

Summary Report

Trends in College Admission 2000:

A Report of a National Survey of
Undergraduate Admission Policies, Practices,
and Procedures



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*Trends in
College
Admission 2000*

**A Report of a Survey of
Undergraduate Admissions
Policies, Practices, and Procedures**

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Foreword

“Trends in College Admissions” is the fourth in a series of nationwide studies, beginning in 1979, examining the policies, practices, and procedures of two- and four-year postsecondary institutions. Over the years, reports on our national surveys have analyzed how the college admission process reacts to and reflects changes in the size and composition of the college-bound population. The latest study, based on the 1999/2000 academic year, reinforces one important theme: that even as the number of students change and recruitment efforts intensify, the integrity of the college admission process remains intact.

Previous surveys in this series were conducted in 1979, 1985 and 1992. For admission purposes, one statistic in particular can account for a significant variation in the results over this time horizon. Since 1979, the U.S. Department of Education reports a 31% increase in enrollment at degree-granting two- and four-year postsecondary institutions.

The data analyzed in this report confirm what we have known for years—that college admission decisions are made in an increasingly competitive landscape, where students and parents are becoming more savvy and where institutions employ state-of-the-art marketing and research to attract high-achieving students and a diverse population to their campuses. Institutions report significant increases in the scope and complexity of their recruitment and research efforts. This change has likely been precipitated by two other findings contained in the 2000 survey—a large increase in applications for admission and a resulting decline in the percentage of accepted students who enroll (i.e., “yield”) at many public and private institutions. In contrast to speculation that competition over enrollments might decrease standards for admission, this report indicates that standards have not been compromised.

Accompanying the increase in enrollment has been a more concerted policy focus on standards in higher education. As two- and four-year degrees become vital in the increasingly complex economy, and as more students move through institutions of higher education, the private and public sectors increase their calls for maintaining high standards in postsecondary education. Indeed, this report indicates one symptom of this movement—the shift in responsibilities for developing admission criteria and standards from the admission office to states and other governing bodies. In addition, selectivity at four-year institutions has increased. More is being required of students, who are meeting the challenge in increasingly large numbers.

Information in this report can be an important tool in helping parents, students, educators, administrators and policymakers learn more about and evaluate the college admission process. This report is a collaborative effort of our five organizations, each committed to serving students, educators and postsecondary educational institutions. We appreciate the efforts of our researchers and other staff for their contributions to this effort. This report could not have been completed without the cooperation of more than 1,600 admission officers and their staffs, who made it possible to assemble the data. We owe them our special thanks, for without their fine spirit of cooperation this report would not have been possible.

Richard L. Ferguson, *President, ACT, Inc.*
Dawn Geronimo Terkla, *President, Association for Institutional Research*
Gaston Caperton, *President, The College Board*
Kurt Landgraf, *President, Educational Testing Service*
Paul Pedersen, *President, National Association for College Admission Counseling*

Acknowledgments

A survey of this magnitude requires the help of a number of people and institutions. The 2000 report would not have been possible without the foundation built by those who worked on the 1979, 1985, and 1992 surveys. Since 1979, members and staff from ACT, The College Board, ETS, NACAC, AACRAO, and AIR have collaborated to provide survey formulation, drafting, data collection, interpretation, reporting drafting and proofing, and many other invaluable services to these efforts.

The sponsoring organizations owe a debt of thanks to the following individuals and institutions for their contributions to the 2000 survey and report:

Gretchen Rigol of the College Board hosted the meeting that launched the 2000 survey and analysis. Wayne Camara reviewed the survey questionnaires and provided general advice. Brad Quinn reviewed the questionnaires, advised, and presented results of the survey at conferences. Renee Gernand oversaw the data collection, and Jan Gams, Associate Director of Public Affairs, mined the analysis for newsworthy information. The College Board also supplemented the data collection with data from the Annual Survey of Colleges.

Tony Broh helped shape the survey instrument and advised on other aspects of the analysis; John Milam of AIR provided the resources for posting the full report on the AIR website.

Mark Cannon and David Hawkins at NACAC reviewed the draft reports, contributed to survey response and follow up, edited the final report, and disseminated the data.

Many thanks to all who helped make this report a success.

Survey Steering Committee:

Association for Institutional Research: Anthony Broh, *Director of Research, Consortium on Financing Higher Education*

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Educational Testing Service: Hunter Breland, *Senior Research Scientist*

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Sponsoring Organizations



ACT, Inc., is an independent, not-for-profit organization that provides more than a hundred assessment, research, information, and program management services in the broad areas of educational planning, career planning, and workforce development. Each year we serve millions of people in high schools, colleges, professional associations, businesses, and government agencies—nationally and internationally. Though designed to meet a wide array of needs, all ACT programs and services have one guiding purpose—to help people achieve education and career goals by providing information for life's transitions.



