remote workers and hybrid teams
		Self-paced online modules: Useful for scalability and asynchronous access
		Brand camps: Half-day or full-day immersive sessions
		Lunch-and-learns: Short, informal sessions for small groups
		Train-the-trainer programs: Empower campus "brand ambassadors" to extend training in their units

Source: EAB research and analysis.

A Varied Challenge Across School Segments

A large-school advantage

A clear trend has emerged in recent years of large schools having an outsized ability to draw students, relative to their smaller counterparts. This fact is illustrated by the chart at right—in every region of the country, small schools lost enrollment in recent years, while large schools grew, with the differences in most cases being significant.

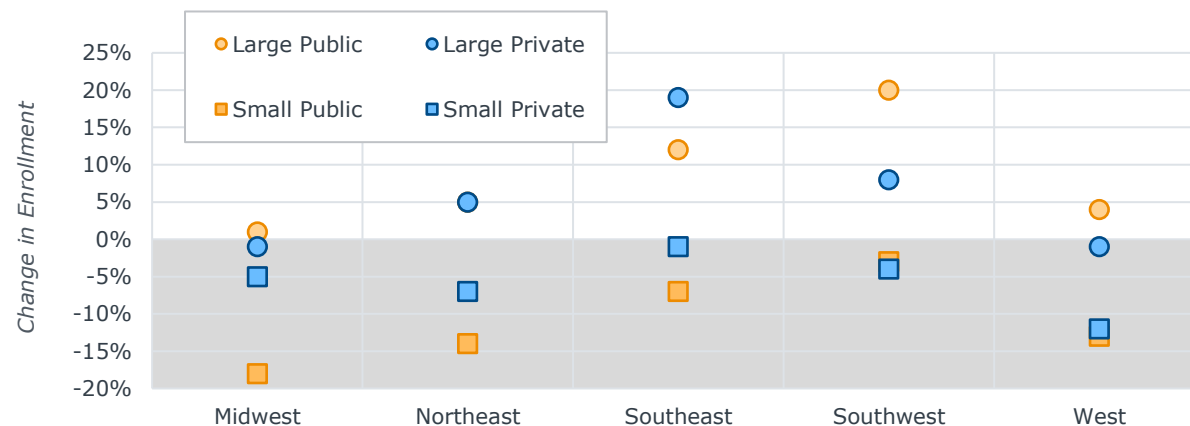
A small-school advantage

There are a number of reasons for the trend, including students' preference for institutions with a great variety of student organizations and majors—traits that go hand in hand with institution size.

That said, there is at least one respect in which small schools have the upper hand—namely, their greater ability to give admitted and committed students close personal attention. This is, not incidentally, one of the most powerful tools admission teams have for boosting yield and reducing melt.

Large Schools Are Outcompeting Smaller Institutions

Change in Enrollment, Entering Class 2018 versus 2023, by Region, School Size, and School Control, Competitive Four-Year Institutions, United States (IPEDS)



Smaller Scale Enables Intensive and Hyper-personalized Engagement

Cases in Point



Home Visits

Wadhams College's¹ admission counselors visit the home of every admitted student



100% Customizable Campus Visits

Lynn University's admission team reaches out to all admitted students, individually, to find out what they'd like to see and do when they visit campus. Visits are tailored accordingly

1) A pseudonym.

Source: EAB research and analysis.



Tactics for Engaging Admitted and Committed Students

Advancing Four Yield and Melt Management Imperatives

PART

2

An Overview of the Tactics Covered in This Report

Novel and/or foundational

This report is necessarily selective in terms of the best practices it covers. Some ideas were included because of their newsworthiness, i.e., they are things enrollment leaders may not have heard of or perhaps do not fully understand. Others were chosen because they should be considered “musts” by every enrollment team, due to the critical role they play in improving yield and melt performance and their wide applicability.

Deep dives

Some of the tactics within the “musts” category are given a more detailed treatment in this report than others. In some cases this is due to their outsized impact on enrollment outcomes. In others it is because giving detailed guidance for them is necessary and practicable. In yet others it is because a deeper understanding of the rationale underlying the tactic promotes a better grasp of its implementation. This more detailed presentation is indicated by the “deep dive” annotation in the list at right (and in the table of contents).

Four Imperatives for Improved Yield and Melt Performance Define Four Corresponding Categories of Tactics

1

Engage the Anxious Generation on their own terms

- Tactic 1: Anxious-Generation Messaging Audit
- Tactic 2: Two-Minute Value Tutorial
- Tactic 3: Activated Aid-Award Letter
- Tactic 4: Outcomes Marketing
- Tactic 5: Maximized SMS Outreach (*deep dive*)
- Tactic 6: Context-Aware Financial-Aid Monitoring
- Tactic 7: Comprehensive Parent Engagement Plan
- Tactic 8: Non-Consumer Reapproach

2

Enable intensive engagement with students

- Tactic 9: Outreach-Intensity Triage Analytics (*deep dive*)
- Tactic 10: Next-Generation Peer-Mentoring Infrastructure
- Tactic 11: School-Owned Post-Admit Social Network (*deep dive*)

3

Make personalization a priority

- Tactic 12: AI Chatbot
- Tactic 13: .edu AI Concierge
- Tactic 14: Virtual Private Tour
- Tactic 15: IRL-Campus-Visit Hyper-personalization

4

Commit to communications-infrastructure excellence

- Tactic 16: Admitted-Student-Website Audit (*deep dive*)
- Tactic 17: Value-Messaging Cross Training
- Tactic 18: Tailored Direct-Admit Yield Communications
- Tactic 19: Consolidated Matriculation Communications (*deep dive*)



Imperative 1: Engage the Anxious Generation on Their Own Terms

The Youth Mental Health Crisis: An Obstacle on the Path to Matriculation

A psychological burden

It is common knowledge that the prevalence of mental health issues among today's youth is much higher than it was for previous generations of college-goers.

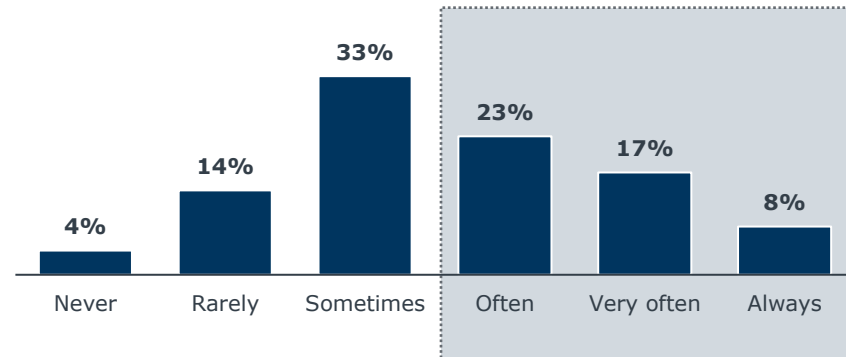
Less often talked about is the host of other problems that go hand in hand with those mental health issues, either as causes or consequences of them. In addition to being more likely to suffer major depressive episodes (a statistic commonly cited to demonstrate the mental health trend), today's students bear a range of other less "clinical" psychological burdens, including loneliness, lessened motivation, and inability to concentrate.

Undermining college-going

Crucially for admission teams, this negative psychological landscape adversely impacts students' college search and their likelihood to matriculate, evidence of which can be seen in the material on the lower portion of this page.

How Often Do Students Feel Nervous, Anxious, Lonely, or Isolated?

% of Student Survey Respondents

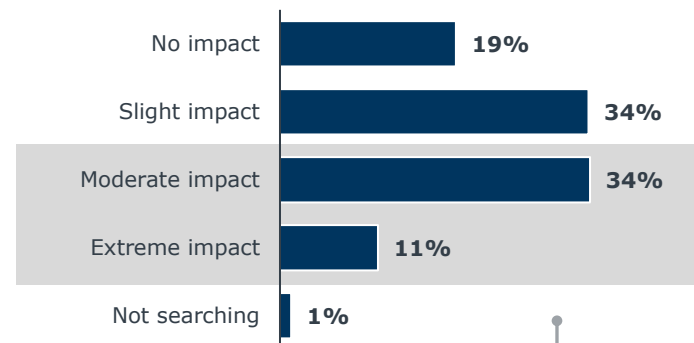


48%

of students report feeling negative emotions often, very often, or always

How Much Do Nervousness, Anxiety, Loneliness, and Isolation Impact Students' College Search?

% of Affected Students



45%

of affected students report meaningful impact on college search

% of Students Citing Lack of Mental Preparedness as Their Reason for Not Going to College Right After High School



50%

Proportional increase

Sources: EAB 2024 Mental Health Survey (n=6,398); EAB research and analysis.

Recognizing and Acknowledging Students' Specific Concerns

College anxieties

From an enrollment management standpoint, the aspects of the youth mental health crisis described on the preceding page are best understood in the context of worries that students express specifically with respect to college-going.

Emotional content

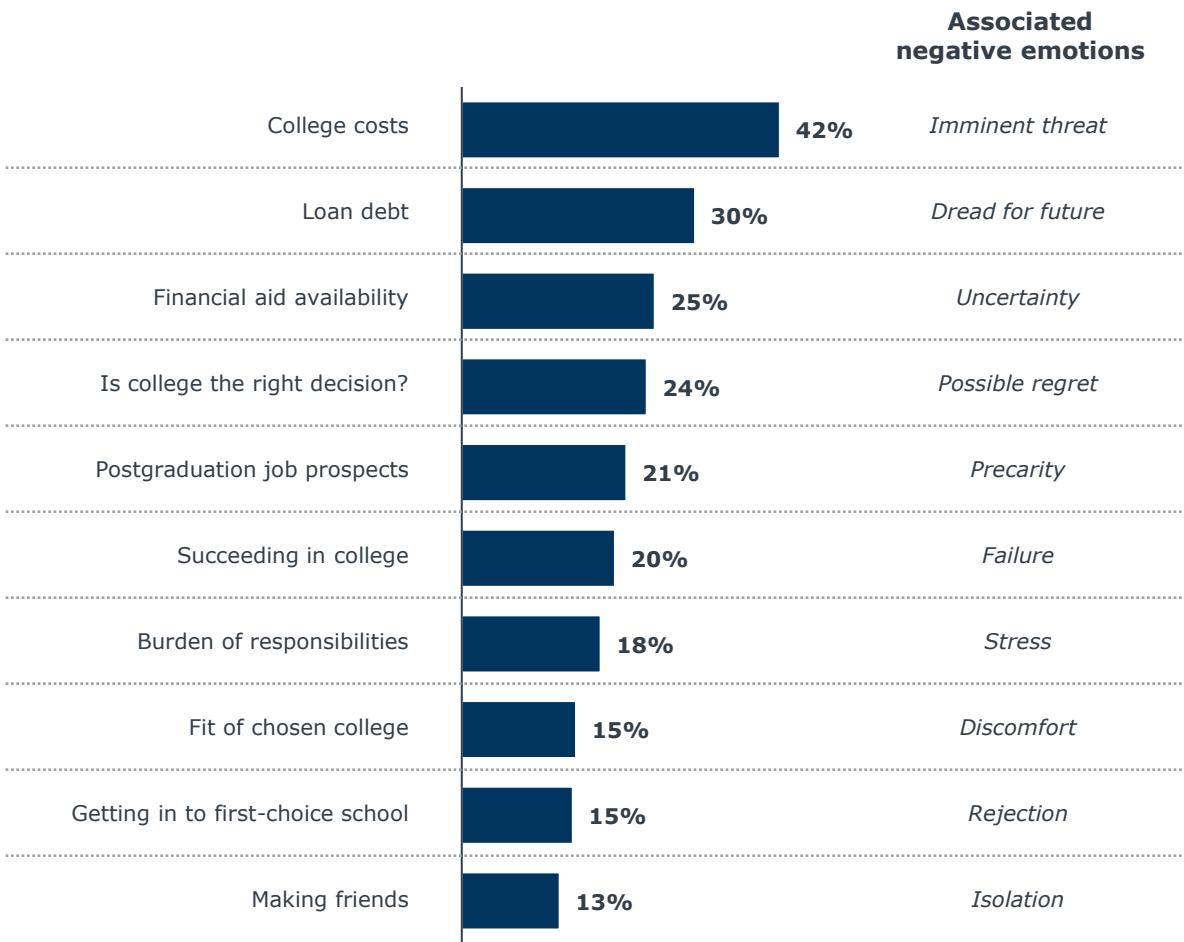
The chart at right shows 10 college-related concerns most frequently cited by high schoolers.

Having this kind of insight into students' worries has always been an important part of getting recruitment messaging right. It is all the more so in the context of markedly increased levels of youth anxiety.

The chart is annotated with various emotions that high schoolers, burdened to an unprecedented degree with negative feelings, might be supposed to associate with the more narrowly framed college-going concerns. This exercise suggests ways that related communications might be positioned, e.g., emphasizing reassurance, acceptance, security, supportiveness, and community.

Things That Most Concern Today's Potential College-Goers

Ten Most Frequently Cited Worries, EAB's 2025 Student Communication Preferences Survey



Source: EAB research and analysis.

An Anxious-Generation Messaging Audit

A need for tailored comms

Given the set of concerns peculiar to the current generation of college-goers (see preceding pages), you'll want to revisit your communications with them to ensure you're addressing their peculiar needs.

And you'll want to do that specifically for the post-admit phase, as the things that most concern admitted and committed students are not the same as those that preoccupy students in earlier funnel stages. Another is that students' levels of anxiety, doubt, and other negative emotions can increase when the hypothetical notion of college-going becomes real, e.g., when they have to finally commit to a single school or when they receive the first bill from your institution.

A high-level plan

The material at right outlines a high-level plan for auditing your communications with admitted and committed students, factoring in the unique psychological profile of the Anxious Generation.

Three Aspects of Your Post-Admit Communications You'll Want to Get Right

Messages

Feasibility

- Show students that attending and graduating from your institution is doable for them. Emphasize the excellence of your support services—academic, financial, mental health, etc.—and talk about personal assistance available to students for things like filling out financial aid forms.

Choice, opportunity, and control

- Research has shown that one of the most powerful messages you can share with potential college-goers is that a degree is their best bet for maximizing the amount of choice, opportunity, and control they'll have in their later lives.

ROI

- Address both the cost and earnings sides of your value equation. Sample statistic to provide: program-level data for monthly earnings versus debt payment for students graduating from your institution, relative to your peer institutions.

Your brand-messaging pillars

- Schools with well-managed brands will have a brand-messaging map, which focuses on the intersection point between their school's strengths and student priorities. Use yours as a basis for identifying other messages to underscore in your outreach.

Channels

Assess how well represented the above messages are in all the channels you use to communicate with admitted and committed students. Pay special attention to channels that students rely on most in the post-admit phase, those that most powerfully influence them, and those that your team can most readily influence. For most schools, those channels will include your school's website, in-person interactions with members of your campus community, and email-based comm flows.

Timing

Adapt the messages you're sending to factor in important contextual factors, e.g., sending information on academic support services when students receive results from placement testing or ROI information when the first bills go out.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

An Affordability-Messaging Checklist

Risk in the post-commit phase

As noted elsewhere in this report, families' concerns over cost often become most acute in the post-commitment phase, e.g. when receiving their first bill from you "makes real" for them just how much they're on the hook for.

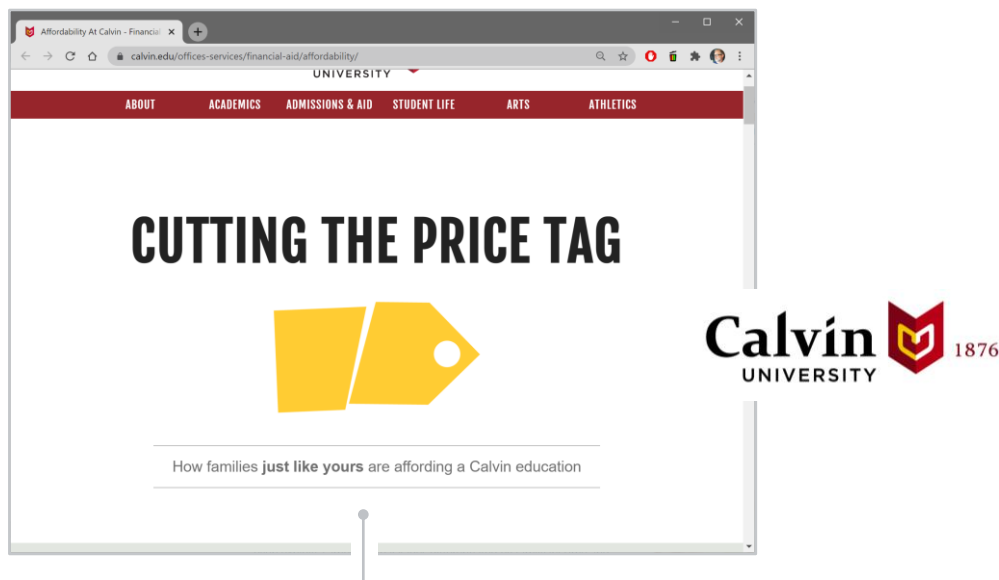
At this stage, content you've created to address families' value concerns in earlier funnel stages takes on new importance.

