
Policy and Practice in U.S. College Admissions

Insights from a 2025 Survey of Admissions Professionals

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Executive Summary

Throughout the college application process, students may encounter a range of requirements and review processes that reflect the unique missions, values, and applicant pools of individual colleges, as well as state and federal guidance. In recent years, many colleges have revisited their admissions practices in response to evolving circumstances. During the covid-19 pandemic, for example, most institutions adopted test-optional policies to address disruptions in students' access to testing, and the Supreme Court's decision in *SFFA v. Harvard* prompted colleges to update their admissions processes to align with the new legal landscape. At the same time, the growing availability of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools has led institutions to consider how such technologies might appropriately support admissions work.

Together, these developments have reshaped the admissions landscape and underscore the importance of gathering evidence on the current state of college admissions to understand how policies and practices are taking shape today.

In this brief, we present responses to a College Board survey administered in the summer of 2025 regarding colleges' admissions policies and requirements, applicant evaluation processes, and AI use for the 2024-25 admissions cycle (for fall 2025 entering cohort). We explore the pathways that colleges offer for admission, the processes colleges use to review applicants, policies for application materials and how colleges value different application components, and uses of AI in admissions. Importantly, we document how responses vary across different types of institutions. We also compare survey responses to those in a nearly identical survey administered in 2024 regarding admission policies and practices for the 2023-24 admissions cycle, and note a few key shifts. A few themes emerge from our analyses:

1. Regular decision is the most common pathway that colleges use to admit students, but most colleges offer multiple admission pathways; available pathways vary by type of college.

- Most common pathways: Nearly three-fourths of colleges (73%) report using regular decision to admit students, while 59% report using rolling admission and 46% report using early action. Rolling admission is the most common admission pathway for publics and small privates with admit rates above 40%.

- Most colleges report using multiple pathways for admission, with 82% saying they offer at least two of the admissions pathways, and 66% selecting at least three of the pathways.
- Public colleges with admit rates above 40% rarely use early decision (binding), with only 5% offering this pathway. Highly selective colleges are more likely than other college segments to use regular decision (97%), waitlist (72%), and early decision pathways (66%).

2. Holistic review of applicants is very common, with 88% of colleges using it in admissions for at least some applicants.

- Alternatives to holistic review, such as formula-driven or auto/guaranteed review, are less common, with 38% and 35% of colleges using it for at least some applicants, respectively. Public colleges with admit rates above 40% are much more likely than private or highly selective colleges to use formula-driven (55%) and auto/guaranteed review (66%).
- Larger public colleges using holistic review are less likely (31%) than other segments to use it only for general admissions. Larger public colleges are more likely to use holistic review for admission to specific majors (64%) and honors programs (57%).

3. Colleges almost universally (97%) require transcripts in applications, and likewise, nearly all colleges indicate that high school GPA (98%) and course rigor (94%) are at least somewhat important in holistic review. For most other application components, requirements and importance in holistic review vary across college segments.

- Besides transcripts, the only other application components that are required at a substantial share of colleges are prerequisite high school coursework (53%), essay(s) (44%), and letter(s) of recommendation (36%). Standardized test scores are accepted at nearly all colleges, but optional for over 70%.
- The percentage of institutions indicating that interviews are not accepted for any students increased from 38% in the 2023-24 admissions cycle to 50% in 2024-25.
- In addition to high school GPA and course rigor, there are eight other application components where half or more colleges indicate they are at least somewhat important in holistic review: essay(s), AP/IB course participation, extra-curricular activities, letter(s) of recommendation, contextual data on applicants' backgrounds, SAT/ACT test scores, AP/IB test scores, and non-cognitive factors.
- Highly selective and larger private colleges tend to view most application components as relatively more important than other college segments. On the other hand, larger public colleges are more likely to view SAT/ACT test scores as at least somewhat important in holistic review.

4. AI use in admissions is low, particularly for application review, but most colleges are considering using AI in their admissions processes, potentially foreshadowing a rise in AI use in future admissions cycles.

- One-third (33%) of institutions report using AI chatbots, while 18% and 13% of colleges are using AI for recruitment strategy or execution and statistical enrollment analysis, respectively. Half of colleges are considering leveraging AI for statistical enrollment analysis and recruitment strategy or execution.
- Very few colleges are using AI for admission evaluation: Fewer than 5% of colleges report using AI for qualitative analysis of written application materials or review of written application materials. Even consideration of AI use for these purposes is relatively low, with just 19% considering using AI for qualitative analysis of written application materials and 16% for automatic scoring of written application materials.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
Introduction	7
Survey Data	7
Findings	9
I. What pathways do colleges offer for admission?.....	9
II. How do colleges review applicants?	10
III. What do colleges require and value in an application?.....	12
IV. How are colleges using AI in admissions?	17
Discussion	19
References	21
Appendix	22
About the College Board	24
College Board Research	24

Tables and Figures

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Characteristics	8
Figure 1: Pathways to Admission, by College Segment (2024-25 Admissions Cycle).....	9
Figure 2: Application Review Types, by College Segment (2024-25 Admissions Cycle)	10
Figure 3: Purposes of Holistic Review, by College Segment (2024-25 Admissions Cycle).....	11
Figure 4: Institutional Policies for Application Components (2024-25 Admissions Cycle).....	12
Figure 5: Year-Over-Year Changes in ‘Required’ or ‘Recommended’ and ‘Not accepted’ Application Components, 2023-24 to 2024-25.....	13
Figure 6: Required or Recommended Application Components, by College Segment (2024-25 Admissions Cycle)	14
Figure 7: Importance of Application Components in Holistic Review (2024-25 Admissions Cycle).....	15
Figure 8: Year-Over-Year Changes in ‘Very’ and ‘Somewhat’ Important Application Components in Holistic Review, 2023-24 to 2024-25	16
Figure 9: Very or Somewhat Important Application Components in Holistic Review, by College Segment (2024-25 Admissions Cycle)	17
Figure 10: AI in Admissions (2024-25 Admissions Cycle).....	18
Figure 11: Current Use of AI in Admissions, by College Segment (2024-25 Admissions Cycle).....	19

Introduction

Colleges design their application requirements and review practices to align with their educational missions, student populations, and institutional goals. In order to identify and admit a class of students likely to succeed on each unique campus, colleges may differ in their policies for which application components are required, recommended, optional, or not considered at all, and how those components are weighed in the evaluation process. As such, navigating the college application process can be complex for students.

In recent years, colleges have adapted their admissions policies in response to significant external developments. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many colleges shifted from requiring SAT or ACT test scores from their applicants to adopting test-optional policies. In 2023, the Supreme Court's decision in *SFFA v. Harvard* outlawed the consideration of students' race or ethnicity in college admissions, requiring some colleges to again adjust how they review applicants. Additionally, the rapid growth of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in recent years across many industries has prompted questions about the prevalence and purpose of AI use in college admissions (Carlson, 2024; Knox, 2023).

The evolving admissions landscape has created a need to capture the current state of admissions policies and practices. Some survey evidence exists on the importance of different individual factors in admissions decisions (NACAC, 2023), and prior research shows that test scores are now optional for most colleges (Princeton Review, 2024). But key questions remain about how colleges review applications, what they require and value, how they may integrate AI into admissions processes, and how these practices may vary across different institutional contexts. Systematic evidence is needed to provide clarity about how colleges are working to evaluate applicants thoughtfully and responsibly in a changing environment.

In this research, we develop a clearer understanding of colleges' admissions policies, application evaluation practices, and AI use in admissions by leveraging a College Board survey administered to institutions in July 2025 regarding their admissions policies and practices for the 2024-25 admissions cycle. We address the following research questions:

1. What pathways do colleges offer for admission?
2. How do colleges review applicants?
3. What do colleges require and value in an application?
4. How are colleges using AI in admissions?