The **Association for Institutional Research (AIR)** is dedicated to professional growth of all who participate in decision making related to higher education via management research, policy analysis and planning. AIR members work in many different postsecondary areas—finance, academic affairs, instruction, student services and institutional development—and in offices at the international, state, system or campus levels. In bringing diverse membership together, AIR provides a professional organization where members' view points, concerns and differences are examined in an atmosphere of learning, mutual exchange and professional development.



The College Board is a national nonprofit membership association dedicated to preparing, inspiring, and connecting students to college and opportunity. Founded in 1900, the association is composed of more than 3,900 schools, colleges, universities, and other educational organizations. Each year, the College Board serves over three million students and their parents, 22,000 high schools, and 3,500 colleges through major programs and services in college admission, guidance, assessment, financial aid, enrollment, and teaching and learning. Among its best-known programs are the SAT[®], the PSAT/NMSQT[™], the Advanced Placement Program[®] (AP[®]), and Pacesetter[®]. The College Board is committed to the principles of equity and excellence, and that commitment is embodied in all of its programs, services, activities, and concerns. For further information, contact www.collegeboard.com.



Educational Testing Service is the world's largest private educational testing and measurement organization and a leader in educational research. A nonprofit company dedicated to serving the needs of individuals, educational institutions and agencies, and governmental bodies in 181 countries, ETS develops and annually administers more than 11 million tests worldwide.



The National Association for College Admission Counseling supports the work of more than 7,500 members at the secondary and college and university levels of education and in a variety of organizations and agencies. Members become involved with issues and policies on the state and national level and within the counseling profession that have an impact on the lives of students making the transition from high school to college within the U.S. and in many foreign countries. As a non-profit education organization, NACAC promotes the highest standards for guidance and admission programs, provides continuing education opportunities for members, and annually sponsors college fairs in more than 60 locations across the country as well as online to enable students and parents to interact, at the same time, with one of the largest gatherings of college representatives.

Highlights

Enrollment

- Between 1979 and 1999, the annual number of high school graduates in the United States decreased by over a quarter million students, but total and undergraduate enrollment in higher education increased substantially.
- Between 1979 and 1999, there were some declines in total first-time, first-year student enrollment, but these declines were not uniform across institutional sectors. First-time, first-year student enrollment at four-year public and private institutions and two-year private institutions was relatively stable, while first-time, first-year-freshmen enrollment at two-year public institutions decreased.
- Between 1985 and 1999, the average number of applications per enrolled first-time, first-year student increased dramatically, and thus yield rates—the proportion of accepted applicants who enroll at any given institution—decreased dramatically.

Recruitment

- A very high percentage of admissions staff or high school relations staff continue to make very frequent visits to high schools, and recruiting outside the local geographic service area has increased for public institutions in the last few years.
- Institutions in all four sectors have significantly increased their participation in college fairs that charge for participation.
- Over 80 percent of the institutions in all four sectors now use the World Wide Web for recruiting purposes.
- Much greater use is made of telephones for contacting prospective students than in 1985 among all four sectors.

- Four-year institutions make greater use of mailing services such as the Educational Opportunity Service (EOS) and the Student Search Service (sponsored by the College Board).
- Two-year institutions use mailing lists and search services to recruit students more often than in the past.
- Although still prevalent among all four sectors, recruiting activities aimed at special groups of students has decreased since 1992, particularly racial/ethnic minorities, academically talented, athletes, and adults seeking a career change.
- Public institutions have increased their efforts to recruit out-of-district/out-of-state and international students.
- Two-year institutions have increased their efforts since 1992 to develop cooperative relationships with business and industry.
- Institutions in all sectors are making greater use of marketing or public relations consultants than in previous years.
- Since 1985, the most common market research related to recruitment involves conducting studies to project future enrollment, and to evaluate current recruiting activities. Such research is more common among four-year institutions, but over half of the two-year colleges also conduct such research.
- Four-year institutions continue to raise their academic qualifications for new students. Nearly 60 percent had increased their academic qualifications for the entering class of 1999 compared to 1998.
- A majority of four-year institutions (in 1999) had plans to increase the size of their entering class and its racial diversity compared to 1998.