Comprehensive but brief

The material at right shows a webpage that Calvin University created, focused entirely on addressing families' most pressing cost and value concerns and targeting gaps in knowledge that can exacerbate those concerns.

A key part of what makes the page effective is its succinctness, a reflection both of editorial focus—understanding what matters most to families and focusing selectively on related information—and thoughtful visual presentation that makes the material easy to scan and assimilate.

Calvin University's Website Offers a Quick but Comprehensive Tutorial on College Finances



- ✓ Shows **distribution** of Calvin students by family income
- ✓ Compares Calvin's price to **national average** for four-year privates
- ✓ Explains sticker price versus **actual cost** of attendance
- ✓ Shows **average debt** at graduation for Calvin students who borrow
- ✓ Shows **negligible loan default** rate for Calvin graduates relative to national average

Sources: <https://calvin.edu/offices-services/financial-aid/affordability/index.html>; EAB research and analysis.

Aid-Award Communications Focused on the Complete Value Equation

A consequential communication

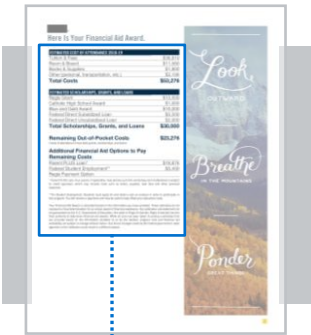
The first and most important point on the path to matriculation where the cost of attendance becomes real for your admitted students is when they receive their aid package. How that package is communicated can provoke a variety of responses—positive or negative—with corresponding downstream implications.

Overwhelm with value

One basic rule of thumb to follow in communicating aid packages is that information on cost should always be paired with compelling illustrations of the positives that come with attending your school. The sample award letter shown at right is noteworthy for the degree to which it embodies this principle. It gives cost information enough real estate to stand out, but most of its eight pages focus on explaining what’s great about the school. That’s done via a wide range of information types, from breathtaking images of the campus and its surroundings to data on the earnings premium enjoyed by the school’s graduates to descriptions of the rich extracurricular life their campus offers.

Excerpts from Emerald Valley College’s¹ Aid-Award Brochure

Cost ...



... and benefit



ESTIMATED SCHOLARSHIPS, GRANTS, AND LOANS	
Grant	\$13,500
Catholic High School Award	\$1,000
Award	\$10,000
Federal Direct Subsidized Loan	\$3,500
Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loan	\$2,000
Total Scholarships, Grants, and Loans	\$30,000
Remaining Out-of-Pocket Costs	\$23,276
(costs of attendance minus total grants, scholarships, and loans)	
Additional Financial Aid Options to Pay Remaining Costs	
Parent PLUS Loan*	\$19,876
Federal Student Employment**	\$3,400
Payment Option	
* Parent PLUS Loan: Your parent, if applicable, may borrow up to the remaining cost of attendance (subject to credit approval), which may include costs such as books, supplies, loan fees and other personal expenses.	
**For Student Employment: Students must apply for and obtain a job on-campus in order to participate in this program. You will receive a paycheck and may be used to help offset your education costs.	
Your Financial Aid Award is calculated based on the information you have provided. These estimates do not represent a final determination for an actual award of financial assistance. Any estimates calculated will not be guaranteed by the U.S. Department of Education, the state or University. University has the final authority to determine financial aid awards. While all care has been taken to produce estimates that are accurate based on the information provided to us by the student, program cost and financial aid availability are subject to change without notice. Any future changes made by the federal government, state agencies or the institution could result in a different award.	

EARN NEARLY

\$10,000

MORE

PER YEAR¹

MANY HAPPY RETURNS
In plain English, █ grads earn more. Our graduates earn \$9,894 more on average per year than their national counterparts. Employers know the value of a █ education, and they're willing to pay for it.

1) A pseudonym.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Proof of Value

A cost threat

Few enrollment leaders will need reminding of the groundswell of negative sentiment among Americans regarding higher education, much of it being some variation on the “college is not worth the cost” theme.

As noted earlier, such worries can be especially damaging in the post-deposit phase, when families are forced to confront most directly the scale of the financial commitment required of them.

Concrete proofs

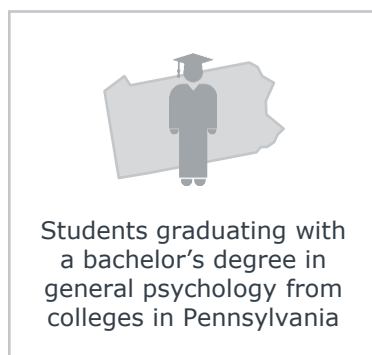
In addition to the more general sorts of arguments described on the preceding page, admission teams can also offer families more concrete and tailored evidence of the soundness of the investment they are being asked to make.

Tools such as the one at right enable you to tell students, with a high degree of specificity, the likely financial consequences of their pursuit of a degree from your institution (and, not incidentally, other institutions).

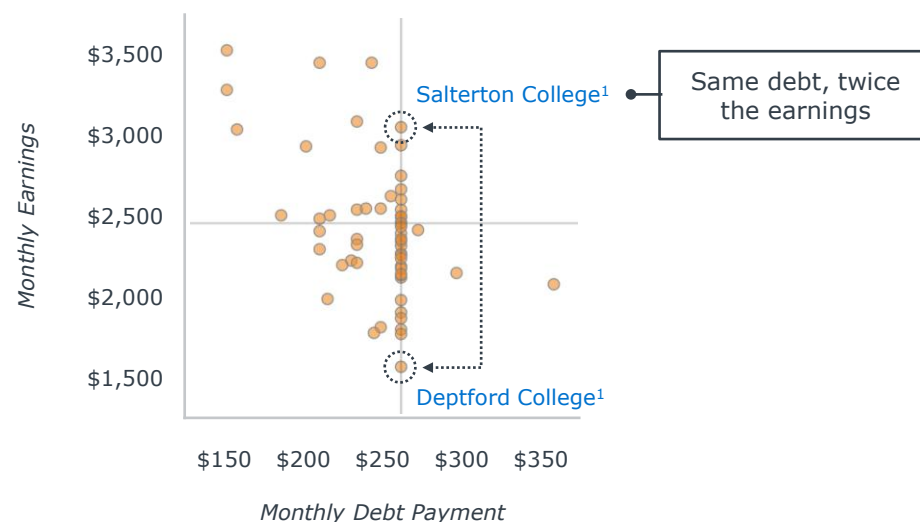
Provided the related data reflects favorably on you, it can do much to put worried families’ minds at ease.

Making the Most of Granular, Publicly Available Data on College Outcomes

Sample Output from an Online Tool Available via Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce



Outcome in First Year After Graduation, by College



1) Pseudonyms.

Sources: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, “Buyer Beware”; EAB research and analysis.

Texting Is a Powerful Tool, to Be Used Judiciously

An action-oriented season

Your success in converting admitted students depends on your ability to get them to take certain actions by certain dates. While this is true of all funnel stages, the number and urgency of things you need students to do in the post-admit phase greatly exceed what is required of them in earlier stages of the recruitment funnel.

This being the case, you'll want to handle related communications via channels that give you the greatest odds of getting through to them. Foremost among these is text messaging.

Be strategic with SMS

The same thing that make SMS so powerful as a means of engaging students—its ability to promptly and reliably get their attention—also presents a risk; if you're contacting students too frequently or about the wrong things or on a schedule that does not work for them, you can quickly annoy and alienate them.

That being the case, you'll want to save texting for messages most directly aimed at converting students, including calls to action that advance them on their path to matriculation.

Students Find SMS Prompts and Reminders Helpful

Percentage of Surveyed Students

86%

Said texts prompted them to complete unfinished tasks

85%

Said texts informed them about something they didn't know they needed to do

84%

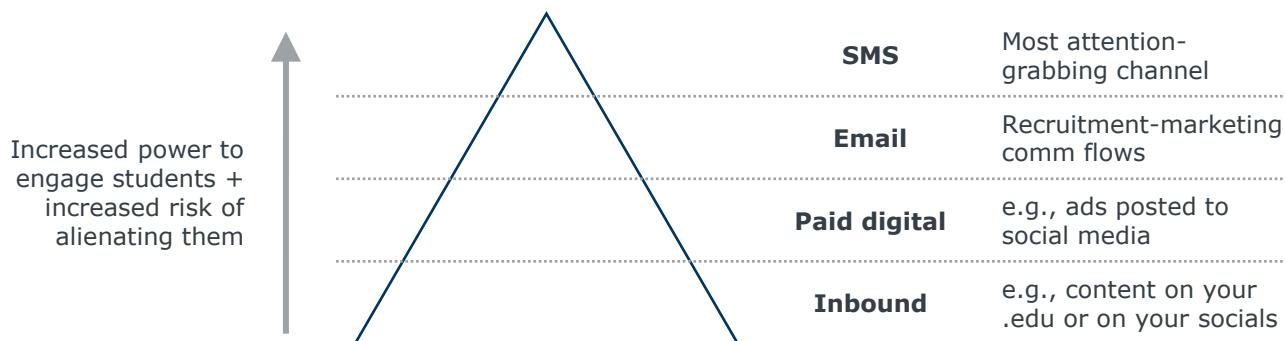
Said text reminders were useful in helping them get everything done before enrolling

SMS Is a Two-Edged Sword

"Texting works because text messages are basically impossible to ignore. But that's also what makes it risky. Just like anyone else, students are going to be unhappy with you if you're repeatedly grabbing their attention for no good reason."

*Dean of Admissions
A Small, More Selective College in the South*

A Communications-Channel "Nutritional Pyramid" for Student Engagement



Sources: blog.admithub.com/16-statistics-why-schools-should-texting-and-messaging-students/; EAB research and analysis.

A Metered Series of Transaction-Focused Text Messages

What to text students about

You can help ensure your texting doesn't annoy students by sticking to a few well-defined message types that research has shown they respond positively to—short transactional communications, such as ones notifying them of deadlines or prompting them to take important actions related to their matriculation.

How often is too often?

When developing an SMS contact calendar it's also important to consider the intensity of your outreach. Regardless of how diligently you stick to the right types of messages, students will react poorly if you're over-contacting them.

While there's no clear consensus about what frequency of messages students will tolerate, out-of-industry examples and the experiences of SMS pioneers in recruitment marketing suggest one message per week as a maximum not to be exceeded. With this as a starting point, admission teams can extrapolate a total number of mass text communications to be sent across yield season.

Focus on Transactional Communications

Reminders/Notifications

- Deposit deadline
- Financial aid deadlines
- Scholarship deadlines
- Orientation registration open

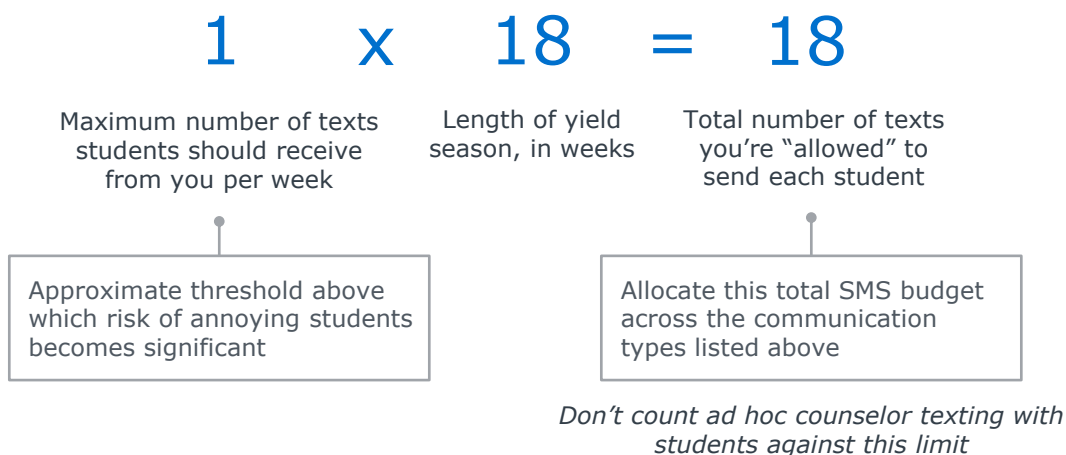
Action prompts

- Submit documentation
- Check email

Rule of thumb for text message content: Ask yourself if it is something students will be grateful to you for sending

Create a "Goodwill Budget" for Your SMS Outreach

An Example



Source: EAB research and analysis.

Ensure Maximum Reach and Appropriate Intensity for Your SMS Efforts

Ensuring maximum impact

Once you've established how many planned mass SMS communications you're going to send across yield season, there are additional steps you'll want to take to ensure those messages are delivering the greatest possible benefit. Four key considerations are outlined at right.

SMS in the AI era

While the four objectives on this page should guide your thinking about SMS strategy in the near term, the picture may look quite different in the not-too-distant future.

Of all the potential use cases for generative AI in the enrollment setting, none has had clearer impact and none promises greater potential than the use of chatbots to engage students.

This point has direct relevance for how you're using text messaging with admitted and committed students. While chatbots may be deployed in any number of settings—on your school's website, for example—EAB tests suggest that having students engage with chatbots via SMS produces unusually high levels of student engagement relative to other chatbot deployments.

Four Primary Considerations

1



Maximize audience capture

Solicit student and parent mobile numbers, and secure their opt-in to receive messages from you, in the application phase (or earlier)

2



Make the most of your SMS budget

Text your admitted students as frequently as possible within the limits you've set (see preceding page)

3



Prepare to respond

Ensure that you have capacity allocated for responding to texts from students after sending out mass SMS communications

4



Include a call to action

Students appreciate your being clear about the action you want them to take, and doing so helps make sure they convert

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Arm Your Counselors with Tips for Ad Hoc SMS Communications

Counselor contact a special case

While the focus of the preceding pages has largely been on planned mass texting, it's also important to have a strategy for one-off SMS communications going out to students from admission counselors. Common sense can do a lot to prevent missteps in this kind of ad hoc outreach. That said, it's helpful to keep a few rules of thumb in mind, as described at right. Additionally, the same rules apply to mass communications in terms of sticking to transactionally focused messages.

"Free" contact

Executed properly, communications from counselors can (within reason) be considered as separate from those you count toward your total allowable budget. The risk of unwelcome contact is reduced when texts are sent in response to texts from students and when messages are coming from a person with whom the student has an established relationship.

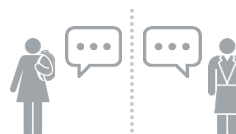
Rules of Thumb

Identify Yourself in Initial Contacts



"Hi, this is Jane, your counselor from XYZ University"

Mirror Students' Channel Selection



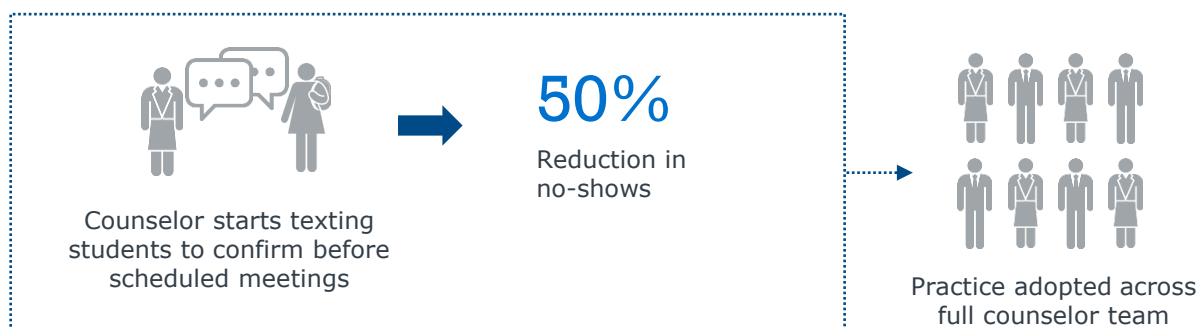
Respond in kind when students text you

Coordinate with Higher-Touch Channels



"What would be a good time for me to call you?"