In some cases, we also compare survey responses to those in a nearly identical survey administered in the prior year regarding admission policies and practices for the 2023-24 admissions cycle to highlight year-over-year differences.

Survey Data

The data in this report are primarily drawn from a College Board survey administered to about 2,800 higher education institutions in July of 2025. The survey asked admissions leaders about

their admissions policies and requirements, applicant evaluation processes, and AI use for the 2024-25 admissions cycle (for enrollment in fall 2025). Admissions practitioners from more than 300 institutions responded to the survey. In some exhibits, we compare responses to this survey about the 2024-25 cycle to responses to the same survey administered in the prior year about the 2023-24 admissions cycle.

Table 1 shows that sample characteristics are generally similar between the 2024 and 2025 surveys. A key element of our analysis is displaying survey results separately for different college segments. All institutions in the sample are four-year baccalaureate-granting colleges and universities. In the 2025 survey data, about 20% of the sample are highly selective colleges with admit rates less than 40%. For the remaining institutions with admit rates 40% or higher, we categorize colleges based on their first-year enrollment class size and whether they are publicly or privately controlled. For private colleges, we consider institutions as “larger” or “smaller” based on whether their 2024 first-time undergraduate enrollment was above or below 600 students. For public colleges, the first-time undergraduate enrollment threshold we use to categorize institutions as “larger” or “smaller” is 2,500 students. Larger private colleges make up 15% of the sample, while smaller privates make up 21%. Meanwhile, larger and smaller public colleges make up 17% and 21% of the sample, respectively.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Characteristics

		2024 survey	2025 survey
Total Number of Respondents		363	345
College Segment	Highly selective college (<40% admit rate)	17.6%	19.7%
	Larger private college (>=40% admit rate; first-time enrollment >=600)	13.8%	14.5%
	Larger public college (>=40% admit rate; first-time enrollment >=2,500)	11.0%	16.8%
	Smaller private college (>=40% admit rate; first-time enrollment <600)	34.2%	27.8%
	Smaller public college (>=40% admit rate; first-time enrollment <2,500)	23.4%	21.2%
College Sector	4-year private college	62.8%	58.8%
	4-year public college	37.2%	41.2%
Title of Survey Respondent	Vice President of Enrollment	26.5%	36.2%
	Dean/Director of Admissions/Enrollment	46.0%	41.2%
	Assistant/Associate Dean/Director of Admissions/Enrollment	14.6%	12.9%
	Other Admissions/Enrollment Officer	3.6%	4.1%
	Other	9.4%	5.6%

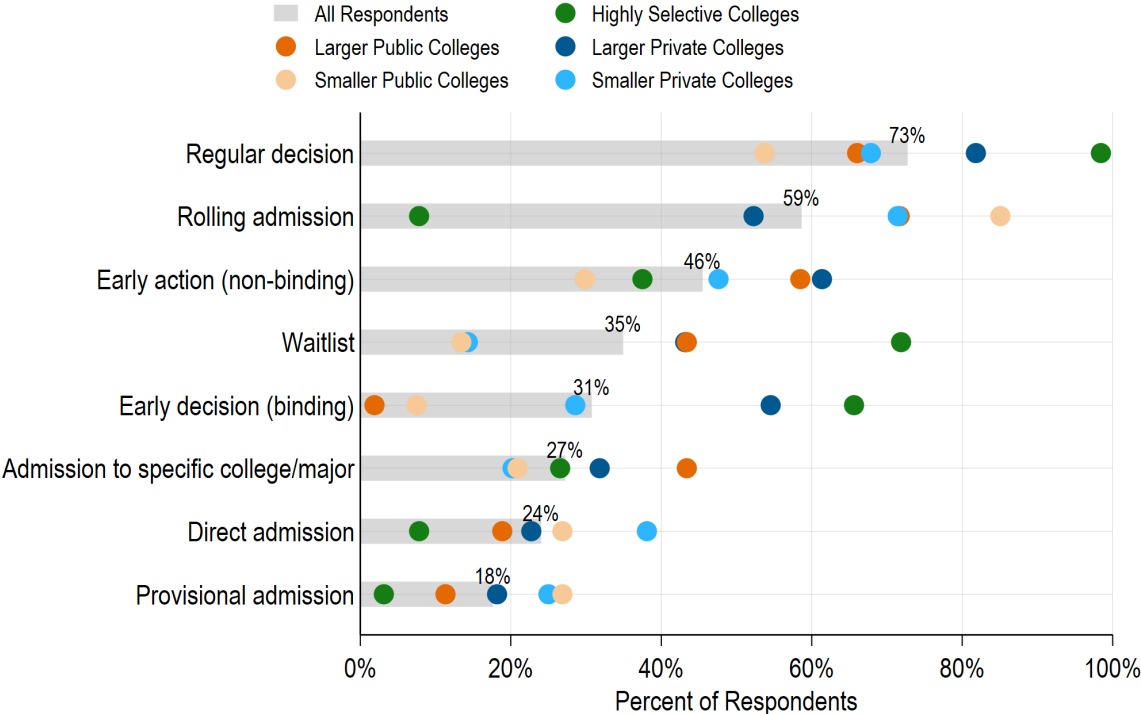
Notes: College segments are classified based on institutions’ sector and first-time enrollment size: “highly selective colleges” are those with admit rates less than 40% (either public or private) in fall 2023. For private colleges with admit rates greater than 40%, we consider institutions as “larger” or “smaller” based on whether their 2023 first-time enrollment was above or below 600 students. For public colleges with admit rates of 40% or higher, the enrollment threshold we use to categorize institutions as “larger” or “smaller” is 2,500 students.

Findings

1. What pathways do colleges offer for admission?

Colleges admit students using a variety of pathways, but regular decision is the most common. The gray bars in Figure 1 show the percentage of responding institutions that indicate they use each of the listed pathways to admit students. The pathway selected by the highest share of admissions leaders (73%) is regular decision. The next most common pathways for admission are rolling admission and early action, at 59% and 46%, respectively. Fewer than one-fourth of institutions indicate that they use direct admission (24%) or provisional admission (18%). Among colleges not using regular decision, nearly all (95%) use rolling admission.

Figure 1: Pathways to Admission, by College Segment (2024-25 Admissions Cycle)



Notes: The figure above shows responses to the following question: “In which of the following ways did your institution admit students for the 2024-25 cycle? (Select all that apply).” N = 312.

Use of each admissions pathway is similar to the 2023-24 admissions cycle. With the exception of early action, where reports of using this pathway increased from 40% to 46% in the 2024-25 admissions cycle, reports of using all other admissions pathways are similar to the 2023-24 cycle.