Financial Aid

- As was true in 1992, over 80 percent of all institutions indicated that a student had to be admitted before aid is offered, but that financial need had no influence on the admission decision.
- The type of financial aid offered is related to academic ability in over half of the private four-year institutions, and about one-fourth of the public four-year institutions. Academic ability is not considered much in awarding aid in two-year institutions.
- The trend in no-need awards declined slightly from 1992 but remains an important practice among institutions in all sectors. Although not as common as in 1992, seventy-four percent of the public two-year colleges reported that compared to five years ago, more students are electing to attend a two-year institution rather than a four-year institution because of the total costs of education.
- The average percentage of first-year students with demonstrated financial need that was fully met has dropped in all sectors since 1992, except in two-year public institutions

Admissions Policies, Practices, and Standards

- The percentage of institutions reporting that they required admissions test scores remained essentially constant at over 90 percent of institutions reporting over the period 1979 to 2000.
- High school GPA or rank was consistently the most important factor in admissions decisions between 1979 and 2000, and admissions test scores were consistently second in importance.
- Achievement test scores (i.e., SAT II or subject specific) were not viewed as highly important in admissions decisions in any of the four surveys between 1979 and 2000.

- Admissions officers at four-year private institutions perceived that standards were higher in 2000 than five years previously (i.e., 1995), and overall acceptance rates decreased. Four-year public institutions indicated that standards had not changed in the last five years, and overall acceptance rates did not change.
- Between 1979 and 2000, the proportion of four-year institutions reporting exceptions to formal admissions policies for some groups of students decreased for practically all groups, including adult, part-time, veteran, and minority students.
- Over 80 percent of the two- and four-year institutions report information to prospective students such as basis for admissions decisions, exceptions to the standard admissions policy, the percent of minorities enrolled at the institution, equations/schedules to estimate the financial aid available, and completion or retention rates.
- Between 1979 and 2000 there has been a shift in responsibility for establishing broad admission guidelines. The role of an admissions committee to establish broad guidelines has declined, with the Board of Trustees, Governing Board, or state legislature playing a larger role in 2000.
- Institutions in all four sectors (i.e., public and private and two and four-year institutions) tend to conduct admissions research at about the same rate as in 1985, with four-year public institutions making more use of research than other types of institutions.

Equity

- Between 1985 and 1999, proportional representation in first time, first-year student enrollment in four-year institutions increased for Asian, Hispanic, and American Indian students, and decreased for Black and White students.

- Between 1985 and 1999, the average number of applications per enrolled first-time, first-year student in four-year public and private institutions increased for all racial/ethnic groups, with the greatest increases occurring for Asian and Hispanic students.
- Between 1985 and 1999, increasing application rates were accompanied by lower acceptance rates for all groups except white students and students of unknown racial/ethnic identity.
- The percentage of students choosing not to disclose racial/ethnic identity increased somewhat between 1992 and 1999.

Introduction

Three issues dominated college admissions work over the 21 years of the four surveys described in this report: demographics, standards, and equity. Demographics was the primary issue when the first of the four surveys was conducted in 1979 because of a projected decline in the numbers of high school graduates. This decline was expected to continue to the early 1990s and thus represented a significant challenge. The standards issue originally grew out of the demographics issue because it was feared that institutions, in attempting to fill classes, would resort to accepting students with lower qualifications. Persistent reports that our schools were not adequately preparing students or that our students were less competent than students in other countries contributed to concerns about academic standards. The equity issue has also been of growing importance as women and minorities increase in their representation in the population and on college and university campuses. Opposition to affirmative action in a few states has magnified the equity issue in recent years.