Share Wins with the Larger Team



Ingels University¹ counselor's pioneering efforts with SMS adopted as best-practice recommendation for other counselors

1) A pseudonym.

Dynamic Aid Adjustments in a Broader Yield Context

Dollars move the dial

Of all the levers that schools can use to convert admitted and committed students to enrolls, institutional aid is among the most powerful. Many schools understand this and place correspondingly high importance on their aid models.

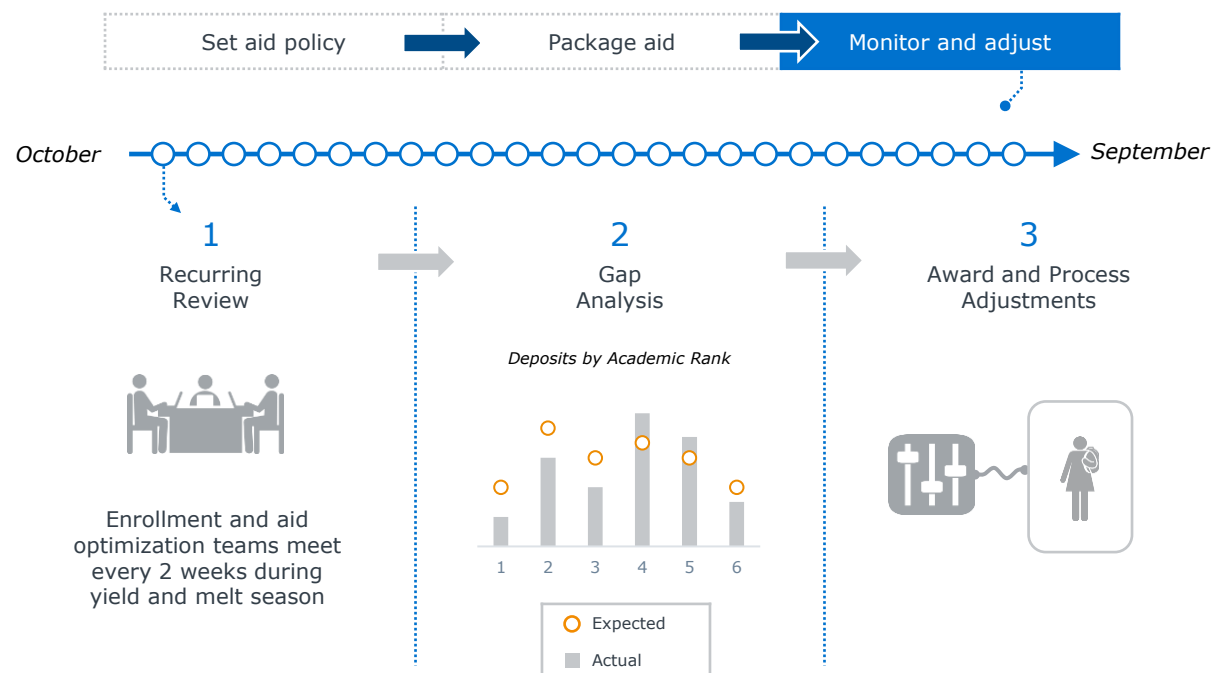
Less widely appreciated is the role that aid granting and related processes can play in influencing students not only at the point of the initial award but throughout yield season.

Dynamic adjustments

This page illustrates an approach consistent with the premise described above—one that treats aid disbursement as a continuous and dynamic process. Rather than “setting and forgetting” aid grants, enrollment and aid optimization teams meet regularly throughout yield season, comparing actual deposits to expected levels and disbursing additional aid as required to address shortfalls.

Important additional work that happens in those meetings is spotting non-aid factors that may be negatively impacting yield performance.

Aid Monitoring in Action



A “Dollars-Plus” Perspective

At the heart of financial aid optimization (FAO) monitoring are analytics that tell you the probable impact of a change in a student’s aid award on their likelihood to convert. That said, there’s far more to impactful aid monitoring. Any number of additional factors can affect a student’s propensity to accept your admit offer, including how effectively your offer letter and post-admit communications position your school’s unique value proposition and how good you are at answering students’ most pressing questions. Optimally executed FAO monitoring can distinguish between yield shortfalls caused by the size of your aid awards and those caused by the broader set of factors just mentioned.



Associated EAB offering: Enroll360 **Financial Aid Optimization**

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Parents as Crucial Yield and Melt Allies

Growing dependence

While college-bound students have always relied on their parents for guidance, recent years have seen students growing even more dependent on them.

This is due, in part, to the Anxious Generation phenomenon. Recent years have seen a rapid change in students' cognitive ability, anxiety levels, motivation, ability to persist in the face of obstacles, and overall mental health—an altered psychological and behavioral profile that has outsized consequences for the post-admit phase, due to the complexity, high-stakes decision-making, and resulting stress that characterize it.

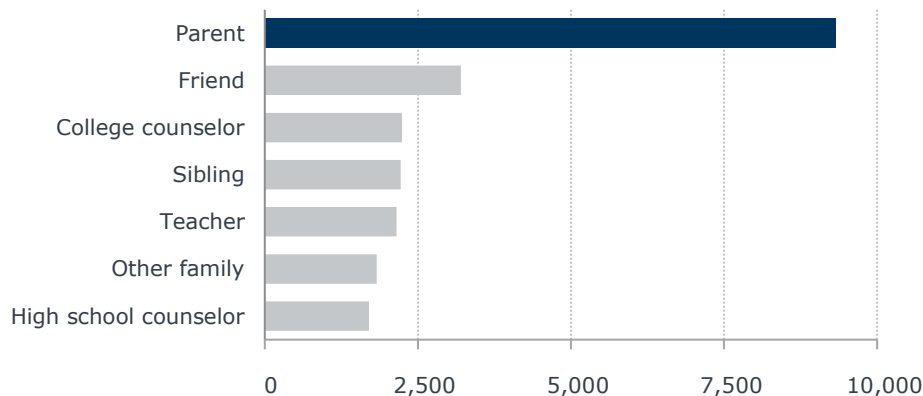
Engaging parents works

The good news for admission teams is that the right sort of outreach from them can help parents better support their students, to the benefit of all involved.

Parents Influence Students

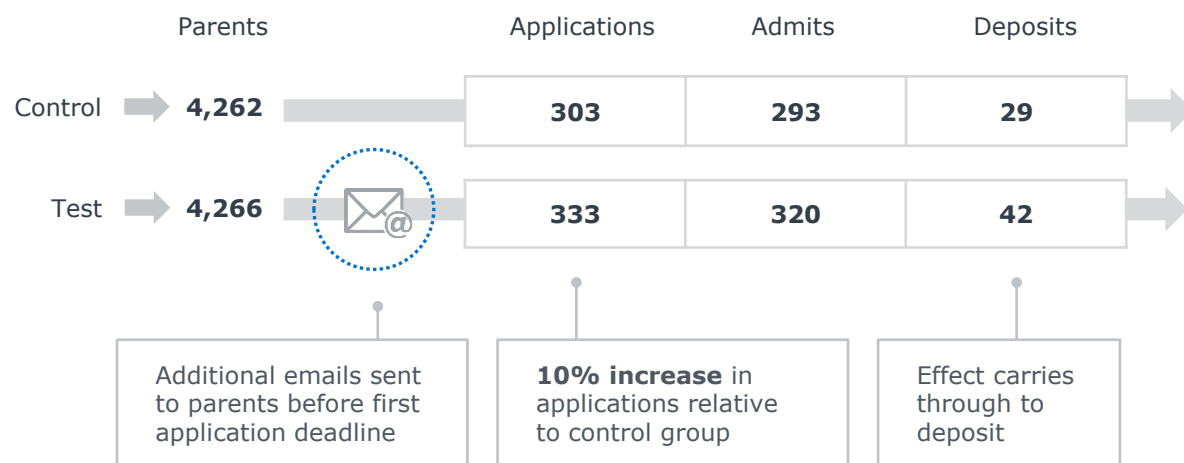
Number of Surveyed Students Identifying Individuals as "Highly Influential" in Their College Search

EAB Survey Research



You Can Influence Parents

Randomized EAB Testing Shows That Engaging Parents Boosts Enrollment



Source: EAB research and analysis.

Comprehensive Parent Engagement Plan

A Flexible All-Points Program for Getting Parents Involved

Some enrollment teams can be hesitant to engage with parents, due to them being a lesser-known quantity than students in terms of top concerns, preferred channels of communication, susceptibility to influence, etc. This and the facing page aim to allay that hesitancy by offering a range of low-risk, high-impact activities admission teams can undertake with parents.

The list represents a wide spectrum of ideas in terms of level of difficulty and potential impact, from work that is a matter of minutes (e.g., ccing parents on emails you’re sending to their students) to improvements that entail a significant resource commitment and that promise commensurately larger benefit (e.g., running a dedicated online parent portal). The idea is to give you a set of practices that may be implemented individually or in combination, that may be selectively adopted based on your team’s unique capabilities, and that may be scoped more or less broadly depending on your bandwidth and resource availability.

Three Main Areas of Focus

1	Comm flows	Extended parent capture	Third-party data (e.g., consumer databases) analyzed to identify contact details for parents whose students have not provided that information
		Dedicated parent comm flows	Run in parallel with student comm flows; themes, channels, cadence etc. customized to parent (as opposed to student) needs and preferences
		Parent cc	Parents are copied on emails and other communications with students, as an easier, if less impactful, alternative to parent-specific comm flows
		Parent messaging audit	Full spectrum of communication with parents (including in-person) audited to ensure that the messages you emphasize reflect parents’ top priorities
		Monthly parent newsletter	VPEM emails a monthly newsletter to parents, outlining important things to know for the current point in the admissions cycle
		Virtual events	Parent-specific Zoom meetings and live-cast events on social media, e.g. financial aid Q&A, AMA session with your institution’s president, etc.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

2	Campus community	VPEM “batphone”	VPEM gives their cell phone number to parents of all admitted students and encourages them to call with any questions, etc.
		Plus-one fly-in programs	Campus-visit fly-in programs for students require them to bring a parent or other adult ally (23 years of age or older) with them
		Counselor-parent connection	Admission counselors proactively initiate outreach to parents, with the aim of having a live, one-on-one conversation with them
		Parent-to-parent roundtables	Parents of admitted/committed students are brought together with parents of current students for informal discussion, either virtually or in person
		Regional alumni events	Parents are invited to local events hosted by alumni of your institution
3	Digital infrastructure	Parent-enabled student portal	Parents are given access to school-hosted online portals used for communication with admitted and committed students
		Dedicated parent portal	The school creates a dedicated online portal for parents of admitted and committed students that tailors information shown to parents’ unique concerns

Source: Eric Hoover, *The Home Stretch of Student Recruitment*; EAB research and analysis.

Re-Recruit Students Who Failed to Yield or Melted

Promising prospects

A large number of admitted and committed students end up not enrolling at any institution. Rather than simply forgetting about these populations, treat them as hot leads for re-recruitment in future enrollment cycles.

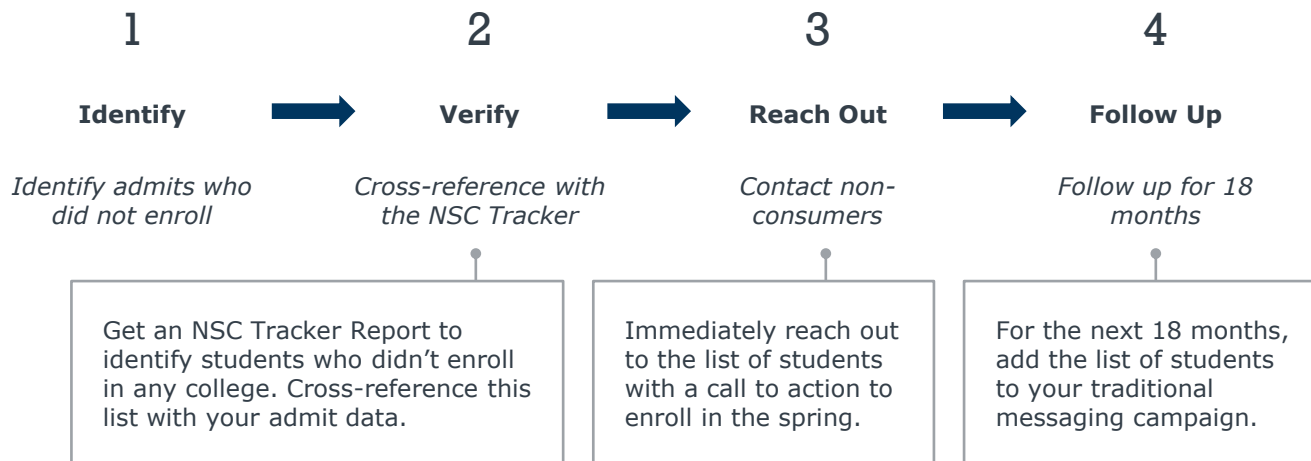
These students not only have shown that they are interested in pursuing postsecondary education; they have also demonstrated interest in your institution specifically. Furthermore, having already been through the admission process once, they are less likely to stumble on unfamiliar processes such as applying for financial aid.

Putting NSC data to work

The material at right shows a methodical approach to identifying and reengaging with the category of students just described, based on cross-referencing data from National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) Tracker Reports with a list of individuals who were admitted to your institution but did not enroll.

Your Clearinghouse Report Helps Identify Non-Consumers to Reengage

A Four-Step Process



One School's Experience



A large, associate's-dominant four-year institution in the Midwest

Results from an 18-month Reengagement Campaign



Sources: Community College Research Center, "What we know about Transfer," Teachers College, Columbia University, Jan. 2015; EAB interviews and analysis.



Imperative 2: Enable Intensive Engagement with Students

Cut Your Yield-Management Task Down to Size

A tall order

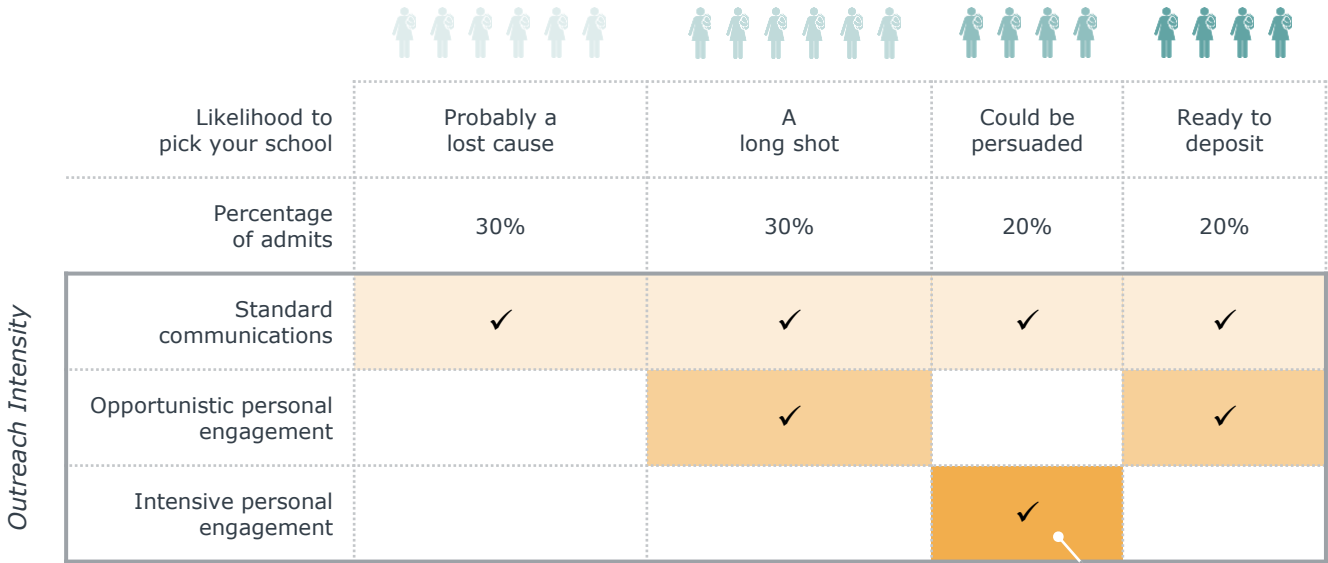
One of the central challenges of yield management is the size of colleges’ admit pools. As mentioned earlier in this document, schools face an urgent imperative to grow their admit pools, this being the single most powerful determinant of downstream enrollment outcomes, including class size and revenue. At the same time, converting these students increasingly requires highly intensive and personalized outreach.