Admissions pathways generally differ across college segments, with highly selective colleges more likely to use regular decision, waitlist, and early decision pathways, and less likely to use rolling admission, direct admission, and provisional admission than other segments. The dots in Figure 1 show responses to the question about admissions

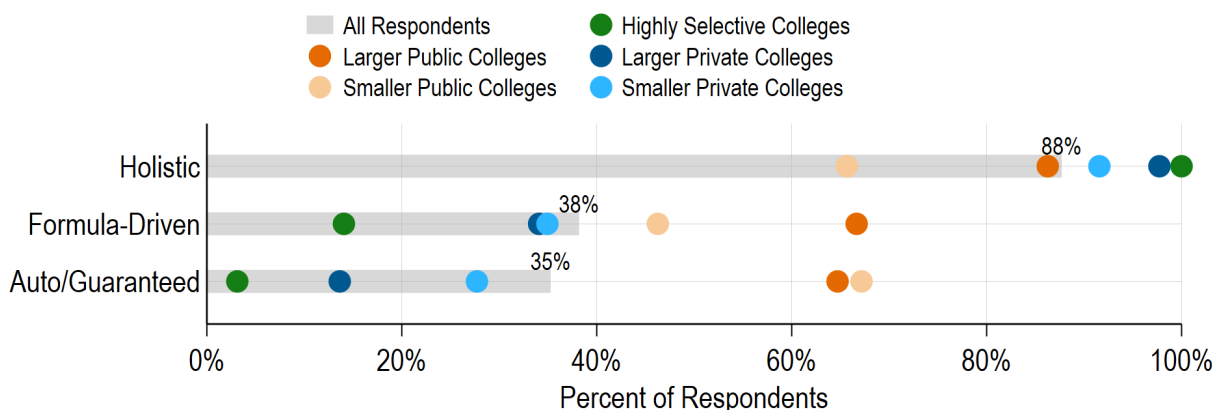
pathways separately for each college segment. More than 70% of public colleges and small private colleges use rolling admission, compared to only 8% of highly selective colleges. Virtually all highly selective colleges (97%) use regular decision, and a majority also report using waitlists (72%) and early decision (66%). A majority of larger private colleges (55%) also report using early decision. Admission directly to major is used by fewer than one-third of smaller colleges and highly selective colleges, but 43% of larger public colleges admit to specific majors.

Most colleges offer multiple pathways for admission, with 82% of respondents selecting at least two options. Meanwhile, 66% of colleges report using at least three of the listed admissions pathways, and 40% are using at least four of the pathways.

II. How do colleges review applicants?

The vast majority (88%) of admissions leaders report using holistic review in admissions for at least some applicants. Figure 2 shows the percentage of institutions indicating that the listed application review types are used for at least some of applicants in the 2024-25 admissions cycle. Outside of holistic review, 38% report using formula-driven review, where applications are evaluated using an institutional formula, for at least some applicants. Meanwhile, 35% of responding colleges report using auto/guaranteed review, where applicants meeting criteria specified by the state/system are offered admission. Reports of application review type usage are very similar to responses in the 2023-24 admissions cycle.

Figure 2: Application Review Types, by College Segment (2024-25 Admissions Cycle)



Notes: The figure above shows the percentage of respondents who indicated that at least some of their applicants are reviewed with each of the listed pathways. The full question text is: "Please review the definitions of the three admissions pathways we've identified. Then, please indicate whether the pathway was used for all, most, some, or none of your applicants for the 2024-25 cycle. Be sure to consider your general population, as well as any special programs." Holistic: Applicants are evaluated based on academic and non-academic achievements and personal characteristics. Formula Driven: Applications are evaluated using an institutional formula. Auto/Guaranteed: Applicants meeting criteria specified by the state/system are offered admission. N = 309.

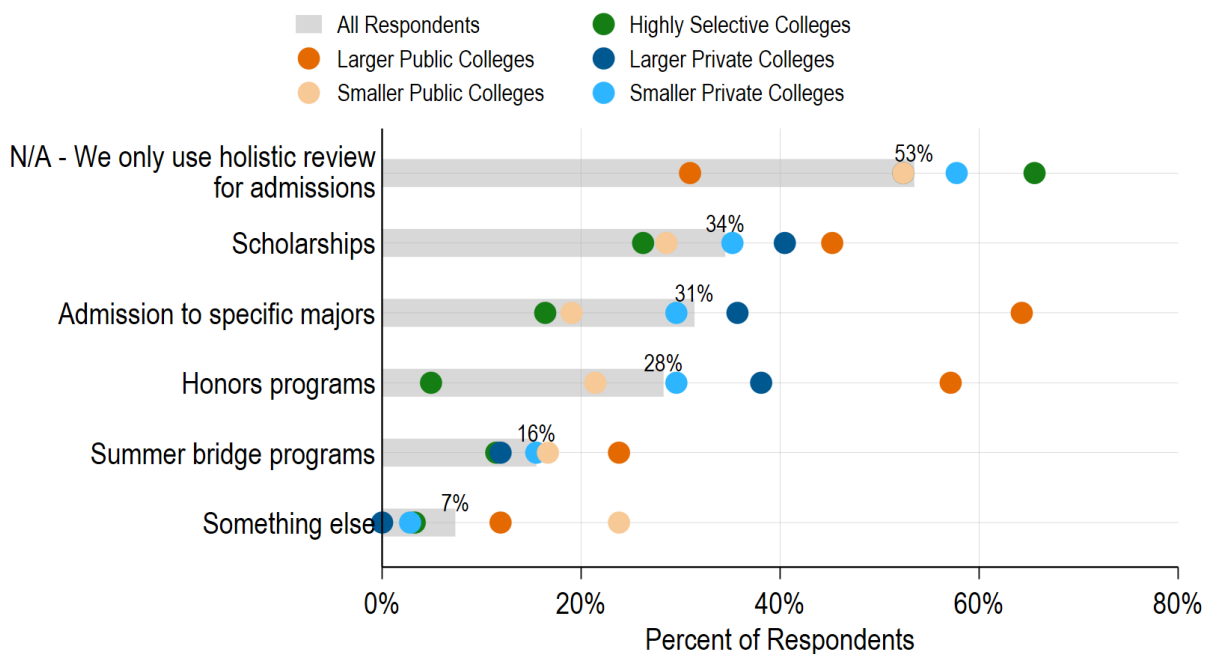
Public colleges are more likely than private colleges to use formula-driven or auto/guaranteed application review. Figure 2 also shows the percentage of institutions using each type of application review separately by college segment. Among smaller public colleges, 46% report using formula-driven review and 67% report using auto/guaranteed review. Among

larger public colleges, 67% report using formula-driven review, while 65% report using auto/guaranteed review. Highly selective colleges rarely use formula-driven or auto/guaranteed review, at 14% and 3%, respectively.

GPA or class rank is the most important factor determining whether an applicant is reviewed holistically or by another type of review. Among colleges that report using holistic review for “some” or “most” (but not all) of their applicants, 82% indicate that GPA or class rank influences whether holistic review is used or whether formula-driven or auto/guaranteed admission is used. Other factors influencing which review type is used include major or college choice (44%), test scores or test score submission status (44%), student residence (26%), and honors or other selective program (25%).

Half of institutions using holistic review only use it for general admission, while the other half evaluate students holistically for various purposes. Figure 3 shows the purposes for which colleges report using holistic review among colleges that indicate using holistic review for at least some of their applicants. Fewer than one-third of larger public colleges use holistic review for general admissions. Instead, larger public colleges are the most likely segment to use holistic review for admission to specific majors (64%) and honors programs (57%).

Figure 3: Purposes of Holistic Review, by College Segment (2024-25 Admissions Cycle)