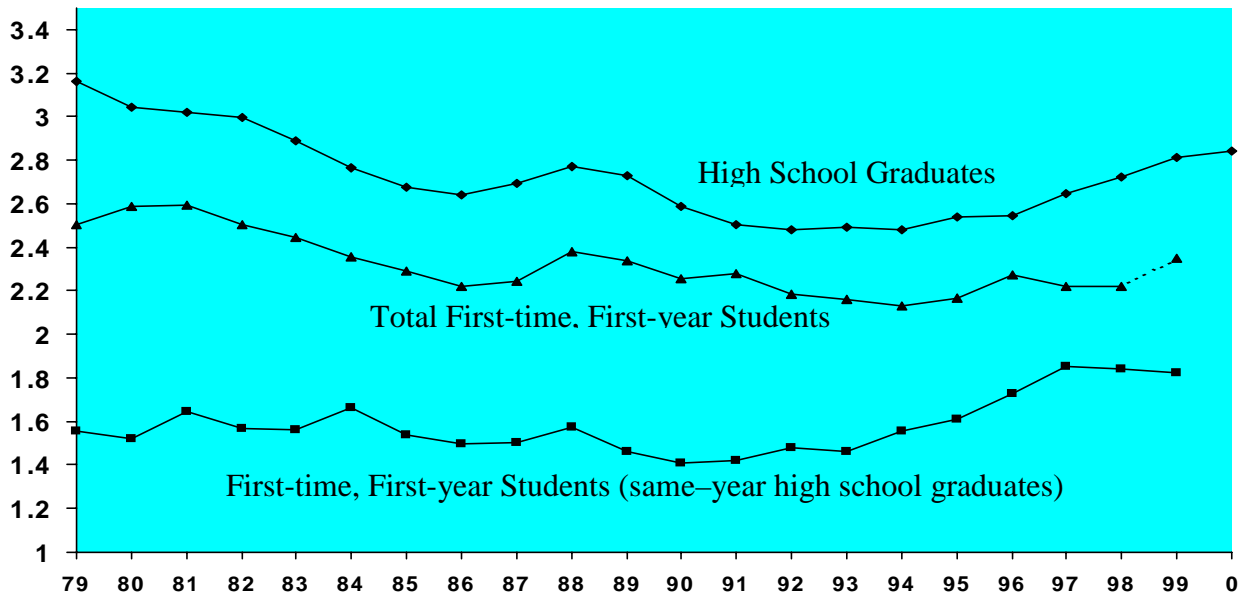
With some assistance from societal changes in the enrollment of women, minorities, immigrant groups, and older students, colleges and universities met the demographic challenge through aggressive marketing, recruiting, and financial aid practices. Academic standards in college admissions appear to have been uncompromised. Minority representation in colleges is progressing, despite a brief period of declines in enrollment of some minority students in a few institutions.

Enrollment

National enrollment data compiled by the U. S. Department of Education (2000) give an indication of how the demographic challenge was met. From 1979 to 2000, first-time freshman enrollment in institutions of higher education fluctuated considerably. The first part of that

period, between 1979 and 1994, witnessed a decline in the numbers of high school graduates of almost 700,000 students. Between 1994 and 1999, the high school graduation rate increased by almost 400,000. Thus, between 1979 and 1999 there was a net decline of about 300,000 in the number of high school graduates. It would be expected that a decline in the numbers of high school graduates would translate into a decline in the numbers of first-time, first-year college students, since the high school has always been the primary source for college entrants. Indeed, total first-time, first-year college enrollment declined between 1979 and 1994 by about 370,000 students, compared to the almost 700,000 decline in high school graduates. Since 1994, first-time, first-year college enrollment has increased along with the numbers of high school graduates (see Figure 1). The latest available published data from the U. S. Department of Education is for 1998 and shows that first-time, first-year college enrollment increased by about

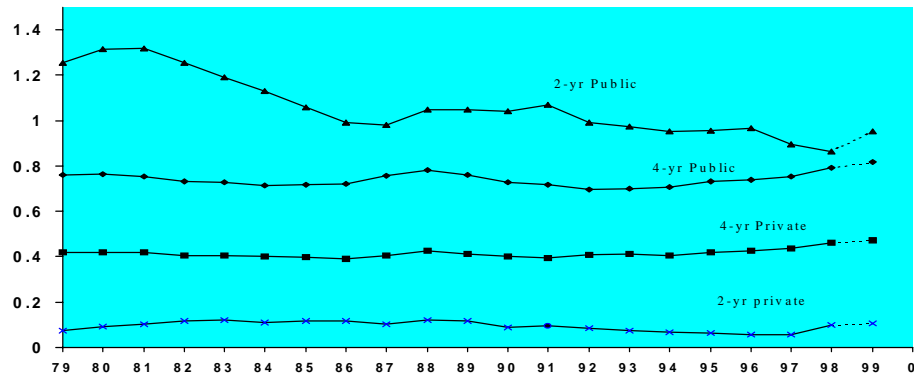
Figure 1
 Numbers of High School Graduates and First-time, First-year College Students,
 1979-2000 (Millions)



Sources: U. S. Department of Education (2000), Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education, American College Testing Program (2000), and preliminary information from U. S. Department of Education (indicated by dashed line).

85,000 students between 1994 and 1998. Preliminary estimates (U. S. Department of Education, personal communication) for 1999 indicate that there was an increase of over 200,000 first-time, first-year students between 1994 and 1999. The net decline in first-time, first-year college students was about 150,000 students between 1979 and 1999. Of particular interest, however, is the first-time freshman enrollment in public versus private institutions and in two-year versus four-year institutions. The 1979 to 1994 period saw declines in all four types of institutions, but by far the largest decline (of about 300,000) occurred in two-year public institutions. The net result of these changes in first-time enrollment was that all institutional types except two-year public institutions maintained their first-time, first-year student enrollments between 1979 and 1999 (see Figure 2). The greater amount of recruiting conducted by four-year and private two-year institutions may be the reason for these differences in first-time freshman enrollments for different institutional types.