Focus where it matters

Few enrollment teams have the capacity to perform high-touch outreach across the whole of their admit pool. All too often, they are left to guess which students to focus on and hope for the best—an approach that can lead to underinvesting in some prospects and overinvesting in others. Solving this problem entails getting a more accurate read on your admitted students’ intent, which enables you to focus your most intensive efforts where they will have the biggest impact—an idea that is developed further across the next few pages.

Admitted Students

By Likelihood to Yield and Optimal Degree of Outreach Intensity, Typical EAB Partner Institution



Highest-intensity outreach efforts focused selectively on just 20% of admit pool, greatly reducing burden on admission staff and boosting quality of engagement with students

Ask Students About Their Intentions

The power of surveying

One of the most effective ways of predicting students' yield behavior is also the simplest—just ask them what their plans are.

EAB research has consistently shown that admitted students' response to the question "Do you intend to deposit?" is highly correlated with the actions they ultimately take. For example, around three-quarters of students who respond "yes" end up enrolling, while just 1% of those who answer "no" do so.

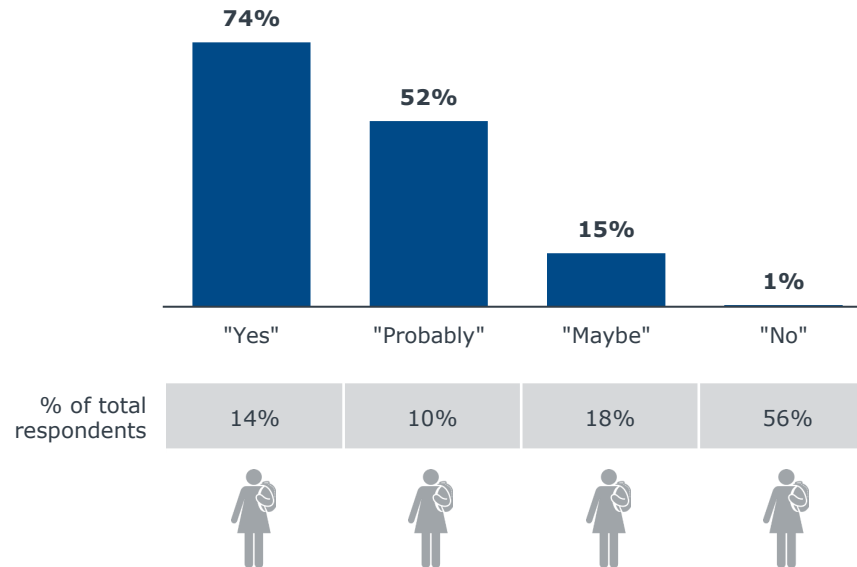
Based on a typical distribution of responses, data from surveys enables enrollment teams to focus their most intensive outreach on just a quarter of respondents, thereby greatly reducing their workload, with no related yield-performance penalty.

How you ask matters

One important additional consideration related to yield surveying is that, while not all students respond, using best practices in outreach to them consistently produces response rates in the neighborhood of 40%.

Students' Survey Responses Accurately Predict Their Yield Behavior

Deposit Rate by Admitted-Student Response to the Question "Do You Intend to Deposit?"¹



40%

of surveyed students respond



Associated EAB offering: **Enroll360 Yield**

1. Not shown here are an additional 2% of students who responded "done."

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Use a Robust Predictive Model

The limits of surveying

As shown on the preceding page, student surveys can offer reliable insight into yield behaviors of around 40% of your admit pool (the typical upper limit for survey response rates). But what do you do about the remaining 60%?

Looking to predictive analytics

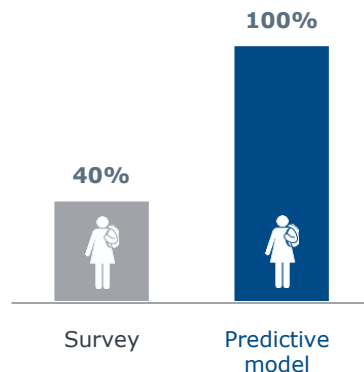
One important answer is found in data science. As explained on this and the following pages, predictive models can provide actionable insight on likelihood to yield for all students in your admit pool.

Furthermore, they can do so earlier in yield season. EAB research has shown that statistical models incorporating data from recruitment-marketing interactions, typically available several months before survey responses, are highly predictive of student behavior.

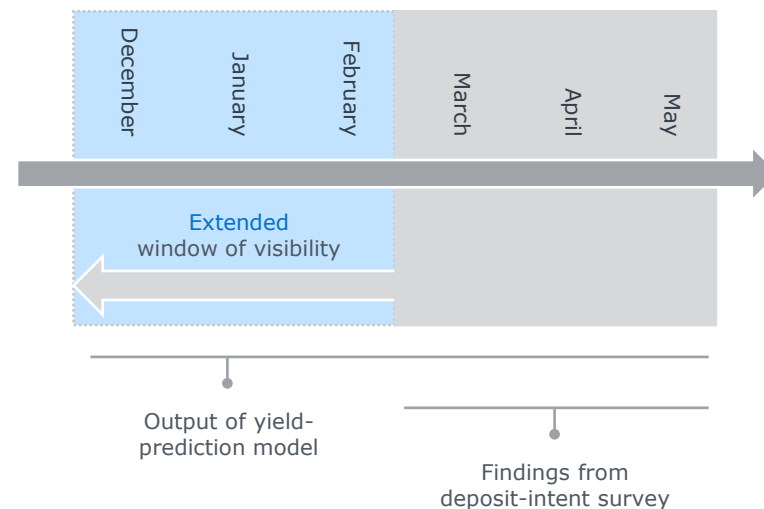
The greatest degree of insight into student intent becomes available to enrollment teams earliest when both approaches—student surveying and predictive modeling—are used in combination.

Delivering Earlier Insight on More Students

% of Admitted Students Covered



Timing



Associated EAB offering: Enroll360 **Yield**

Source: EAB research and analysis.

An Unstable Marketplace Raises the Stakes for Yield Modeling

Yield becoming less predictable

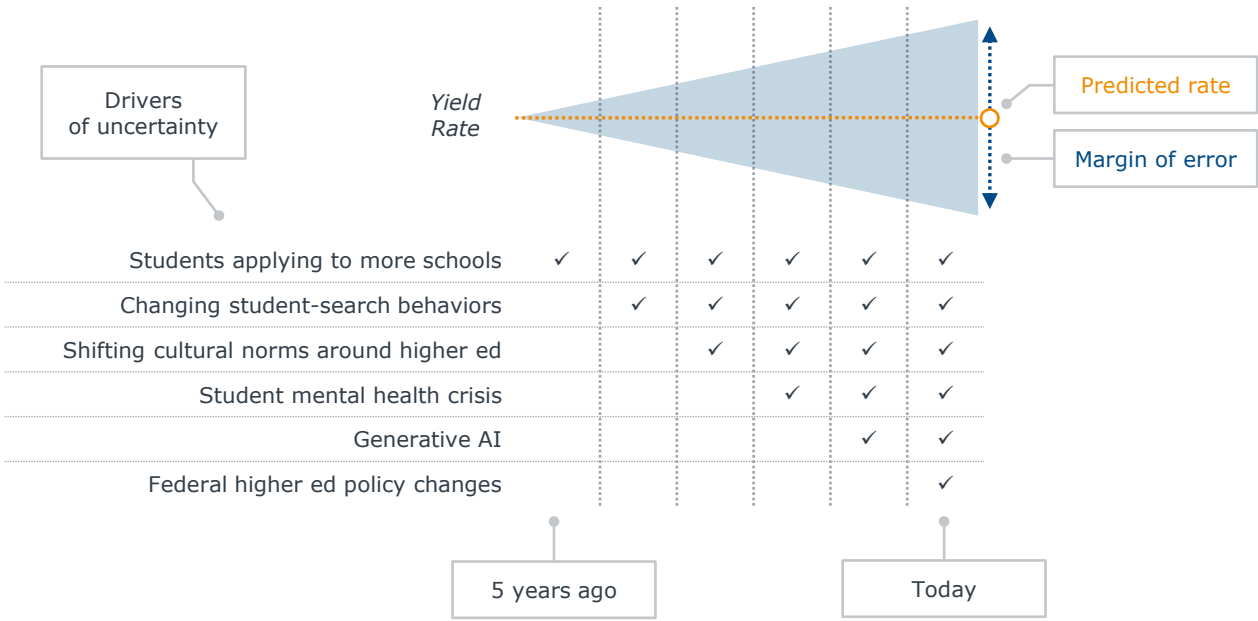
As explained on the preceding page, predictive models can increase the number of students for whom you are able to accurately estimate propensity to yield. One factor making this more important than ever is increased yield volatility. There was a time not so long ago when yield rate did not vary markedly from year to year. That is no longer the case. As shown at right, numerous factors, from students applying to more schools to the rise of generative AI, are boosting the uncertainty associated with yield season.

A problem you can't ignore

The problems caused by that kind of uncertainty are not merely hypothetical. The COVID pandemic, for example, demonstrated just how consequential large, unanticipated swings in yield rate can be, with some schools having suffered double-digit drops in enrollment and others unintentionally over-enrolling their classes by 10% or 20%. The corresponding imperative for enrollment teams is to find better ways of predicting yield—an aim that, for most, will mean using more robust predictive models.

Cumulative Factors Making Yield Rate Harder to Anticipate

Predicted Versus Actual Yield Rate



Source: EAB research and analysis.

Robust Models Work Even in Chaotic Market Contexts

Model quality matters

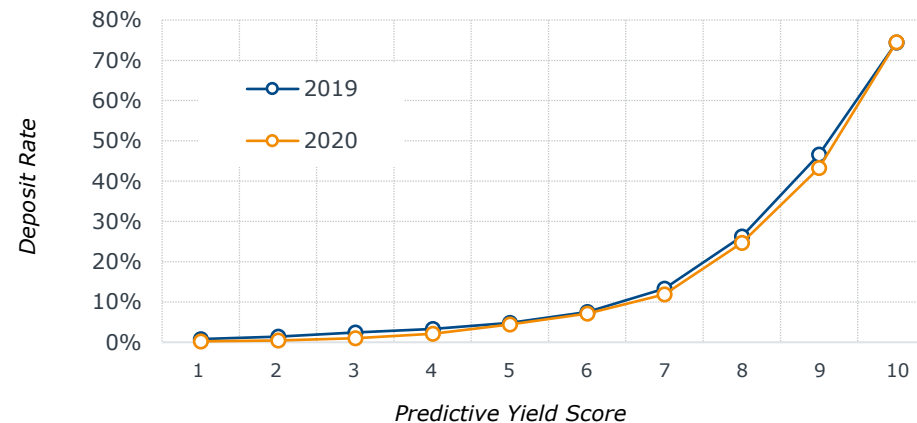
When thinking through what use you might make of data science in managing yield, it's important to understand that not all predictive models are created equal.

Yield-related statistical models vary greatly in their predictive power, accuracy, and ability to adapt to unexpected market conditions. This is especially true in this day and age, as an explosion of data available on students, associated advances in data science, and the arrival on the scene of generative AI are enabling previously unseen levels of modeling power.

EAB's own research has shown that advanced statistical methods, incorporating the right inputs, give yield models a remarkable degree of adaptability—having enabled them, for example, to predict yield with undiminished accuracy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Case in Point: Sustained Accuracy Across the COVID Pandemic

Deposit Rate by Yield Score, EAB Yield Predictive Model, Aggregate Data Across EAB Partner Colleges, Pre- and Post-Pandemic



Accuracy of predictive model unaffected by the pandemic



Associated EAB offering: Enroll360 **Yield**

Source: EAB research and analysis.

What Makes a Yield Model Robust?

Seeking a solid foundation

As explained on the preceding page, predictive models vary greatly in terms of their quality and efficacy.

If you're using the output of a model to inform the actions your admission team is taking—and that is, after all, their main purpose—then that variation in quality matters quite a bit.

Characteristics of strong models

So—how can you tell if your model is good enough?

Certainly, it may be judged retrospectively, as you compare predicted with actual outcomes, which is absolutely something you should do.

But you can also assess the quality of models based on characteristics of them that are evident prior to implementation and are associated with strong performance. Five examples of such characteristics are shown at right.

Five Key Characteristics



Specific to your institution

Your model should be designed specifically for your institution, using your data. (Some third-party models are generic, based on data from other institutions.)



Dynamically updated

Your model should be calibrated throughout yield season to adapt it to changes in market context.



Diversified

Your model should use a diverse array of variables, so that if the predictive power of one is diminished, others can compensate.



Methodologically cutting-edge

Your model should take advantage of ongoing advances in data science, which can greatly increase the accuracy and timeliness of yield prediction.



Networked

Your model is fed by the full range of data your institution has on students, acquired via behavioral sensing across your communications ecosystem.



Associated EAB offering: **Enroll360 Yield**

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Hardwire Your Response

From insight to impact

As mentioned earlier, the insight that predictive modeling gives you into individual students' likely yield behavior helps your admission team better tailor outreach to them, focusing your counselors' most intensive efforts where they will have the greatest impact.

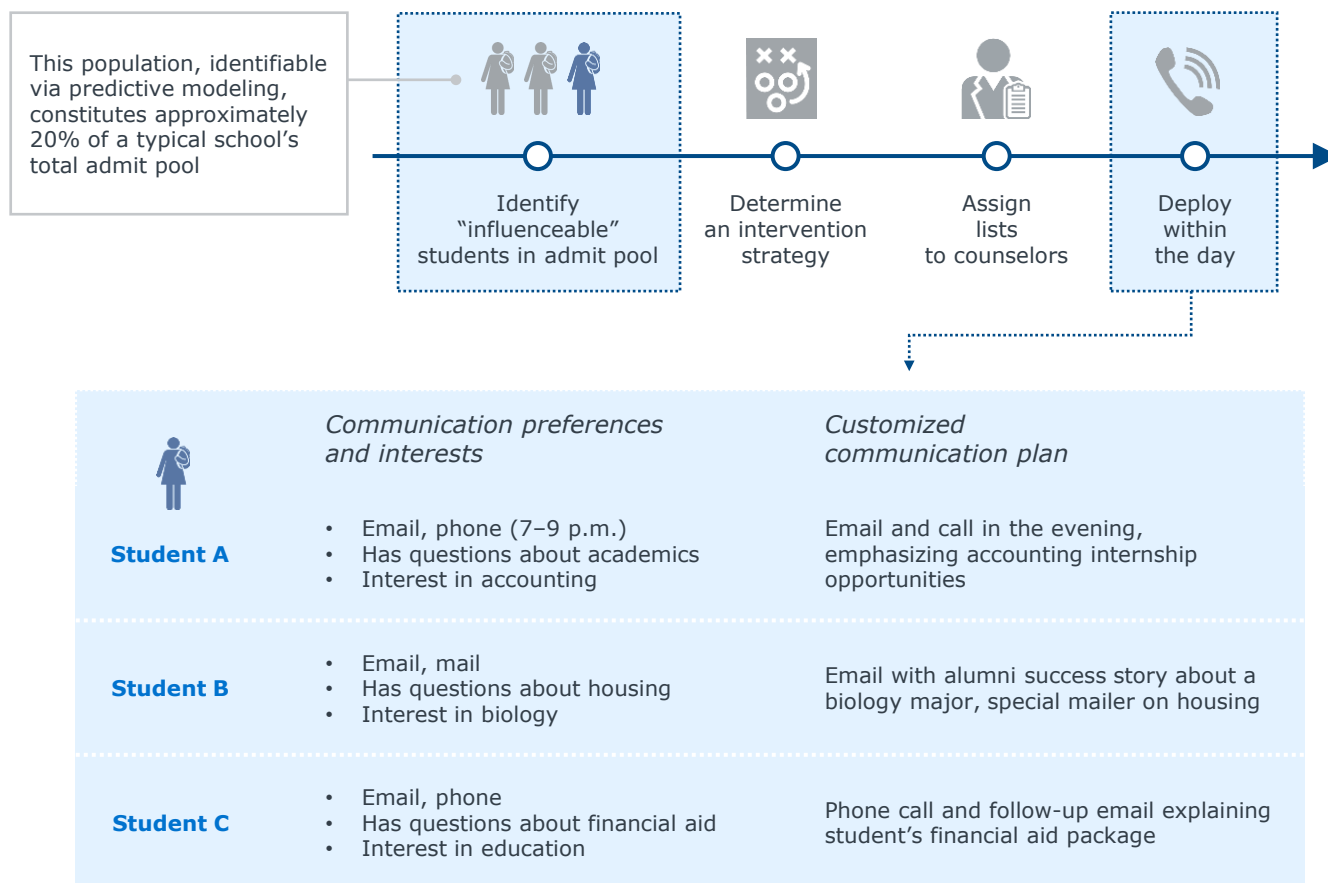
But to make the most of that capability, you'll need to have processes in place that reliably translate insight on students into concrete action by your team.