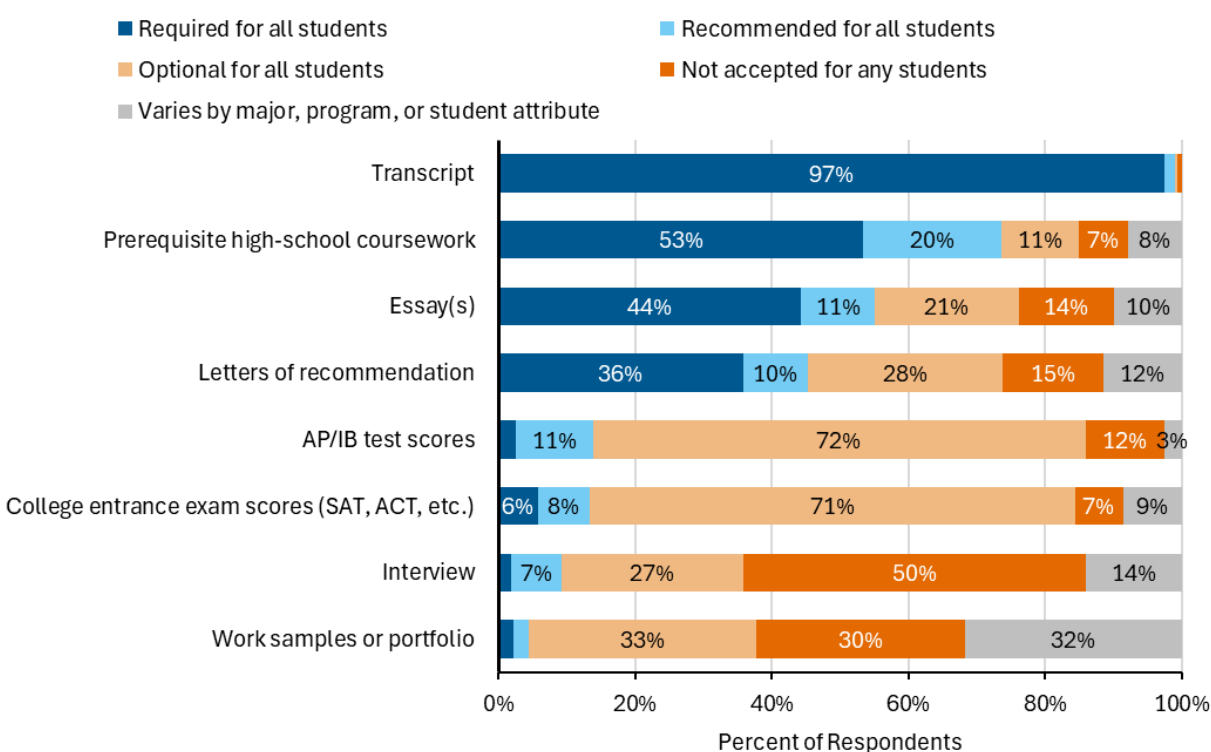
Notes: The full question text is: “Thinking again about your institution’s holistic review process, for which of the following did your institution review students holistically in the 2024-25 cycle, outside of general admissions? Please select all that apply.” N = 258.

III. What do colleges require and value in an application?

Policies for Application Components

Institutions universally require high school transcripts. Policies related to other application components vary by institution. Figure 4 shows the percentage of institutions indicating the policies they use for various application components. Nearly all institutions require transcripts for all students (97%). Three-quarters of institutions recommend or require prerequisite high-school coursework (73%), while roughly half recommend or require essays (55%) and letters of recommendation (46%). In contrast, most institutions report that AP/IB test scores (72%) and college entrance exam scores such as SAT or ACT (71%) are optional components of college applications, with only a small share of institutions requiring or not accepting these components. Interviews and work samples are the most likely to not be accepted.

Figure 4: Institutional Policies for Application Components (2024-25 Admissions Cycle)

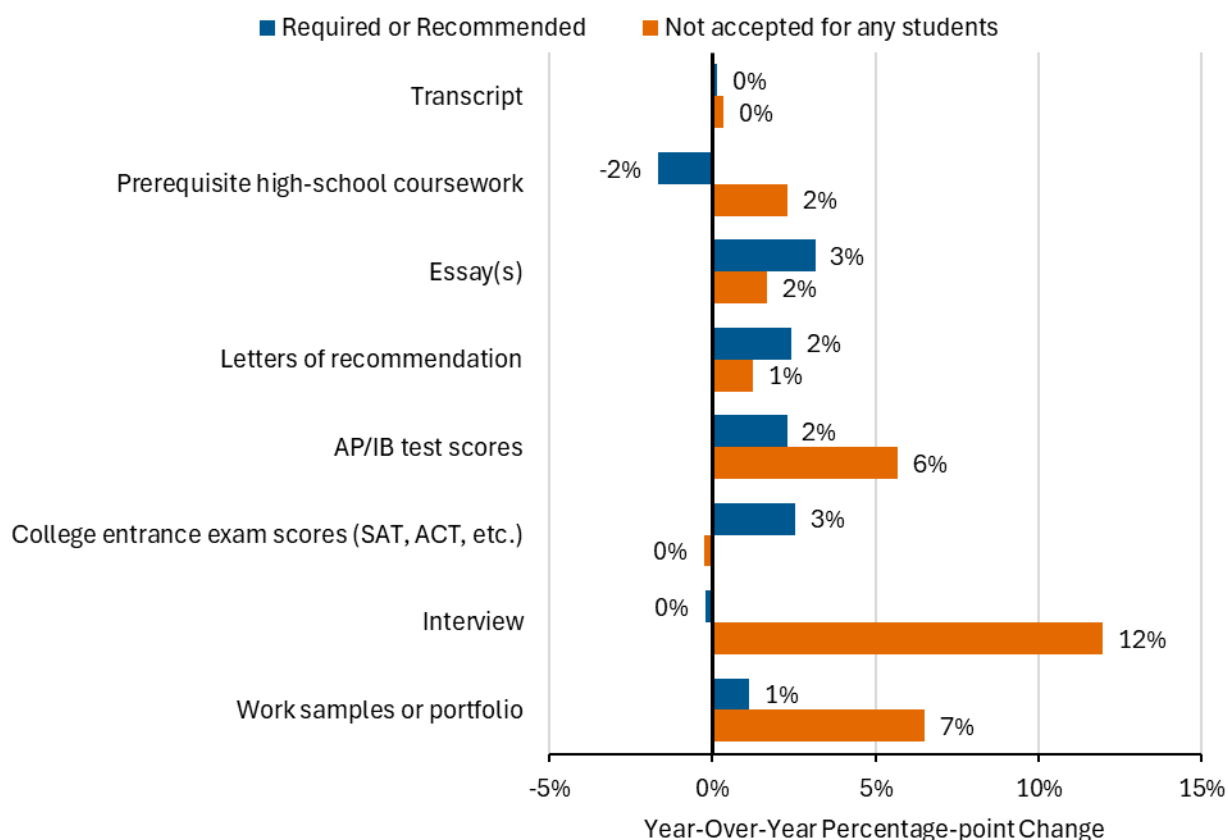


Notes: The full question text is: "How would you describe your institution's policy related to each of the following application components for the 2024-25 cycle?" N = 314.

Fewer colleges used interviews in college applications for the 2024-25 admissions cycle compared to the 2023-24 admission cycle, while use of most other application components held steady. Figure 5 shows year-over-year percentage-point changes between the 2023-24 and 2024-25 admission cycles in the use of application components that are required or recommended, as well as those not accepted for any students. The percentage of

colleges reporting that interviews are not accepted for applications increased by 12 percentage points in the 2024-25 admissions cycle (50%) compared to 2023-24 (38%). The percentage of colleges reporting that work samples or portfolios and AP/IB test scores are not accepted both increased slightly as well, by 7 and 6 percentage points, respectively. The remaining application components—including transcripts, prerequisite high-school coursework, essays, letters of recommendation, and college entrance exam scores—experienced little to no year-over-year changes.