Figure 2
 Numbers of First-time, First-year Students, 1979-1999, by
 Institutional Type (Millions)

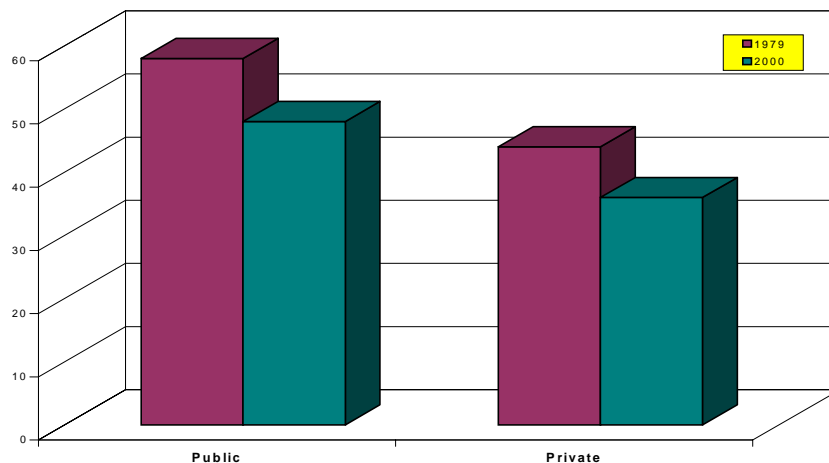


Another trend in the 1974 to 1999 period was an increase in the proportion of high school graduates enrolling in college during the fall of the year in which they graduated. In 1979, only about half of high school graduates (both male and female) enrolled in college immediately after

high school graduation. By the late 1990s, this percentage had increased to over 65 percent, and it was higher for women (about 68 percent) than men (about 62 percent). This increase also occurred for ethnic minority students: immediate enrollment of Black high school graduates in college increased from about 45 percent in 1979 to almost 60 percent in the late 1990s, and immediate college enrollment of Hispanic students increased from about 45 percent to over 50 percent (American College Testing Program, 2000). This increased proportion of high school graduates going directly on to college most probably is to some degree related to marketing and recruiting by colleges and universities, but it is also no doubt related also to societal changes.

A final enrollment trend worthy of note is that of declining yield rates, the proportion of accepted applicants who actually enroll, in four-year institutions. In 1979, the average yield rate for four-year public institutions was about 56 percent, but by 2000 it was only about 46 percent. In four-year private institutions, the average yield rate had been about 41 percent in 1979, but by 2000 it had declined to about 33 percent (see Figure 3). The declining yield rates are in part a

Figure 3. Average Yield Rates in Four-year Institutions



result of increases in application rates, the average number of applications submitted per enrolled student. Application rates increased from 2.4 to 3.2 in four-year publics during this period, and

from 3.3 to 4.4 in four-year private institutions. Yield rates are also of course, related to institutional prestige, financial aid practices, and the economy, among other factors.

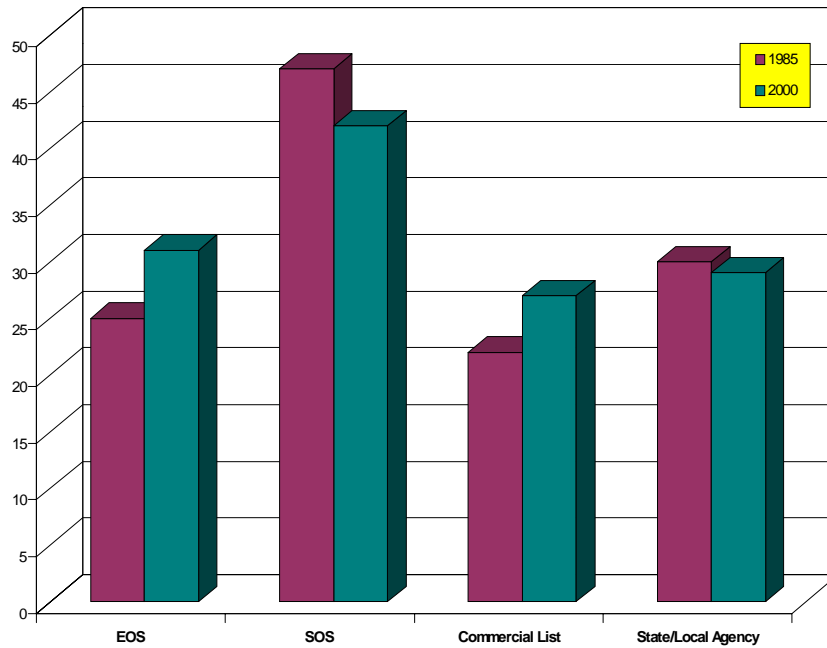
Recruitment

Since 1979, visits to high schools by admissions office and/or school relations' staff has remained very popular. About 80 percent of two-year and four-year institutions have reported that this approach to recruiting is used "very frequently."