An action plan

The graphic on the upper portion of this page shows a basic four-step process by which that aim is accomplished, from identifying a subset of "influenceable" students to their assignment to particular counselors to actual deployment of outreach.

As shown below that, triage of this sort enables outreach to this group of students to be both highly customized and intensive—the sort of contact proven to produce higher rates of conversion in the right students but impossible to scale across an entire admit pool.

Creating a Short Path from Descriptive Information to Action



Source: EAB research and analysis.

Connecting Admitted Students with Currently Enrolled Students

Enlisting the community

One of the most impactful things you can do to increase the intensity of your engagement with admitted students is to involve your campus community in the effort.

Current students a special case

A key constituency in this regard is your currently enrolled students. Not only are they better able to relate to prospective students, because of their age proximity, but they are also more likely to be perceived as objective (relative to, say, admission counselors or administrators). Furthermore, their large numbers represent a big potential supplement to your own team's bandwidth.

One way of getting your current students involved is to have them serve as mentors to admitted and committee students.

The pages that follow look at ways of addressing barriers that can stand in the way of implementing that vision.

There's lots to like about peer mentoring ...

Insight

Peers have a deeper intuitive understanding of admitted students than you do and also possess knowledge about the campus experience that you do not

Trust

Admitted students are more likely to regard information from their peers as honest and impartial, compared to that coming from your school's officialdom

Capacity

Increasing mentoring capacity is easier than creating new admission-counselor capacity and therefore holds greater potential for engaging more students

... but formidable obstacles can stand in the way of its adoption

Expertise

Design and execution of effective mentoring programs depends on a specialized knowledge base and learning gained from experience

Bandwidth

Managing mentoring programs can require more capacity than some admission teams can spare

Recruitment

Some currently enrolled students will have limited interest in serving as mentors; others will feel they are too busy to do so

Quality control

Mentors need to have knowledge of requisite mentoring best practices, need to be capable of following them, and must be motivated to do so

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Peer Mentoring at Scale

Peer-mentoring platforms

Recent years have seen the emergence of specialized infrastructure for peer mentoring, designed, in part, to address the limits to scalability described on the preceding page.

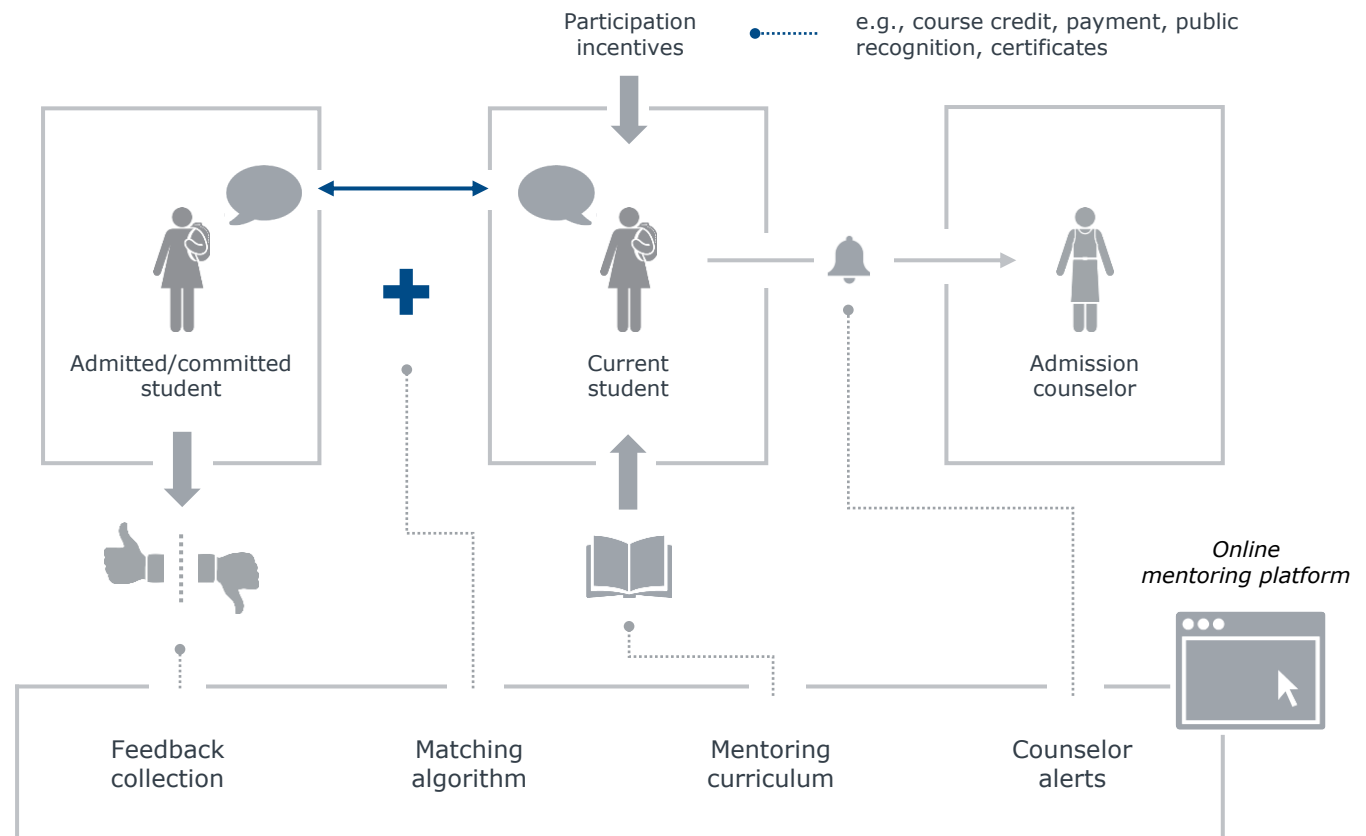
The most prominent examples are comprehensive online platforms developed by third parties, a generic example of which is shown at right.

Tech plus knowledge

As noted, the platform engages three different constituencies: admitted/committed students, currently enrolled students, and admission counselors.

It does so through a digital infrastructure whose features include mentor-mentee matching algorithms, mechanisms for collecting feedback from prospective students, and a knowledge base that includes a mentoring curriculum and guidance on how to incentivize students to participate as mentors.

Key Components of Next-Generation Peer-Mentoring Infrastructure



Third-party partnerships

Vendors offering platforms that support some variation of the approach described above include **The Mentor Collective**, **Unibuddy**, **The Ambassador Platform**, and **PeopleGrove**. One important difference between them is the degree to which participating students from your institution serve as mentors rather than as a less specialized sort of ambassador for your school. Another is the degree to which they focus on fostering 1:1 relationships versus connecting prospective students with communities of like-minded individuals.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Repurposing the Social-Network Model

A premium on personalization

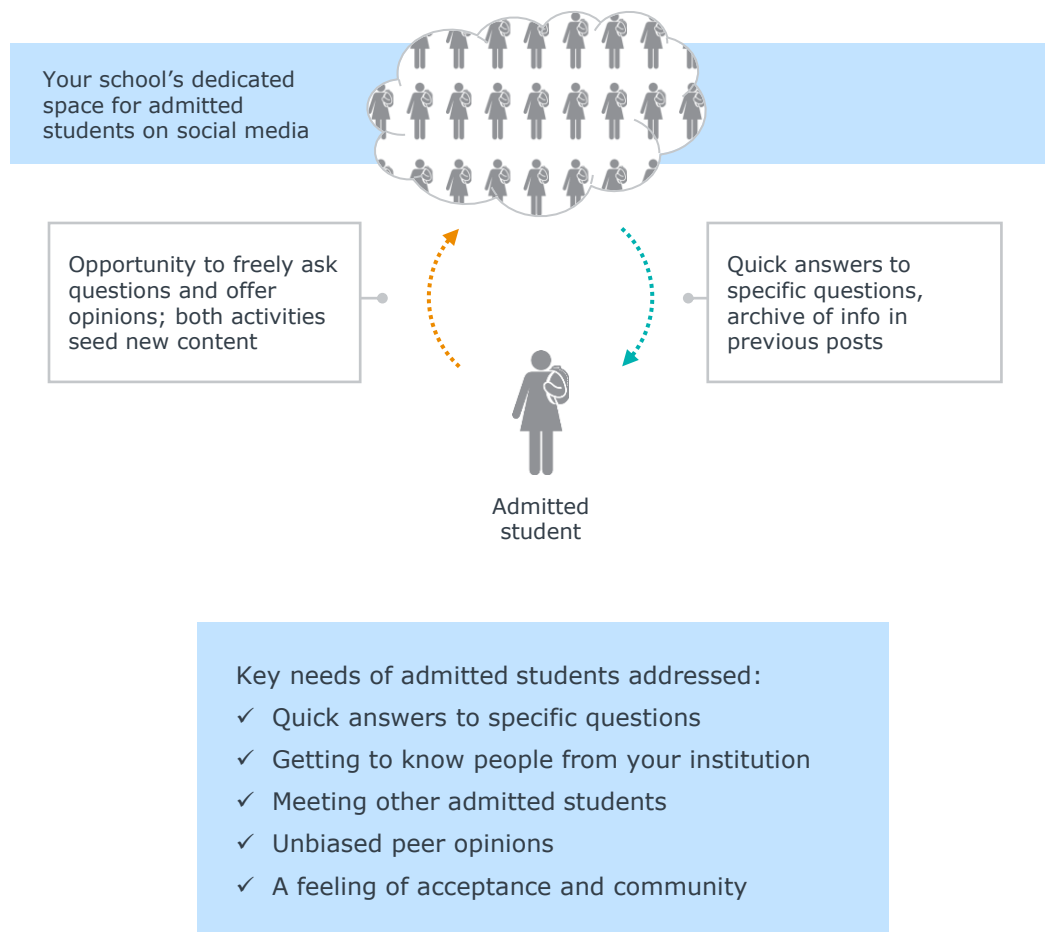
As shown on the preceding page, online infrastructure can be used to help maximize the number of students involved in peer mentoring relationships. The next few pages describe another, more generalized means of engaging your campus community with admitted and committed students, intensively and at scale. As shown at right, it uses digital infrastructure to organize interactions between admitted students and your campus community, takings as its model social-media platforms.

Special relevance for social

One of the more salient features of social networks in the yield context is their scalability—their ability to quickly generate large amounts of highly relevant content for admitted students, with relatively little effort on your part. Another is their ability to promote interpersonal connections.

These and other features of social media directly address several needs of admitted students, such as getting quick and easy answers to specific questions and their desire to get to know your organization's people.

A Scaffolding for Connections Between Admitted Students and Your Broader Campus Community



Source: EAB research and analysis.

School-Owned Social Networks Improve on Commercial Options

Limits of commercial networks

For the reasons outlined on the preceding page, many schools have made social media a core element of their strategy for engaging and converting admitted students, an especially common approach being the creation of groups for admitted students and their parents on social networks.

While such approaches can be highly impactful, the use of commercial social networks (Instagram, etc.) does have drawbacks. For example, they are often rife with distractions, offering users tempting off-ramps to other content on the platform not associated with your institution.

A school-owned alternative

For these and other reasons, some schools are opting to set up their own, school-owned social platforms for admitted students—an approach that delivers many of the benefits of commercial social networks without their drawbacks.

Commercial Versus School-Owned Social Networks

Commercial social network	School-owned social network
 Distractions	 Focus
 Uneven content quality	 Fine-tuned quality control
 Limiting site architecture	 Purpose-built site architecture
 Siloed	 Integrated with other channels
 Data rationing	 Full data transparency
 Platform rejection by users	 No compromising affiliations

Third-party partnerships

Companies that help colleges and universities create and manage owned social networks include **ZeeMe**, **Rafr**, and **NearPeer**. Some of these vendors' offerings overlap significantly with the peer mentoring platforms described earlier in this report (60), blurring the lines between them.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Don't Leave Social Engagement to Chance

Not an all-or-nothing proposition

Even if you don't, as described on the preceding page, decide to build your own dedicated social network for admitted students, there are related things you can do to make your social strategy more impactful. One important example is to more effectively deploy members of your campus community.

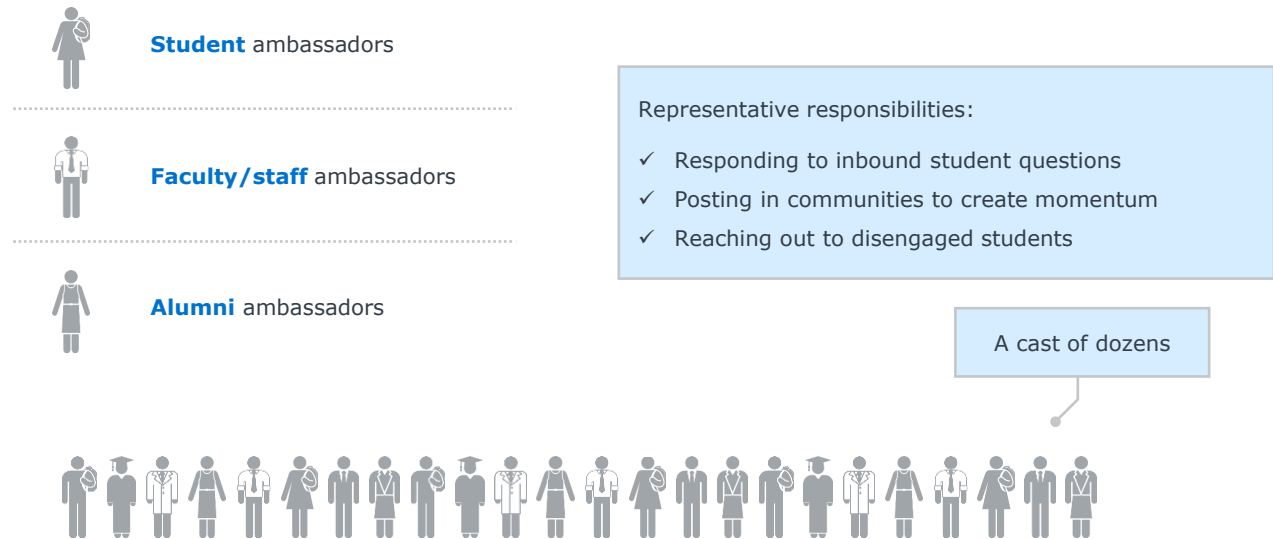
Activating your community

How engaging admitted students find your social presence depends largely on the amount and quality of information they find there.

For that reason, some admission teams actively manage the admitted-student groups on their social networks—assigning members of their staff to serve as moderators, for example.

Fewer have developed that approach to the point where it consistently ensures the right degree of content quality and user engagement. Those that have tend to be ambitious in their approach, enlisting many members of their campus communities in the effort and assigning them clearly defined goals.

"Staff" Your Socials with an Active Team of Ambassadors



Source: EAB research and analysis.

Boost the Effectiveness of Your Social Ambassadors

A more structured effort

As noted on the preceding page, one way of ensuring maximum effectiveness of social media for engaging admitted students is to have more members of your campus community get more involved.

One important way of advancing that objective is to bring the right degree of structure to the effort. Simply inviting your current students, staff, and alumni to participate is unlikely to deliver the level of impact you're looking for. Instead, you'll want to set clear goals and expectations, offer hands-on assistance, and provide feedback on their performance.