Figure 5: Year-Over-Year Changes in ‘Required’ or ‘Recommended’ and ‘Not accepted’ Application Components, 2023-24 to 2024-25



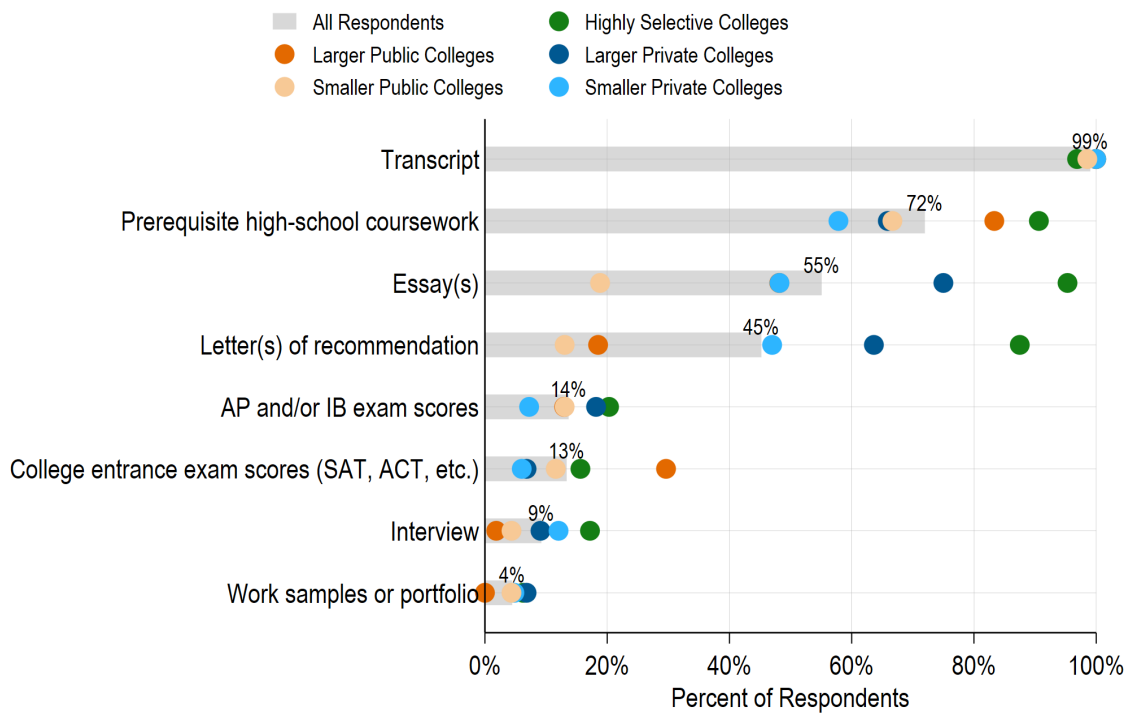
Notes: The figure above shows the year-over-year percentage-point change in respondents who selected that the application component is “required” or “recommended” and “not accepted” to the following question: “How would you describe your institution’s policy related to each of the following application components for the 2023-24/2024-25 cycle?” N = 360 (2023-24), N = 314 (2024-25).

Public institutions are generally less likely than other segments to require or recommend most application components, except for larger public colleges that report a relatively high share using college entrance exam scores and prerequisite high school coursework. Figure 6 shows that for most application components, public colleges are relatively less likely to report that they require or recommend them for their applications. In particular, both larger and smaller public colleges are notably less likely than other segments to report using letters of recommendation (19% and 13%, respectively). However, a relatively high share of larger public colleges report requiring or recommending pre-requisite high-school

coursework (83%). Larger public colleges are also the most likely segment to require or recommend college entrance exam scores (30%).

Highly selective colleges are more likely to require or recommend essays, letters of recommendation, and prerequisite high school coursework in their applications. Figure 6 shows the percentage of institutions requiring or recommending application components by college segment. Nearly all highly selective colleges report either requiring or recommending essays (95%), prerequisite high school coursework (91%), and letters of recommendation (88%). A substantial proportion of admissions professionals at larger private colleges also report requiring or recommending essays (75%) and letters of recommendation (64%).

Figure 6: Required or Recommended Application Components, by College Segment (2024-25 Admissions Cycle)



Notes: The figure above shows the percentage of respondents who selected that the application component is “required” or “recommended” to the following question: “How would you describe your institution's policy related to each of the following application components for the 2024-25 cycle?” N = 314.

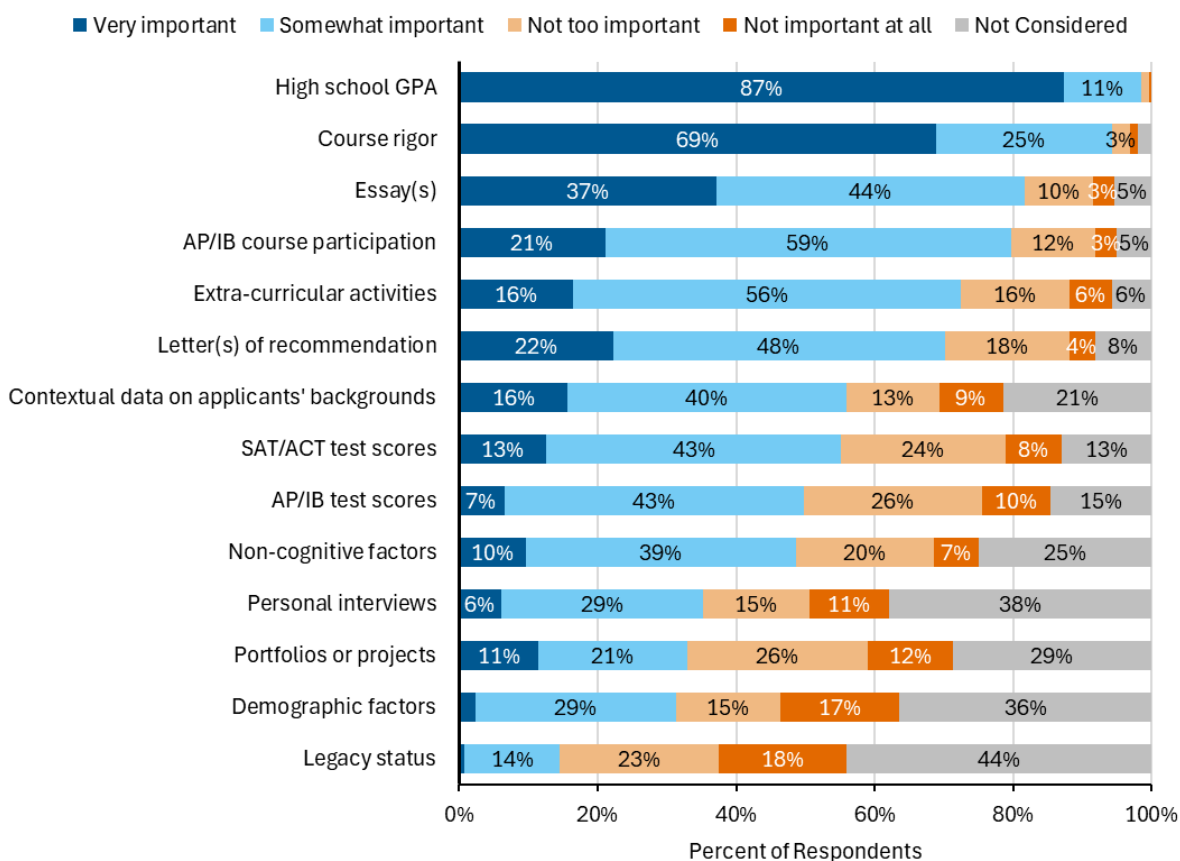
Importance of Application Components in Holistic Review

High school GPA and course rigor are the most important factors in holistic admissions review, while demographic factors and legacy status are the least important factors.

Figure 7 shows that high school GPA is the most influential component in holistic review, with 87% of institutions rating it as *very important* and an additional 11% as *somewhat important*. Course rigor is valued highly, with 69% of institutions rating it as very important and 25% as somewhat important. Essays occupy a middle tier of importance, with more than four-fifths of institutions (81%) rating them as very or somewhat important. AP/IB course participation (80%),

extracurricular activities (72%), and letters of recommendation (70%) are also widely considered, though more often as *somewhat* rather than *very* important. In contrast, standardized test scores play a limited role: 56 percent of institutions rate SAT/ACT scores as very or somewhat important, and 50 percent do so for AP/IB test scores, with sizable shares rating these components as not important or not considered at all (21% and 25%, respectively). Contextual data, non-cognitive factors, interviews, and portfolios all vary in importance, with between one-quarter and two-fifths of institutions reporting that these elements are not considered. Demographic factors and legacy status are the least valued components overall, with 36% and 44% of institutions, respectively, reporting that they are not considered in admissions decisions.