Student and family visits to campuses remains one of the most utilized recruiting practices since 1979, along with a large percentage of institutions reporting very frequent use of College Nights. Since 1985 about 70 percent of all institutions make very frequent use of direct mailings to prospective students, although the practice is more popular among four-year institutions than two-year institutions. Increasing in popularity since 1985 are College Fairs that charge for participation. Institutions in all sectors (i.e., public and private and two and four year institutions) are making greater use of telephone calls to prospective students (43 percent in 1985 to 60 percent in 2000). The use of toll-free lines for incoming calls has increased as a "very frequent practice" (from 48 percent to 63 percent of all institutions in 2000). However, the most-utilized recruitment technology in 2000 is of web-based sites and services (86 percent of all institutions report "very frequent" use).

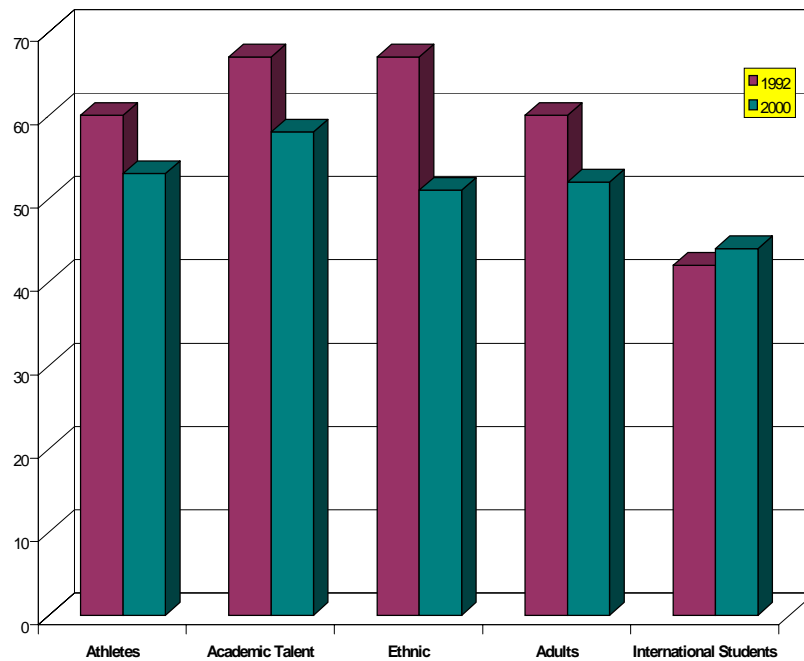
Since the mid-eighties, over 60 percent of the four-year institutions have used the Student Search Service (College Board) and a growing percentage are using the Educational Opportunity Service (ACT) to contact prospective students (see Figure 4) by direct mail. These services are not used much among two-year public institutions.

Figure 4. Recruitment-Direct Mail



A growing percent of colleges now use Commercial Mailing lists, and state or local agency lists to contact prospective students. As in the past, the most commonly recruited groups are academically talented students, athletes, adults, and racial minorities; however, a decrease in recruiting such groups has developed over the last several years. The only percentage increase noted across all institutions regarding special recruiting activities was noted for international students (see Figure 5).