Many options for support

One especially impactful form of assistance is to help your ambassadors burnish their personal profiles—for example, assisting them in the creation of compelling video introductions. Another is to share data that benchmarks their activity on social media with that of their peers—a great way of spurring healthy competition.

A Comprehensive Support Infrastructure for Your Social Staff



Set clear goals and expectations

Your ambassadors won't know what, specifically, to do on your network and how often if you don't spell it out for them. Give them concrete guidance, including numerical targets.



Offer hands-on assistance

Where feasible, pitch in directly on key components of your ambassadors' online presence, e.g., use your knowledge about best practices for social-media video to help them create compelling videos to include in their profiles.



Benchmark ambassador performance

Share data with your ambassadors, showing how their activity and results on your network compare with those of their ambassador peers—information that can be a highly effective motivator.

Source: EAB research and analysis.



Imperative 3: Make Personalization a Priority

AI Chatbots—the Ultimate in Scalable Personalization?

A chatbot revolution

Personalized interaction with admitted students hinges on understanding what they want to know and getting them that information with a minimum of fuss.

Generative AI has been revolutionary in this respect, bringing high-quality chatbots, formerly an expensive niche technology, within easy reach of every institution. Furthermore, unlike many other enrollment-related use cases for AI, chatbots have an established track record in higher ed, as the case study on this page demonstrates.

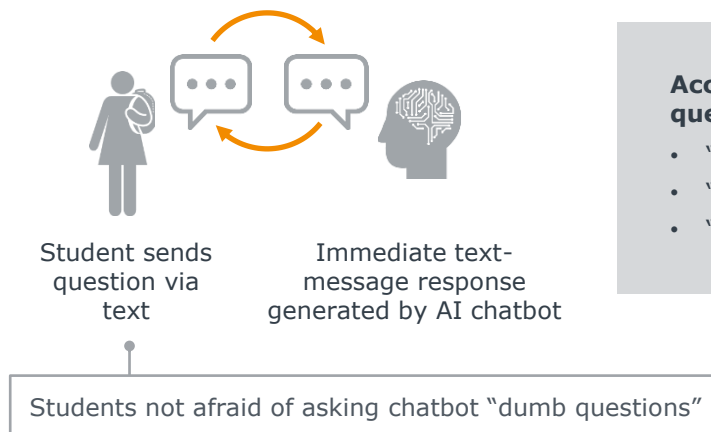
Specialization on the horizon?

An exciting frontier for chatbots in the admission context is the possibility of their being specialized to specific use cases, including yield and melt management.

While all-purpose chatbots—the sort trained on the full spectrum of information on your school that might be of interest to students—do a good job of serving students at all funnel stages, it is reasonable to suppose that chatbots trained specifically on interactions with admitted and committed students could reach unprecedented levels of efficacy.

AI Chatbots Are Not New to Higher Ed

Georgia State's "Pounce" Chatbot Has Been Active for Years



Accommodating the enormous variety of questions admitted students ask

- "When will I get my scholarship package?"
- "Should I enroll in summer school?"
- "Can my cat live in the dorms with me?"

Demonstrated Effectiveness

135K

Text messages sent across four months

50K

Queries received from students

0.9%

of queries required human intervention

94%

of students recommend the system

Significant admissions-team capacity freed up



Associated EAB offering: Enroll360 **Conversation Agent**

Sources: "How Georgia State University supports every student with personalized text messaging," blog.admithub.com/case-study-how-admithub-is-freezing-summer-melt-at-georgia-state-university; EAB research and analysis.

A Chatbot-Adjacent .edu Enhancement

A chat-like website extension

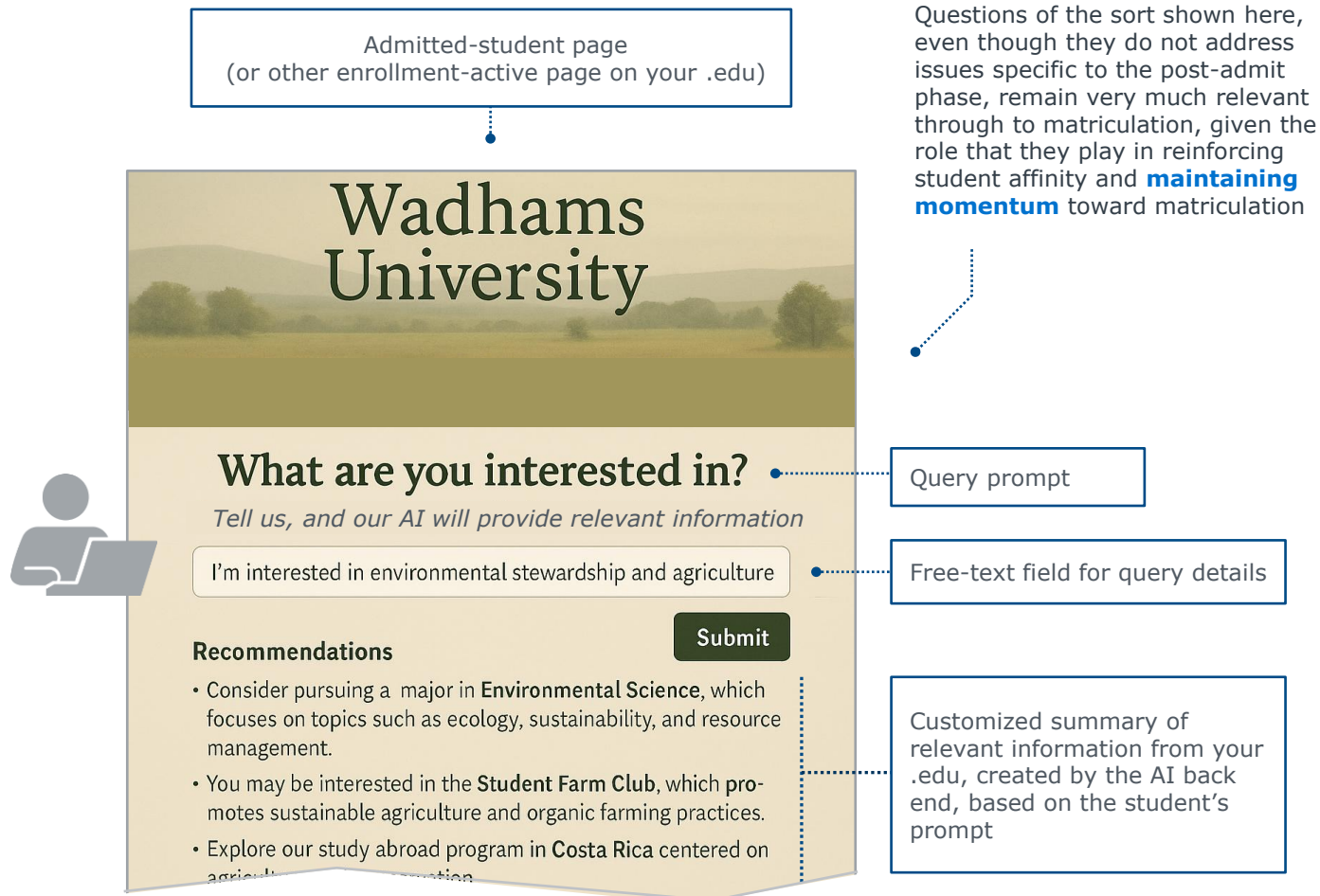
Higher education and its industry partners are in the early stages of envisioning the full possible range of AI deployments that might be used with prospective students. One that has already attained a high level of maturity, the AI chatbot, was seen on the preceding page. Close behind it in terms of maturity and similar to it in usefulness is the idea shown on this page: an approach we're calling the .edu AI concierge.

Flattening the .edu

The basic idea is to include a prompt on your .edu that asks students what they are interested in; a free-text field is provided for them to input their response. The field is tied to an AI on the back end of your website, whose natural-language capabilities enable it to understand what the student has written and whose generative capabilities enable it to comb your .edu for relevant information, summarizing it for the student and saving them the trouble of scouring your website for it. While the example shown here is a hypothetical, generic one, it resembles implementations currently seen on college and university websites.

Website-Query AI Widget Instantly Gives Students a Bespoke Guide to Your Institution, Based on Their Interests

A Hypothetical/Generic Example



Source: EAB research and analysis.

Personalization Comes to the Virtual Tour

A digital supplement

One growing concern among enrollment leaders is an ongoing drop in the percentage of admitted students making campus visits—a category of activity widely understood to be pivotal for converting students.

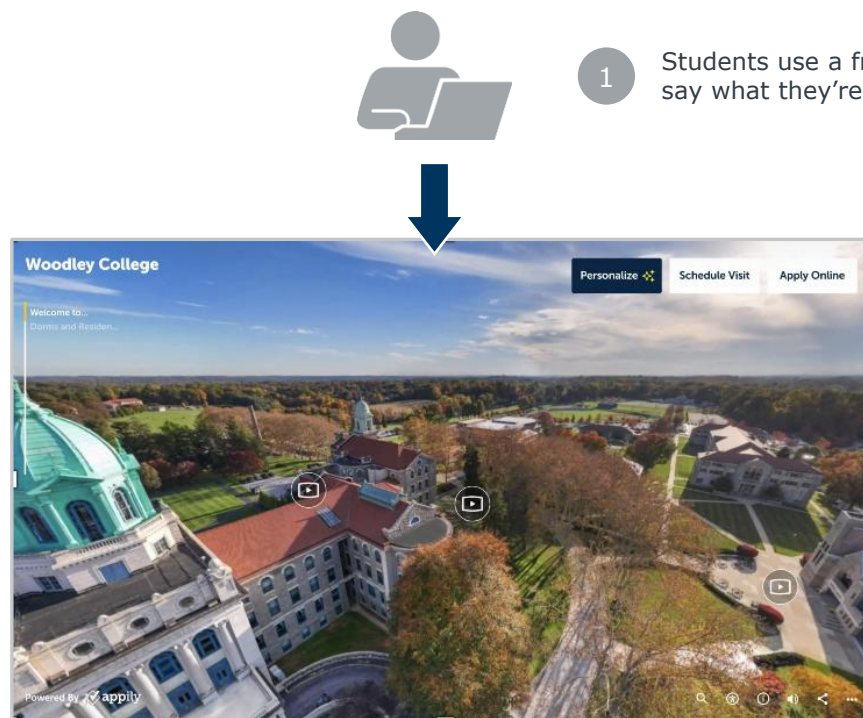
This trend has been accompanied by growing interest among admission teams in virtual campus tours, which, while not a substitute for in-person visits, provide many of the same benefits, in addition to other advantages unique to the virtual approach.

Growing sophistication

Increased use of virtual tours is also attributable to growth in sophistication of the technology itself, including the layering of different media within a single tour experience (video, immersive interactive panoramic photos, etc.) and advanced narrative techniques used to structure the tour experience.

The latest innovation to come to virtual tours is AI-based personalization, as described at right. EAB's own implementation of this approach has found it to significantly boost tour performance.

AI Enables a Customized Virtual Campus Tour Experience for Every Student



1 Students use a free-form text box to say what they're most interested in

2 Via its natural-language processing capabilities, generative AI converts a student prompt into a personalized virtual tour itinerary

43%

of visitors used the free-form text option to customize their tours

+9%

Increase in time on tour associated with customized itineraries



Associated EAB offering: Enroll360 **Virtual Tour**

Source: EAB research and analysis.

A 100% Customizable Experience of Your Campus

Lasting relevance for IRL visits

The preceding pages focused on technological solutions to personalized engagement with students, important for their ability to scale intensive interaction across large numbers of admitted students.

These solutions notwithstanding, the in-person campus visit remains critically important to your yield and melt management efforts, and its personalization merits your close attention.

Artisanal engagement

The material on this page describes various approaches that different schools have taken to customizing the visit experience for admitted students.

Few of them are scalable to any large extent, as their effectiveness relies on a deep understanding of individual students' needs and interests and the development of unique visit experiences that match them.

While smaller institutions may be able to work this way with every student in their admit pool, larger institutions will likely need to save that level of individualized attention for a subset of their admit pool.

Five Ways to Tailor In-Person Campus Visits for Admitted Students



Visit-focused counselor outreach

Using information from student profiles, admission counselors develop proposed visit agendas tailored to student interests. They follow up with each admitted student individually to talk through possible options.



100% customizable visit itinerary

Students are able to design a visit agenda 100% tailored to their interests—meeting with a player on the lacrosse team, meeting with a faculty member from their intended major, etc.



Campus-community “all points bulletin”

The admission team sends all faculty and staff a daily email with information on each student who will be visiting campus that day, enabling these members of your community to engage with them in a personalized way.



Marquee treatment

The names of visiting students are displayed prominently in conspicuous locations on campus, e.g., on large digital monitors or by labeling a family's designated parking spot with their name.



Individualized post-visit follow-up

Students and families are surveyed after their visit, to solicit their feedback on it. This makes families feel heard and seen; it also highlights strengths and weaknesses of your visit approach, highlighting opportunities for improvement.

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Imperative 4: Commit to Communications- Infrastructure Excellence

A Suite of Tools for Engaging Admitted Students

Evolving infrastructure

Recent years have seen meaningful advances in the online infrastructure used to manage relationships with admitted and committed students.

While many different versions of such infrastructure exist, this page shows one representative configuration, as a framework for examining some of the key considerations involved.

Varied purposes

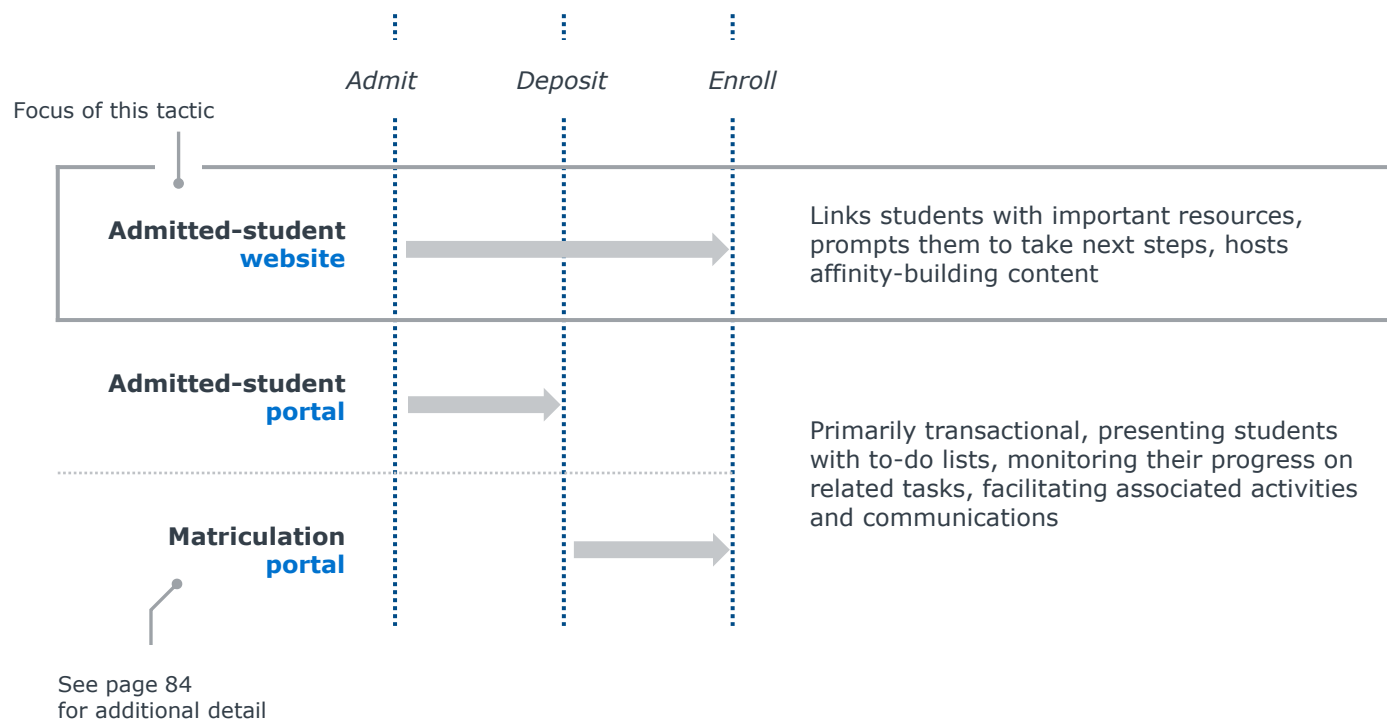
The online settings through which you connect with students in the post-admit phase fall into two broad categories—websites and portals.