Figure 7: Importance of Application Components in Holistic Review (2024-25 Admissions Cycle)



Notes: The figure above shows responses to the following question: “For applicants reviewed holistically for the 2024-25 cycle, how would you describe the importance of each of the following factors in admissions evaluation?” N = 261.

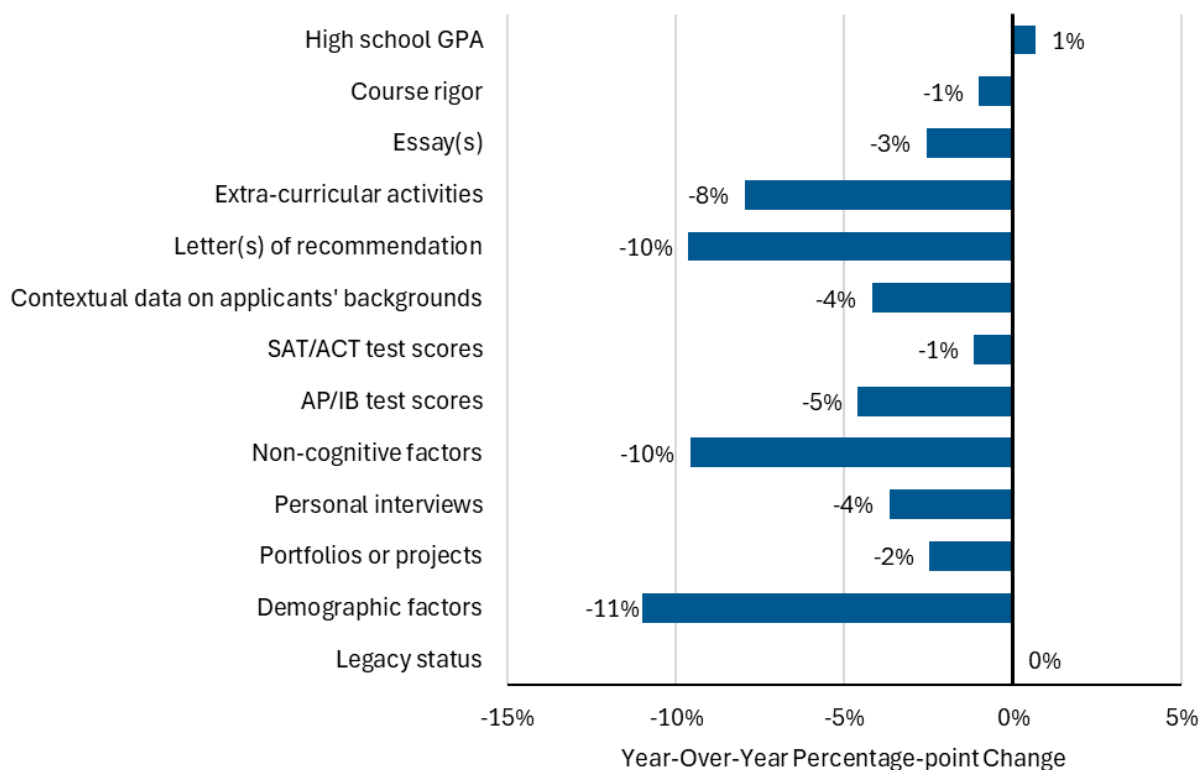
Institutions were less likely to report that demographic factors, non-cognitive factors, letters of recommendation, and extra-curricular activities were important for holistic review during the 2024-25 admissions cycle compared to the 2023-24 cycle. Figure 8 shows year-over-year percentage-point changes in the share of institutions rating application components as *very* or *somewhat* important across the 2023-24 and 2024-25 cycles.

Demographic factors (-11pp), letters of recommendation (-10pp), non-cognitive factors (-10pp), and extracurricular activities (-8pp) all experienced large drops in being considered very or somewhat important in holistic review. Contextual data on applicants' backgrounds (-4pp), AP/IB test scores (-5pp) and personal interviews (-4pp) also experienced modest declines year-over-year. High school GPA, course rigor, essays, SAT/ACT test scores, portfolios/projects and legacy status experienced little to no change year-over-year.

Despite the declining importance of some application components, holistic review continues to consider a broad set of application components, with 91% of institutions indicating that at least 5 application components are at least somewhat important.

Moreover, 71% of institutions indicated that at least 7 application components are at least somewhat important, and 50% indicated this level of importance for at least 9 components.

Figure 8: Year-Over-Year Changes in ‘Very’ and ‘Somewhat’ Important Application Components in Holistic Review, 2023-24 to 2024-25

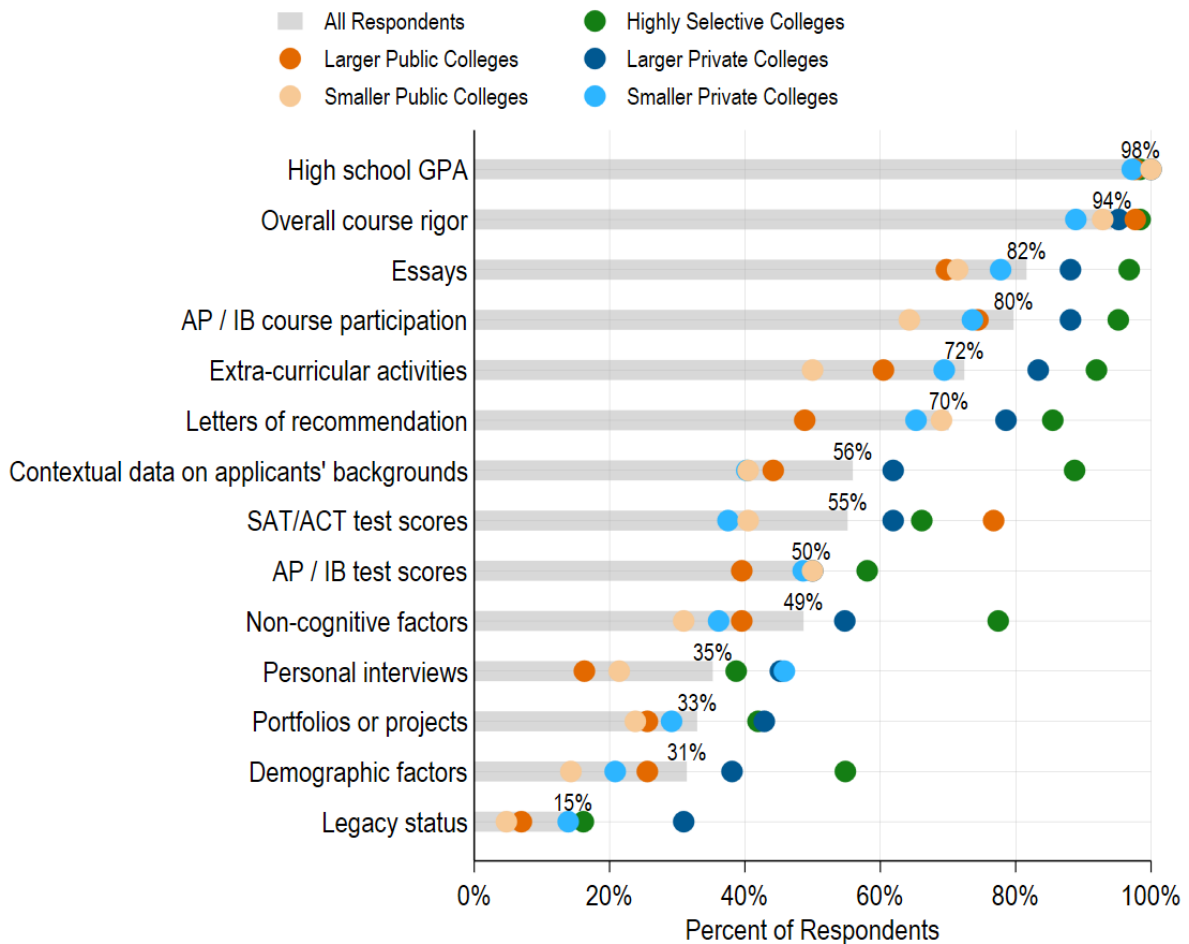


Notes: The figure above shows the year-over-year percentage-point change in respondents who selected that the application component is “very” and “somewhat important” to the following question: “For applicants reviewed holistically for the 2023-24/2024-25 cycle, how would you describe the importance of each of the following factors in admissions evaluation?” N = 291 (2023-24), N = 261 (2024-25)