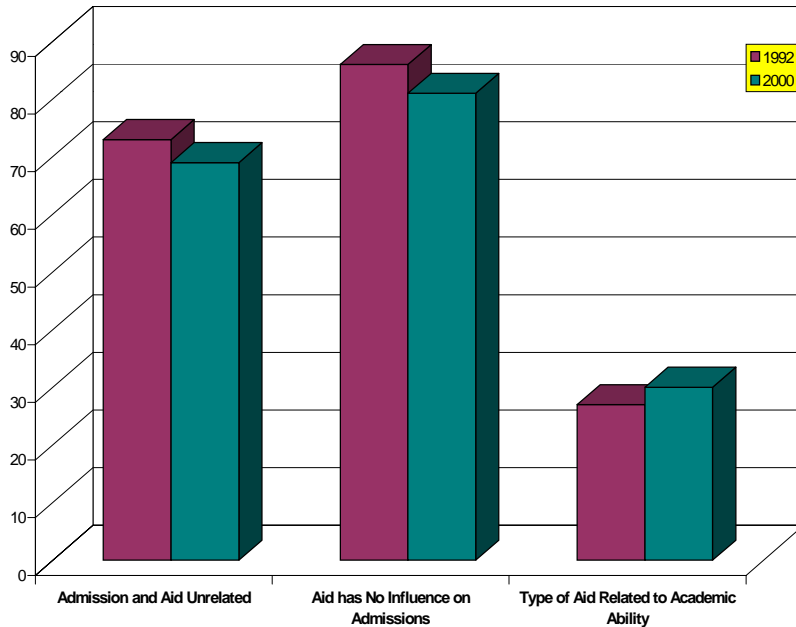
Figure 5. Recruitment Targets



Market Research

In 2000, many four-year institutions were using data and statistics to better understand their students and to inform prospective students. It is now common to have the basis of admissions decisions available to all prospective students, along with exceptions to the standard admissions policy. Many institutions report the percent of minority students enrolled, profiles of high school rank of enrolled first-time, first-year students, information to estimate the likelihood of receiving financial aid, retention rates, and information about educational choices of their graduates. All these efforts enable prospective students to make more informed decisions and choices about their college experience.

Figure 6. Admissions and Financial Aid Association



Little change has occurred among institutions that develop statistical summaries (profiles) of entering students, or validity studies to examine the effectiveness for estimating the success of first-time, first-year students. Four-year institutions are much more likely to conduct such research compared to two-year institutions. The percentage of institutions participating in such studies has remained steady since the mid-eighties.

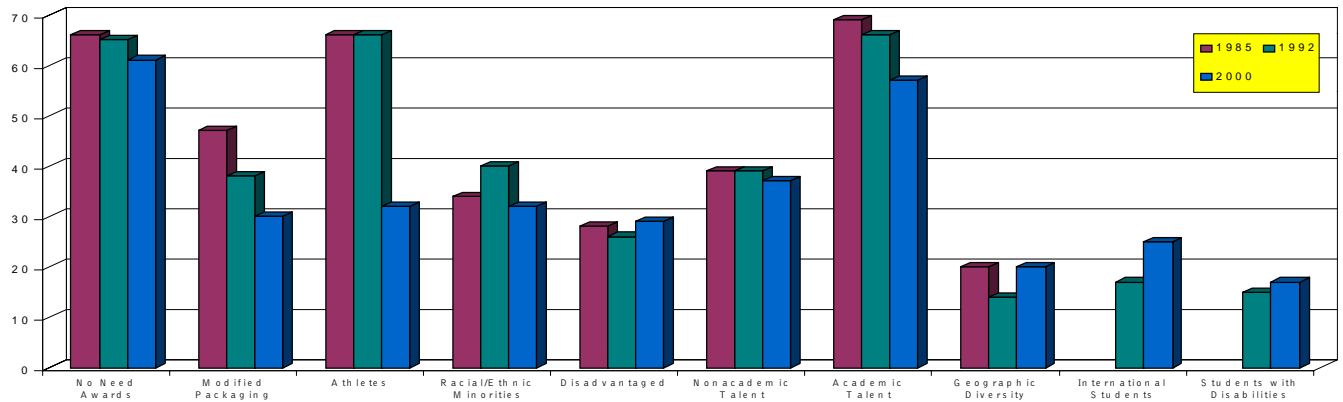
Although a high percentage of incoming first-year students in two-year institutions require remediation, less than half of such institutions conduct course placement research. Research of this type is needed to determine meaningful algorithms for placing students in the proper entry-level courses, especially in English and mathematics.

Financial Aid

Throughout the last decade, most postsecondary institutions indicated that financial aid could not be offered unless a student was admitted to their institution. However, most

financial need is not a factor in the admissions process. The small number of institutions that actively consider financial aid as a factor for admission (4 percent) tend to be private institutions (see Figures 6 & 7).

Figure 7. Aid to Accepted Applicants at Four Year Institutions



Notable among the four-year public institutions in 2000 was the increase from 1992 in the percentage of institutions that reported that the type of financial aid offered is related to the academic ability of the student. This may reflect the practice of distributing support to maximize the return to the institution.