Many schools host publicly accessible admitted-student websites on their .edus that aim to both inform and engage, continuing the school's courtship of students and prompting them to take next steps toward committing.

Many schools also have password-protected portal-style sites, more narrowly scoped and primarily transactional in nature, aimed at helping students understand the steps they need to take in order to deposit and matriculate and to track their progress on those steps.

Three Different Online Settings

When Students Engage with Each, by Post-Admit Phase



Source: EAB research and analysis.

The Front Door for Your Yield Communications

A channel for service

While there are many important channels through which you communicate with admitted students, arguably the most critical is your admitted-students website. More than any other piece of your communications infrastructure, it serves as a go-to resource for students throughout yield season, being a one-stop shop for any information they might need from you as decision day approaches.

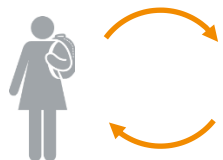
A channel for influence

Because it is revisited frequently, the admitted-students site also is an unusually powerful channel through which to “sell” your institution. For this reason, sites that are not optimized to provide students with important transactional information *and* make a compelling case for your school are missing a critical opportunity to win over undecided students.

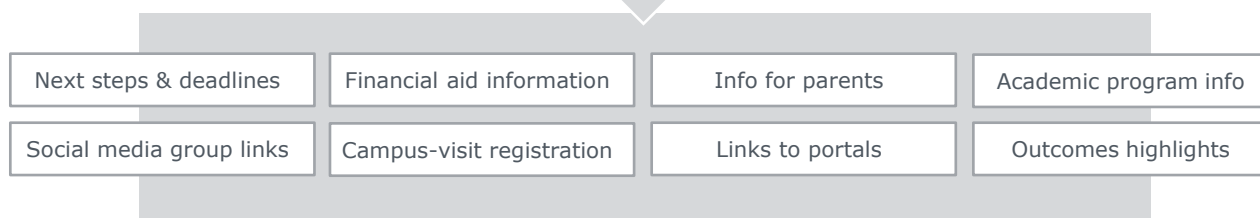
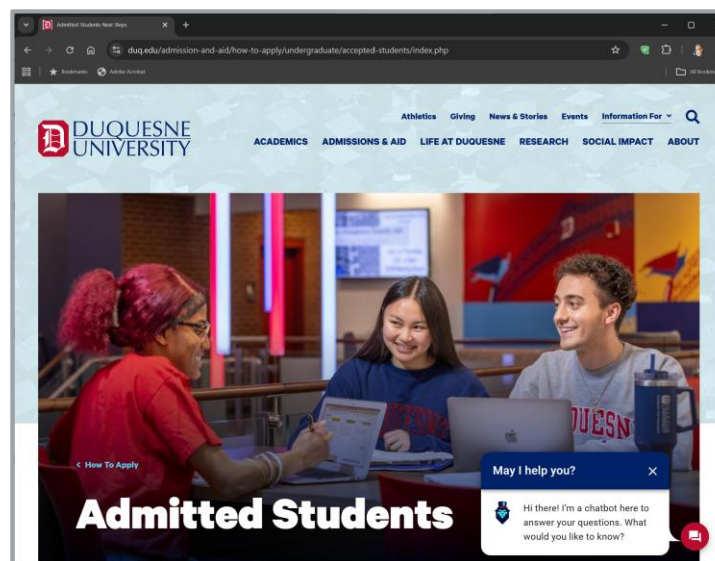
The following pages offer an audit that enrollment leaders can use to assess their own institutions’ admitted-student pages and identify potential opportunities for improvement.

The Admitted Students’ Page Is a One-Stop Shop for Critical Information

Answering Families’ Most Pressing Questions and Building Affinity



A frequently
revisited resource



Sources: EAB research and analysis; <https://www.duq.edu/admission-and-aid/how-to-apply/undergraduate/accepted-students/index.php>.

Admitted-Student Website Audit

The next three pages provide prompts and examples to help you evaluate your admitted-student website. Read through the sections below while interacting with your site, and check the boxes as appropriate. Consider individual sections in the assessment to identify parts of your site that may benefit from targeted revision. A high proportion of unchecked boxes overall indicates significant opportunity for improvement and suggests the need for a more extensive reworking of your site.

Part I: Content Audit

Calls to action

- ☐ Your site prompts students to take actions that boost their likelihood to deposit and enroll, with clickable links inviting them to:
 - Deposit (or “commit”)
 - Join the school’s admitted-students group on socials
 - Register for admitted-student events
 - Connect with a counselor

Notifications

- ☐ Notifications on your site focus on a deliberately narrow set of critical communications in order to increase the amount of attention given to each:
 - Deposit deadline
 - Admitted-student event dates

Differentiation messaging

- ☐ Imagery and copy used on your site quickly and effectively convey what is different and special about your institution, with common categories of differentiation, including:
 - Location or setting
 - Mission
 - Careers focus

Value messaging

- ☐ Your site prominently highlights key aspects of your institution’s value proposition, for example:
 - Percentage of students employed in a field related to their degree or enrolled in a graduate program within 6 months of graduation
 - Four-year graduation guarantee
 - How much more your graduates earn on average than their peers from comparable institutions

Resource links

- ☐ Your site serves as a “one-stop shop” for admitted students, providing them with links to resources that address their most pressing questions:
 - Simple bulleted summary of next steps
 - Link to admitted-student portal
 - Link to matriculation portal
 - Contact information for key individuals/departments
 - Financial aid explainers
 - Campus amenities
 - Campus housing
 - Location information (e.g., city guides)
 - Current-student and alumni profiles
 - Student clubs and organizations

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Admitted-Student Website Audit

Emotionally activated copy and images

- ❑ Your site makes ample use of content that appeals to admitted students' emotions, including images, words, and phrases that connote:
 - Belonging
 - Acceptance
 - Achievement
 - Support

Engagement drivers

- ❑ Your site uses content types engineered for impact, including "gamified" ones, as a means of boosting student involvement:
 - Contests
 - Interactive quizzes
 - Giveaways
 - Student-generated content
 - Images of people (especially happy, excited students)

Part II: Format Audit

Accessibility

- ❑ You have minimized barriers students face in accessing the content on your admitted-students site:
 - Your site includes an AI concierge (see page 67)
 - Your site is directly accessible via a single click
 - All content mentioned in this audit is on a single page

Spatial organization

- ❑ The way that information is laid out on the page makes it quickly and easily scannable:
 - The most important information is at the top of the page
 - Different topics are organized in visually distinct blocks
 - Your layout is simple, ordered, and uncluttered

Visuals

- ❑ Your site makes extensive use of different types of visuals to boost legibility and engagement:
 - Calls to action are visually distinctive
 - Key points are anchored with prominent photos or graphics
 - Images occupy at least as much space as does text
 - Your site makes targeted use of animations or video

Mobile optimization

- ❑ All key parts of your admitted-students site can be easily viewed on a phone:
 - Content on both the admitted-student page and key linked pages is highly legible and easy to navigate on a phone

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Learn by Example

Many of the lessons outlined on the preceding two pages are best understood and appreciated by way of well-executed examples. Review the admitted-student websites below to see how yours stacks up.

Some Schools with Well-Designed Admitted-Student Websites



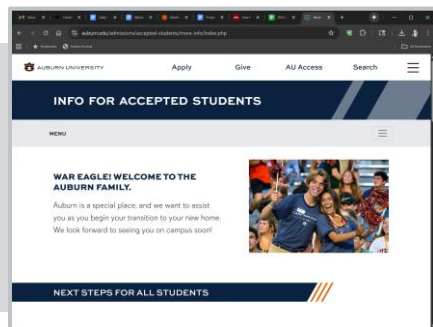
Duquesne University

<https://www.duq.edu/admission-and-aid/how-to-apply/undergraduate/accepted-students/index.php>



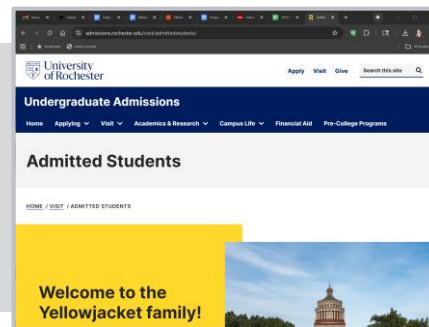
NSU Florida

<https://undergrad.nova.edu/dive-in/admitted-students.html>



Auburn University

<https://www.auburn.edu/admissions/accepted-students/more-info/index.php>



University of Rochester

<https://admissions.rochester.edu/visit/admittedstudents/>

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Hardwiring Cost-Benefit Messaging in Interpersonal Interactions

Human infrastructure

While the preceding pages focused primarily on digital infrastructure, it is important to keep in mind the human infrastructure involved in optimal communication with students.

Interactions with members of your campus community arguably have a greater impact than any other single factor on students' attitudes toward your institution and to college-going more generally. That being the case, you'll not want to leave the success of those interactions to chance.

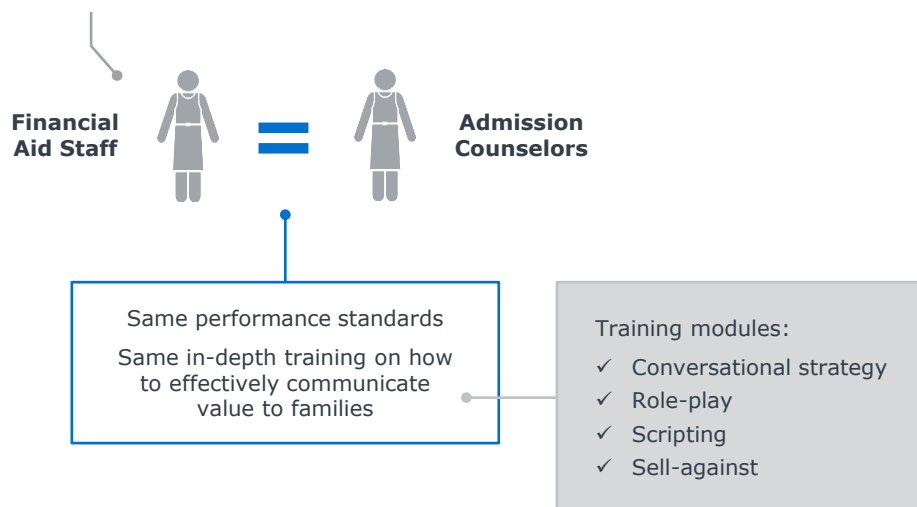
Upskilled financial aid staff

One especially important category of communications that members of your organization have with admitted and committed students is conversations that touch on cost.

This page shows one example of how to ensure that those conversations reassure students and their families rather than scaring them off. As indicated, it is based on training financial aid staff to also foreground your institution's unique value proposition in any discussions of cost, payment, etc.

Financial Aid Staff and Admission Counselors Trained to Same Level on Value Communications

Not often hired or trained with an eye to sales-type skills, and therefore not typically equipped for the challenging and complex work of convincing families that the benefits of an education from your institution more than justify the cost of attendance



Note that the dynamic illustrated on this page cuts both ways. Financial aid staff should be able to describe your school's value proposition to families in a compelling way; by the same token, your counselors should be able to speak with confidence to the fundamentals of cost, debt, and financial aid.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

The Special Case of Direct Admission

What impact on yield?

Probably the single biggest factor impacting yield rates in recent years has been a general move toward making it easier for students to apply to schools. Among related efforts, the most important has arguably been the introduction of direct-admission programs.

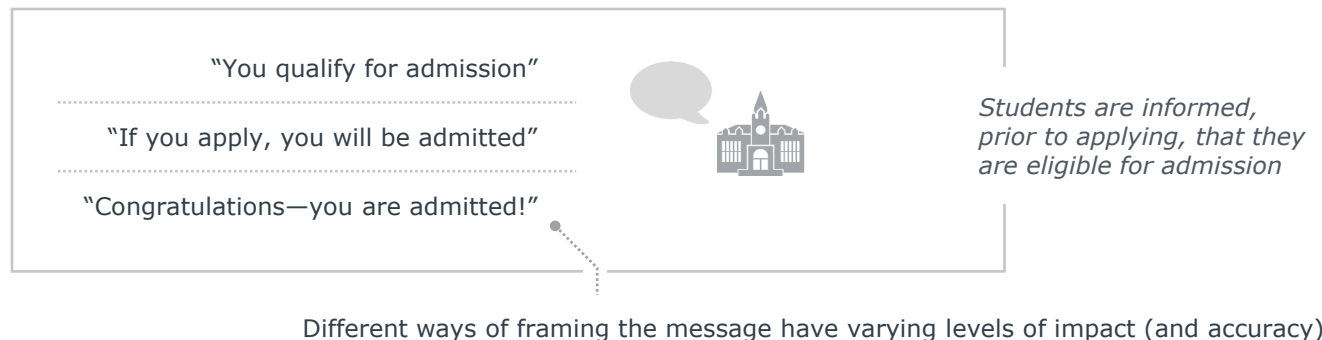
Some informed speculation

A common question among enrollment leaders is what, if anything, direct admission does to yield rates.

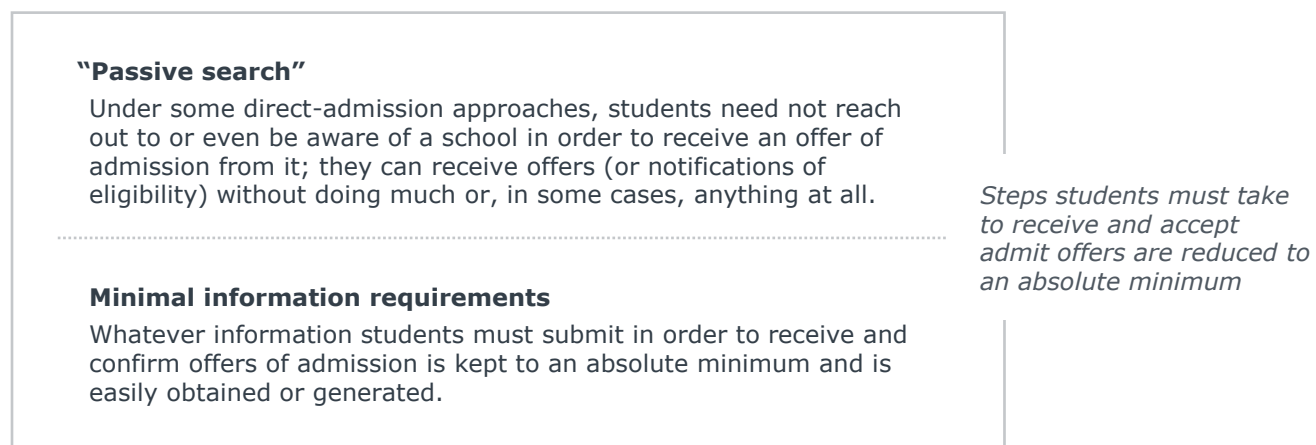
There's no simple answer to this question, as direct-admission programs take many different forms, with correspondingly varied implications for yield performance. That said, direct-admitted students do, generally speaking, yield at lower rates than traditional admits. The same logic applies to direct admission as to any measures that make it easier for students to receive offers of admission—namely, that the simpler you make it for students, the lower your yield rate will be. This is especially likely if the approach in question does not require students to indicate interest in your institution prior to receiving the offer.

Two Defining Features of Fully Developed Direct-Admit Approaches

Proactive assurance



Radical streamlining



Associated EAB offering: **Apply Match**

Source: EAB research and analysis.

How to Talk to Direct-Admit Students

Applicant vs. admit

Many schools treat direct-admitted students as applicants until they accept their offer of admission and until they have met any additional conditions on which a school may have made an official offer contingent.

Tailored communications

One consequence of treating direct-admitted students as standard applicants is that they can end up receiving the same comm flows as the latter group of students. This is to be avoided, insofar as the two groups have a very different relationship to your institution and tend not to be concerned about the same things.

Communications with direct-admitted students should, for example, explicitly confirm their acceptance; direct admission is a new and unfamiliar concept to many students, and some may, therefore, be uncertain as to how “real” their offer of admission is.

