

Admissions programs recruit top-paying students

Survey shows those who can afford full tuition are favored in admissions decisions

GETTING INTO COLLEGE is already hard enough: Applicants worry about whether their grades will pass muster, if their test scores will compete, and whether they've logged sufficient community service hours to win that coveted acceptance letter in the mail.

Money is another major factor, and if low- and middle-income applicants weren't worried about it before, they should start worrying now. A survey released in September by the online news source, *Inside Higher Ed*, shows that admissions officials are making the recruitment of full-pay students a top priority. The second most important admissions strategy is providing more aid for low- and middle-income students.

Responses from 462 senior admissions officials from a variety of nonprofit colleges and universities show that full-pay students—those who do not need financial aid—are so favored that 10 percent of the four-year colleges admit them despite lower grades and test scores. They also may be lured in by “merit aid,” ironically based on their ability to pay a higher portion of their tuition.

Out-of-state and international students are also recruited; at public institutions, they pay significantly more tuition than their in-state classmates. Among four-year institutions, the admissions strategy viewed as most important was recruiting these out-of-staters; 30 percent of admissions directors count recruiting international students as a big part of their admissions strategy.

Admitting more full-pay students can help pay for needier applicants who can't afford to attend on their own. And, at a time when state education budgets are being slashed, colleges are casting about desperately for places to increase revenues and cut back expenses. But many observers are troubled by what appears to be favoritism toward more-privileged students.

In an October address to the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, Kati Haycock, president of the Education Trust, highlighted the persistent gap between minority/low-income students, and white/upper-income students.

Eighty percent of students from families earning top incomes (\$80,000 or above) earn college degrees; just 8 percent of those in the lowest income range (\$25,000 or less) do the same. She charged admissions officials with avoiding systems that continue to favor the privileged and urged them to work to keep admissions more inclusive.

Climbing student debt worsened by high unemployment

AFT targets strategies to ease financial pressure on new graduates

AT GRADUATION, college seniors get good news—and bad news. Along with their freshly minted diplomas, two-thirds of them are graduating with an average of \$25,250 in debt.

That's a 5 percent increase from last year, according to “Student Debt and the Class of 2010,” a recent report from the Project on Student Debt at the Institute for College Access & Success. To make matters worse, the report shows these brand-new grads can't find jobs: 9.1 percent were unemployed in 2010, compared with 8.7 percent in 2009. That's better than the 20.4 percent unemployment rate among people who hold only a high school degree, but it's still no picnic when you're trying to pay back your loans.

After surveying more than 1,000 four-year public and private nonprofit colleges and universities, the report lists the percentage of 2010 graduates with student loan debt and breaks down their average debt levels by state and by institution. Average debt rates vary widely, from \$15,509 in Utah to \$31,048 in New Hampshire, and from \$950 to \$55,250 among individual institutions. The differences can be attributed to a number of factors, including endowment, availability of state aid, student demographics and cost of living.

Students who graduated in 2010 enrolled in college before the recession hit and endured the economic slide midway through. In addition to facing personal financial challenges, they've suffered state funding cuts and

The *Inside Higher Ed* survey shows other admission trends as well: continuing affirmative action policies; weighted admission for athletes, children of alumni and veterans; decreased dependence on SAT and ACT scores; and opinions on plagiarism in application essays. To see the full report, go to <http://go.aft.org/InsideHE>.



subsequent tuition increases. “It is a tragic reality that young people are leaving college saddled with onerous student debt,” says AFT president Randi Weingarten. “This limits the types of careers students can pursue and puts them in the untenable position of having to pay back their loans almost immediately in the face of the worst labor market in 70 years.”

What to do? Education Secretary Arne Duncan recently urged college administrators to think more creatively about controlling tuition and named some federal incentives that could help. Meanwhile, the AFT is:

- Advocating for more state and federal grant aid.
- Supporting Pell Grants and maintaining protections like federal loan deferment, forbearance, and subsidized loans for low- and middle-income students.
- Supporting provisions like income-based repayment, lower interest rates and public service loan forgiveness.
- Continuing public discussion on the rising cost of attending college.
- Working to prevent additional cuts to higher education at the state level.
- Fighting fraud and abuse of the federal student aid system, especially in the for-profit sector.

“We strongly believe that higher education should be affordable and accessible to anyone who wants to pursue it,” says Weingarten.