Highly selective and larger private colleges are most likely to view nearly all application components as important in holistic review, except for SAT/ACT test scores, which are rated as important by a greater share of larger public colleges compared to other college segments. Figure 9 shows that high school GPA (98%) and overall course rigor (94%) are universally rated as very or somewhat important, regardless of college segment. In contrast, the

importance assigned to the remaining application components vary considerably by segment. In particular, highly selective colleges are much more likely than colleges of other segments to value non-academic factors like contextual data on applicants' backgrounds (89%), non-cognitive factors (77%) and demographic factors (55%). Notably, larger public colleges are more likely than colleges of all other segments to consider SAT/ACT test scores as very or somewhat important (77%). Portfolios or projects, demographic factors, and legacy status are not often rated as very or somewhat important across all segments.

Figure 9: Very or Somewhat Important Application Components in Holistic Review, by College Segment (2024-25 Admissions Cycle)



Notes: The figure above shows responses to the following question: "For applicants reviewed holistically for the 2024-25 cycle, how would you describe the importance of each of the following factors in admissions evaluation?" N = 261.

IV. How are colleges using AI in admissions?

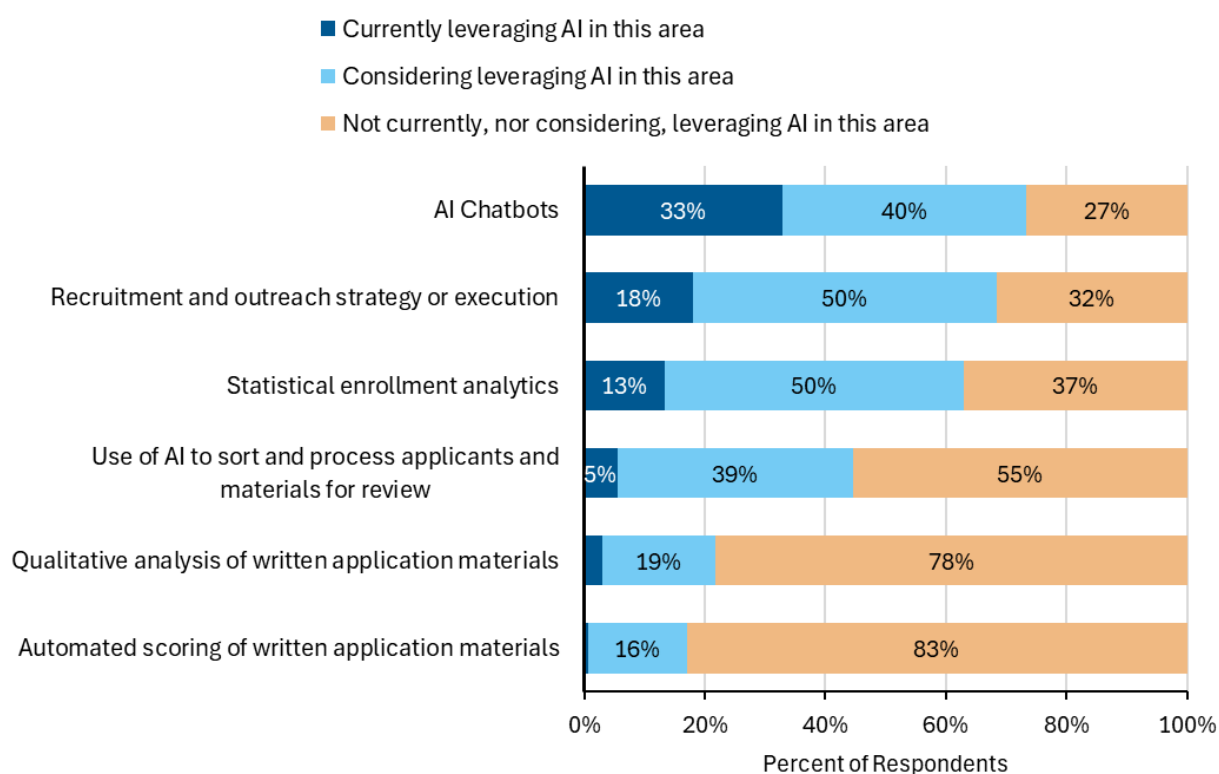
Use of AI in admissions is minimal. While some colleges are using AI chatbots, few colleges are using AI for admission evaluation. Figure 10 shows responses to a question asking institutions about whether they are using AI in several areas related to admissions. One-third of admissions leaders (33%) report they are currently using AI chatbots. Another 18% and

13% report current use of AI for recruitment and outreach strategy and statistical enrollment analytics, respectively. Very few colleges report using AI for application review purposes, including to sort and process applicants and materials for review (5%), qualitative analysis of written application materials (3%), and automated scoring of written application materials (1%).

More colleges are considering using AI for admissions purposes than report currently using it, potentially foreshadowing a rise in AI use in future admissions cycles.

Admissions leaders also had the option to indicate that they are “considering leveraging AI” in each of the listed areas. Half of responding colleges report considering using AI for recruitment and outreach strategy and statistical enrollment analytics. Some colleges are considering using AI for admission evaluation, including qualitative analysis of written application materials (19%), and automated scoring of written application materials (16%).

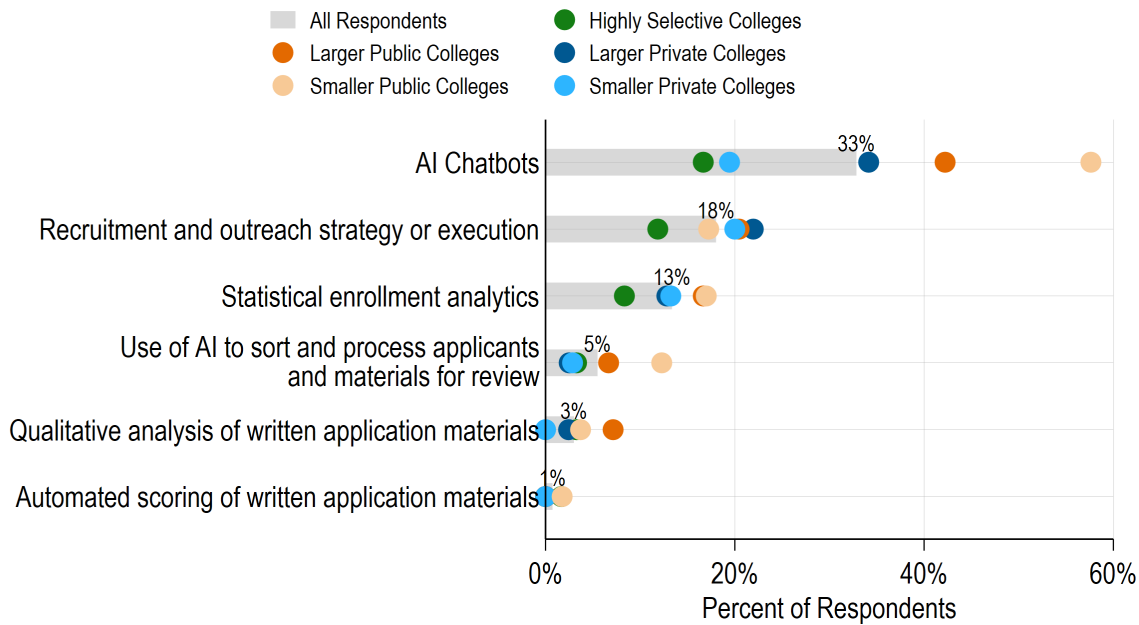
Figure 10: AI in Admissions (2024-25 Admissions Cycle)



Notes: The figure above shows responses to the following question: “For each of the following functions, please indicate whether your institution currently leverages, or is considering leveraging, the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI).” N = 262-277.