Confirmation, Validation, Celebration

Email to Standard Applicant

Track your application status.

Dear Sarah,

Thank you for submitting your application to Woodley University. We're thrilled to see your interest and can't wait to work with you on this exciting journey.

Now that your application has been received, your next step is to create an account with Woodley University, where you can track your application status and missing credentials. Below is your account information:

Username: student@gmail.com
PIN: 1234567
Custom link: admissions.woodleyuniversity.edu/student

Email to Direct-Admit Student

Congrats, you're admitted!

Dear Sarah,

Congratulations! You've officially been admitted to Woodley University through Match,¹ and we are so excited to celebrate this incredible milestone with you.

Your journey here is as extraordinary as you are, and being admitted through Match highlights your ability to stand out. This is just the beginning of a transformative experience that will shape the future you're building.

Your next step is to create an account with Woodley University where you will receive your official offer letter. Below is your account information:

Username: student@gmail.com
PIN: 1234567
Custom link: admissions.woodleyuniversity.edu/student

1. "Match" is the name of the direct-admit platform through which the student was admitted.

A Direct-Admission Dividend

Changing roles

Some schools that have fully committed to the direct-admit approach have found that it leaves their counselors with extra bandwidth, as formerly labor-intensive tasks such as application review are claiming less of their time.

Creative uses that schools are making of this extra capacity include upping the intensity of support offered to admitted and committed students.

Counselor as success coach

Shown at right is the case of Augsburg University. Admission counselor capacity freed up by the school’s pivot to direct admission was redirected to the intensive coaching of admitted students, aimed at helping ensure a smooth path to matriculation.

Specific activities counselors engage in include developing a deeper understanding of individual students’ needs, educating them on postsecondary options best suited to them, and connecting them with resources to help overcome whatever college-going barriers they may be facing.

Augsburg University Repurposes Admission-Counselor Time for Admitted/Committed-Student Coaching

			
Before Direct Admission		After Direct Admission	
Primary focus	Driving funnel conversions—getting prospective students to inquire, apply, and deposit at Augsburg	Helping to ensure students end up in the higher education option (at Augsburg or elsewhere) that best suits their needs and that they are as prepared as possible for whatever that option is	
Characteristic activities	Recruitment outreach to prospects, reading applicant files, rendering admit decisions	Talking to students about their higher education options, evaluating their support needs, and connecting them with related resources, helping remove barriers to matriculation	



Around **1,300 hours** of counselor time were freed up by the switch to direct admission—time that was repurposed for providing success coaching to direct-admitted students, as described above.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Committed Students Overwhelmed with Confusing Communications

Worse than you think?

Most enrollment leaders have a general sense that their committed students are getting a lot of outreach from different departments within their institutions. Fewer have a detailed understanding of what that looks like from the student's perspective and just how problematic the full set of resulting communications can be if not managed carefully.

A student's perspective

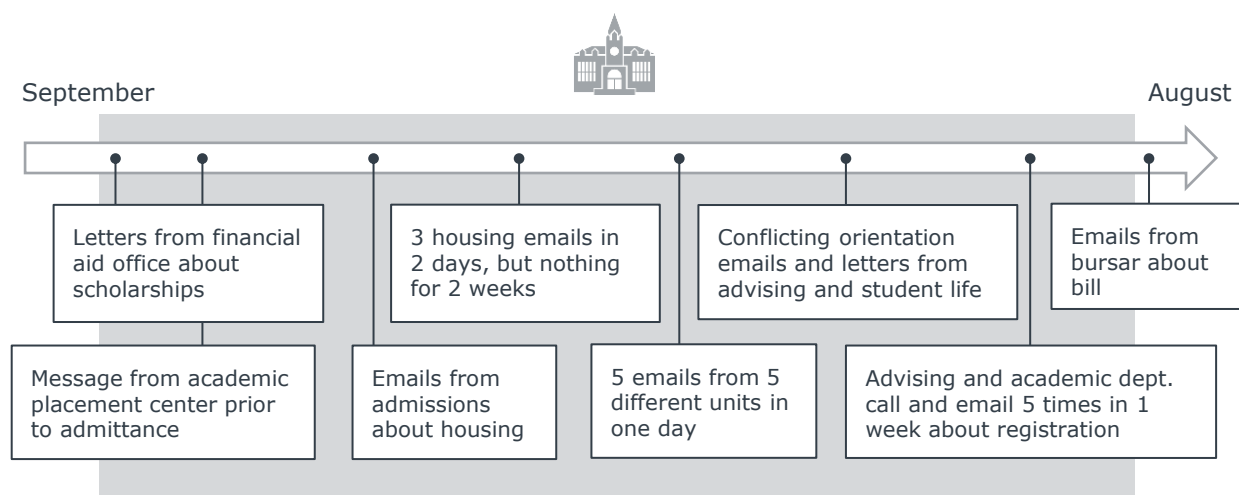
Shown at right, by way of example, are findings from just such an audit undertaken by a school we're referring to as Calatrava University.

As indicated, Calatrava found that students on track to enroll at the school received more than 300 communications from various university departments between September and August.

In addition to uncovering an excessive volume of messages, the audit also found that lack of coordination between senders had resulted in duplicative, contradictory, and otherwise confusing communications going out to students.

Calatrava University¹: A Case in Point

Uncoordinated Communications Originating in Various University Departments Confuse Prospective Students



328

Touchpoints



- ⊗ Volume of contact is excessive
- ⊗ Sequence does not align with enrollment process
- ⊗ Timing is not coordinated
- ⊗ Content is contradictory
- ⊗ Message importance does not match contact intensity

1) A pseudonym.

Stakeholder Coordination Ensures Clear and Impactful Communications

Coming together

The audit described on the preceding page was part of a larger effort Calatrava University undertook to make sure its post-admit communications with students were working as intended. The material at right shows other important steps involved in the process.

As indicated, a team of stakeholders representing all university departments communicating with students was formed, the audit was undertaken, and the full set of messages was evaluated for conflicts, redundancies, etc. A revised communication flow was then created, which, among other things, reduced the number of messages sent to students by 66%.

Accommodating stakeholders

Additional steps, not shown here, can be taken to help ensure full cooperation of stakeholders—for example, having the admission team take on tasks associated with drafting and sending messages for other departments, including copywriting and graphic design work.

Four Steps to Coordinated Communications

Calatrava University's¹ VPEM Spearheads Creation of a Comprehensive Plan

1



Team assembled

Calatrava's VPEM brought together representatives from all departments reaching out to students in the post-admit phase

Departments represented included enrollment, student affairs, and academic colleges

2



Communications audit performed

All communications scheduled with students from September through August were gathered and reviewed

Communications considered included emails, letters, and telephone calls

3



Communications reduced and refined

Duplicative messages were consolidated, conflicting messages were reconciled, low-importance messages were eliminated

Calatrava reduced the number of communications required by 66%

4



New plan written up and distributed

The team's recommendations were summarized in a cross-silo communication plan

Includes critical step of securing stakeholder approval

1) A pseudonym.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Correct Committee Structure Helps Ensure a Successful Outcome

Preempt pushback

One of the more difficult challenges associated with creating coordinated communication flows is getting stakeholder engagement right. Many departments are understandably reluctant to do anything that they think might inhibit accurate, agile, and responsive communication with students.

Committees count

There are a few steps schools can take to ensure stakeholder cooperation.

One is to build a powerful case for the need for change among senior administrators, who can serve as champions for the effort.

Another, shown at right, is to be thoughtful about how stakeholders are engaged. An intelligently designed committee structure ensures that key stakeholder voices are heard while also minimizing demands on their time. It also helps ensure that the revised communications plan that emerges from the process is as effective as possible.

Committee Structure Used in Cross-Silo Communication Optimization

	Purpose	Composition	Time Required
 Steering Committee	Guides creation of the other two committees, oversees implementation of the integrated plan	Includes representatives from admissions and financial aid; formed by VPEM, led by director of admissions or marketing	6–12 months
 Cross-Functional Communication-Planning Committee*	Conducts communications audit and creates buy-in for integrated communications plan	Includes one individual from each department who communicates directly with students (assistant or associate director level or above)	6 months
 Content Enhancement Committee	Revises and edits communications that emerge from the audit process	Includes a minimum of two people from the marketing or communications department (skilled in copywriting)	3 months

*Departments represented

- Enrollment management (admissions, registrar, financial aid)
- Academic affairs (colleges, advising, support)
- Student affairs (housing, orientation, dean of students)
- Other offices (marketing, IT, advancement)

Source: EAB research and analysis.

'Portal-izing' Consolidated Matriculation Communications

An online matriculation hub

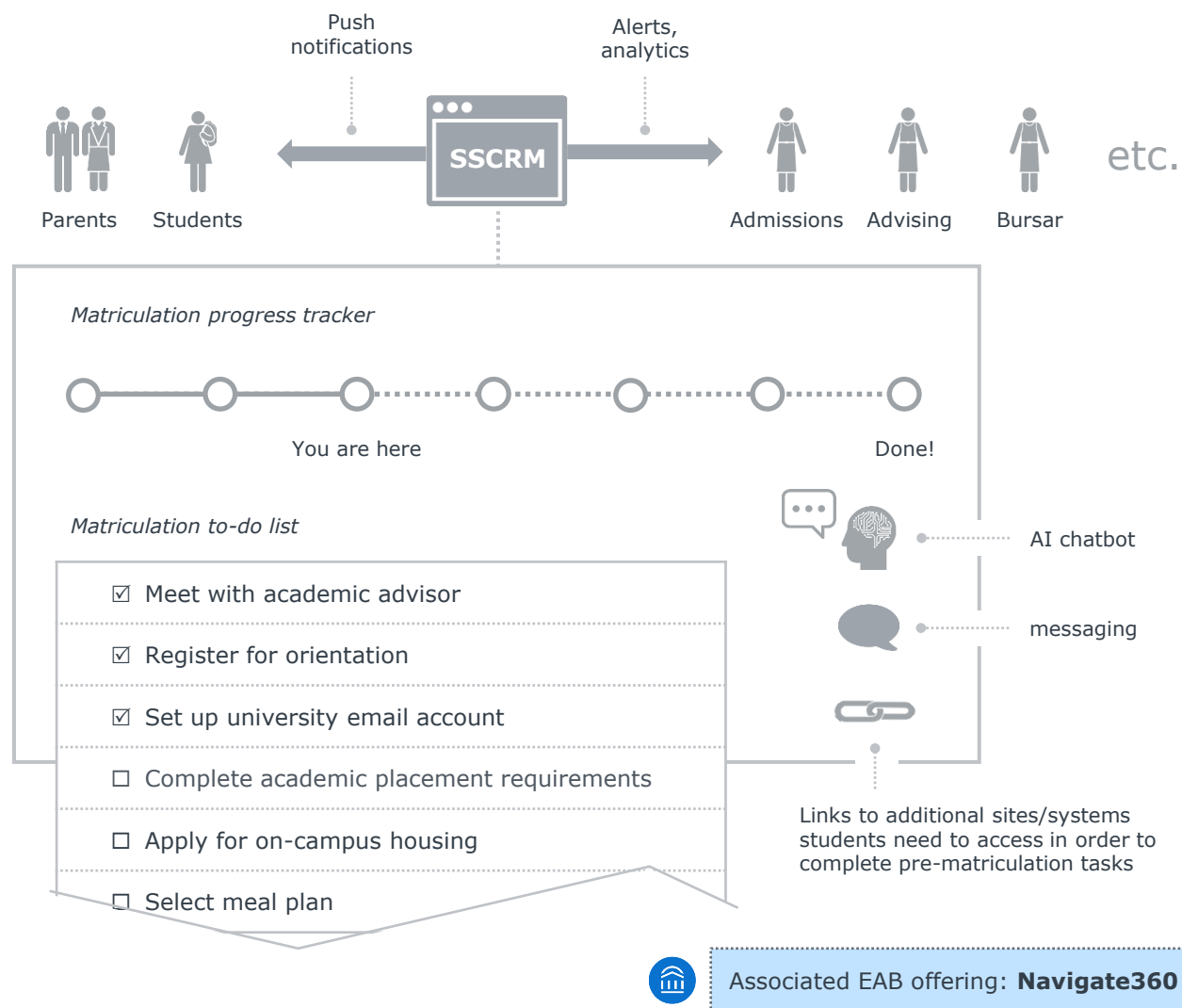
As suggested on the preceding pages, consolidation, streamlining, and centralized oversight of communications with committed students are among the most impactful things you can do to minimize summer melt.

Some institutions have taken the further step of hosting that activity, together with tracking of student progress on related tasks, within online portals—either purpose-built ones or, more commonly, via extensions of existing CRM systems.

Hosting in the SSCRM

The material at right shows the example of a hypothetical implementation within an institution's student success CRM (SSCRM). One advantage of this approach is that several key university departments and functions, such as academic advising, would already be native users of the system. Another is that it can more easily create a longitudinal student data record spanning the pre- and post-matriculation phases, enabling more robust student analytics.

Sample Implementation: A Melt-Prevention Extension of a Student Success CRM



Source: EAB research and analysis.

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An 'In-Brief' Compendium of 24 Additional Tactics

Observed in the Field and Worthy of Your Consideration

Cost and value	
1	Aid-award translation Convert aid offers from other schools into a format matching yours, to help families make apples-to-apples comparisons
2	Major-specific outcomes marketing Provide students with career outcomes data by academic major, e.g., average monthly debt payment versus average monthly earnings in first year after graduation
Parents	
3	Parent social-media groups Create groups for parents of admitted students (plan for intensive management, as parents have a lot of questions)
4	Parent visit days On-campus events specifically for parents, including a lunch where parents can talk to each other and to members of your campus community
Social media	
5	Social-safe response option Allow admitted students to share photos and other content you prompt them to provide without it "hitting" their personal social media accounts
6	Student-generated-content aggregator page Set up a dedicated website for reposting/curating material from current students' social media feeds; share it with admitted students

7	Flash swag contest Run surprise contests on social media in which students responding correctly to a school trivia quiz receive a free school sweatshirt or other school-branded swag
8	Themed photo contest Admitted students post photos of themselves wearing school-branded T-shirts to social media, competing in several categories; winners, chosen by voting, are awarded prizes
On-campus events	
9	Condensed informational session Replace lengthy podium-and-presenter-based visit-day informational sessions with a shorter (<10-minute), lavishly produced video
10	Strategic campus-visit promenade Reorganize the route that visiting families follow on campus to ensure that the first thing they see is the most impressive and best-loved part of your campus
11	On-demand visit shuttle Use an app or similar means to enable visiting families to request, at will, transportation from one part of your campus to another
12	Unburdened campus experiences Complete tasks that can be done online (e.g., class registration) in advance of a student's visit to campus, to free up time for in-person bonding type activities

Sources: Eric Hoover, The Home Stretch of Student Recruitment; EAB research and analysis.

Content strategy	
13	"Picking a major" explainer content Provide students with content pieces built around advice on picking the right major
14	Campus-life explainer videos Post "guide to campus life" explainer videos featuring current students to your socials
Personalization	
15	"Unfakeable" customization Add a paragraph to your admit-offer letter that discusses detail from the student's application in a way that makes it clear it was not generated via automation
16	Personalized acceptance posters Send accepted students posters with school-related imagery and personalized text/details from the student's application
Communications plan	
17	Post-deposit gap communications Create a non-transactional, affinity-building monthly email series that can be initiated as soon as a student deposits
18	Paper-based prominence boost Develop a mailer series around key pieces of information you absolutely want parents to know (physical formats have high visibility in admitted-student households)

19	First-gen post-deposit comm flow Segment your post-deposit communications by first-gen status, so as to more effectively address these students' unique needs
The campus community	
20	All-star faculty engagement Arrange for admitted/committed students to meet with faculty, channeling students selectively to faculty with an exceptional track record of converting prospects
21	Social media campus tours Have your student ambassadors create and post short campus tour videos to Instagram, TikTok, etc.
22	Affinity-based student-to-student outreach Have current students from affinity groups reach out to applicants who have expressed a related interest
Analytics	
23	Pre-matriculant needs survey Survey committed students about their needs, before they enroll; use your findings to develop related programs for future entering classes
24	Retrospective melt analytics Survey students to figure out why they melted; develop dedicated comm flows targeting the most common root causes

Sources: Eric Hoover, The Home Stretch of Student Recruitment; EAB research and analysis.

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