Public colleges are more likely than private colleges to use AI Chatbots, but there are few differences in AI use across college segments in other admissions areas. Figure 11 shows the percentage of institutions selecting “currently leveraging AI in the area” by college segment. Public colleges are more likely than private colleges to report using AI chatbots, with larger public colleges at 42% and smaller public colleges at 58%, compared to less than a third at private colleges. Differences between college segments for all other included uses of AI are minimal, underscoring the lack of AI use among colleges outside of chatbots.

Figure 11: Current Use of AI in Admissions, by College Segment (2024-25 Admissions Cycle)



Notes: The figure above shows the percentage of responses that selected “currently leverages” to the following question: “For each of the following functions, please indicate whether your institution currently leverages, or is considering leveraging, the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI).” N = 262-277.

Discussion

This research presents findings from a College Board survey of higher education institutions administered in July 2025 to provide clarity on current admissions policies and requirements, applicant evaluation processes, and AI use during the 2024-25 admissions cycle. Overall, admissions policies and perceptions of application components remain broadly stable year-over-year, even as clear differences persist by college segment. Institutions continue to offer multiple pathways for student admission, with regular decision remaining the most common. Variation in admissions pathways is driven primarily by college segment, reflecting differences in institutional mission, selectivity, and enrollment strategy.

A majority of institutions report using holistic review in admissions for at least some applicants; however, its implementation varies meaningfully across segments. Public institutions are more likely than private or highly selective colleges to also rely on formula-driven or guaranteed admission policies based on GPA and class rank, underscoring that holistic review does not represent a uniform admissions model. In addition to admissions decisions, institutions report using holistic review in other contexts, extending how “holistic” review is defined and applied.

Admission requirements vary by college segment for nearly all components except transcripts, which remain universally required or recommended. Highly selective and larger private institutions are more likely to utilize more layered evaluative processes that place importance on a wider range of application components. In contrast, public institutions, particularly smaller

publics, tend to rely on fewer supplemental components. While the use of most application components remains steady year-over-year, there is a notable shift away from the use of interviews in the application process.

Colleges' use of AI in admissions remains limited, though public institutions are more likely than other segments to deploy AI-enabled chatbots. At the same time, a subset of institutions report plans to consider AI in future admissions cycles, suggesting gradual adoption focused primarily on enrollment operations rather than direct evaluation of applicants. As AI-assisted processes become more common across higher education and other sectors, future research will be important to understand how institutions evaluate the role of AI in admissions and how its use may evolve over time.

Looking ahead, several areas warrant continued attention. First, ongoing tracking of admissions policies and practices will be important given the dynamic legal and policy environment in which institutions operate. Second, further research is needed to better understand how holistic review is defined and implemented across institutions, particularly as the perceived importance of certain application components may be shifting over time. Third, as institutions face increasing competition for a smaller pool of prospective students—stemming from declining birth cohorts, shifting regional population patterns (WICHE, 2024), and changes in high school graduation rates—future work should examine how these pressures influence recruitment, admissions, and yield strategies. Finally, continued monitoring of AI adoption in admissions will be critical to understanding whether its use expands beyond operational functions and how institutions address questions of transparency, fairness, and governance.

Taken together, these findings highlight a landscape in which admissions practices remain relatively stable in the short term but may continue to evolve in response to broader policy, technological, and demographic changes.

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Appendix

Survey Instrument

The data included in this report are from the following survey questions. The detail provided here includes all response options for each question, though all these response options may not be included in the figures noted within the report and/or response options may have been collapsed.

Which of the following best describes your institution?

- 4-year, private college
- 4-year, public college
- 2-year college
- Higher education system
- Other, please specify: Text entry

Which of the following best describes your title?

- Vice president of Enrollment
- Dean/Director of Admissions/Enrollment
- Assistant/Associate Dean/Director of Admissions/Enrollment
- Other Admissions/Enrollment Officer
- Other, please specify: Text entry

How would you describe your institution's policy related to each of the following application components for the 2024-25 cycle? [Scale: Required for all students, Recommended for all students, Optional for all students, Not accepted for any students, Varies by major, program, or based on student attribute, Not Sure]

- Transcript
- Prerequisite high-school coursework
- College Entrance Exam scores (SAT, ACT, etc.)
- Essay(s)
- Work samples or portfolio
- Letter(s) of recommendation
- Interview
- AP and/or IB Exam Scores (for admission, not credit/placement)

In which of the following ways did your institution admit students for the 2024-25 cycle? Select all that apply.

- Early Decision (binding)
- Early Action (non-binding)
- Regular Decision
- Admission to specific college/major
- Rolling Admission
- Provisional admission
- Direct Admission (admission offered to students pre-application)
- Waitlist
- Another way, please specify: Text Entry

Please review the definitions of the three admissions pathways we've identified. Then, please indicate whether the pathway was used for all, most, some, or none of your applicants for the 2024-25 cycle. Be sure to consider your general population, as well as any special programs. [Scale: All, Most, Some, None]

- **Holistic:** Applicants are evaluated based on academic and non-academic achievements and personal characteristics.
- **Formula-Driven:** Applications are evaluated using an institutional formula.
- **Auto/Guaranteed:** Applicants meeting criteria specified by the State/System are offered admission.

Which of the following influences whether you used holistic, formula-driven, or automatic admission? Please select all that apply.

- Student residence (in-state, out-of-state, international)
- GPA or Class Rank
- Test Score (or submission status)
- Major or college choice
- Honors or other selective program
- Something else, please specify: Text Entry

For applicants reviewed **holistically** for the 2024-25 cycle, how would you describe the importance of each of the following factors in admissions evaluation? [Scale: Very important, Somewhat important, Not too important, Not important at all, Not Considered]

- High School GPA
- Overall Course rigor
- AP / IB **participation**
- AP / IB **test scores**
- SAT/ACT test scores
- Letters of recommendation
- Essays
- Portfolios or projects
- Personal interviews
- Extra-curricular activities
- Non-cognitive factors
- Contextual data on applicants' backgrounds (Landscape or other)
- Legacy status
- Demographic factors
- Another factor(s): Text Entry

Thinking again about your institution's holistic review process, for which of the following did your institution review students holistically in the 2024-25 cycle, outside of general admissions? Please select all that apply.

- N/A - We only use holistic review for admissions
- Scholarships
- Honors programs
- Admission to specific majors
- Summer bridge programs
- Something else, please specify: Text Entry

For each of the following functions, please indicate whether your institution currently leverages, or is considering leveraging, the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). [Scale: **Currently leveraging** AI in this area, **Considering leveraging** AI in this area, **Not currently, nor considering**, leveraging AI in this area, Not Sure]

- Recruitment and outreach strategy or execution
- AI Chatbots
- Use of AI to sort and process applicants and materials for review
- Automated scoring of written application materials
- Qualitative analysis of written application materials
- Statistical enrollment analytics

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