Between 1979 and 2000 the offering of no-need awards has increased for three of the four types of institutions, the exception being two-year private institutions. Approximately 36 percent of the institutions reported that the dollar average of no-need awards has increased over the last five years. Throughout the 1990's about half of the students with demonstrated financial need had their needs fully met. A greater percentage of first-year students in four-year institutions have had their need fully met, compared to first year students in two-year institutions. The average amount of unmet need for accepted first-year applicants who were accepted for

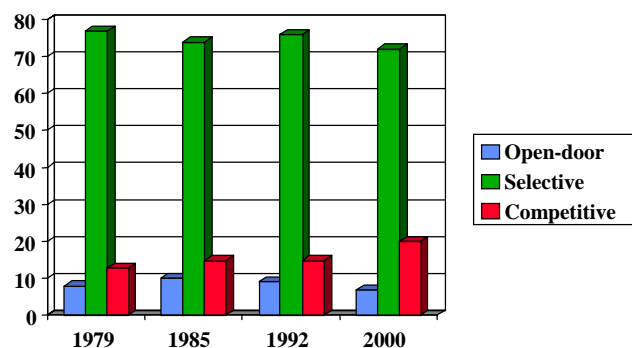
matriculation was higher in 2000 than in 1992 (\$2,419 compared to \$1,847, unadjusted for inflation).

Total cost for attending college appears to be less of a prohibitive factor for a student's decision of whether to attend a two-year institution versus a four-year institution. The percentage of colleges who indicate that cost was a factor in attending a two-year versus four-year institutions was down approximately 17 percent from 1992 to 2000 (86 percent to 69 percent).

Admissions Standards

The 2000 survey results give a number of indications that admissions standards have increased since 1979. First, the percentage of responding institutions classified as "Competitive," the highest selectivity category, increased for both four-year public and private institutions. Additionally, more four-year public institutions were classified as "Selective," the intermediate selectivity category, and fewer were classified as "Open-door" institutions. For four-year private institutions, fewer were classified as "Selective" and there was no change in the percentage classified as "Open-door." Such a change suggest that some four-year private institutions who were classified earlier as Selective" have now moved up to the "Competitive" category. There were no important changes in these categories for two-year institutions (see Figure 8.)

Figure 8. General Admissions Practices in Four-year Private Institutions, 1979, 1985, 1992, and 2000



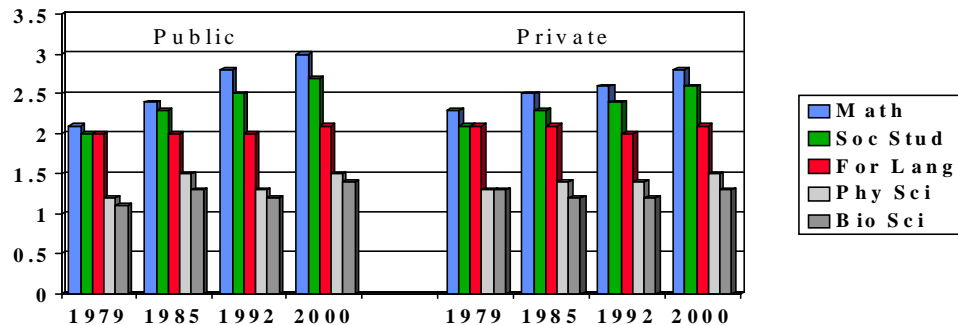
A second view of trends in admissions standards is given by responses to a retrospective question asked in the 1992 and 2000 surveys only. Institutions were asked if standards were lower, the same, or higher compared to five years previously (i.e., 2000 as compared to 1995 and 1992 as compared to 1987) in four specific areas: the general level of selectivity, course work, high school GPA or class rank, and test scores. Although most responses from two-year institutions indicated that standards as compared to five years earlier were the same in 2000 as they were in 1992, the percentage of institutions indicating that standards were the same declined. Two-year institutions were more likely in 2000 to indicate that standards were higher five years earlier (i.e., 1995) than they were in 1992 (compared to five years earlier, or 1987).

Four-year public institutions were mixed in their view of standards, depending on which specific standard was at issue. Slightly more four-year public institutions indicated that the general level of selectivity was higher (in 2000) than it had been five years previously (i.e., 1995). About half of four-year public institutions indicated that high school GPA /Class rank standards were about the same as five years previously, and about half indicated that test scores were higher. Overall, these retrospective judgments from four-year public institutions do not indicate much change in standards between 1992 and 2000.

In contrast to the responses from other institutional types, the retrospective responses from four-year private institutions clearly indicate that standards were higher in 2000 than in 1992. Sixty percent or more of four-year privates indicated (in 2000) that both the general level of selectivity and test scores were higher than five years previously. Almost as many (56 percent) indicated that high school GPA/rank standards were higher than five years previously.

Acceptance rates reported by four-year institutions were in general agreement with the retrospective judgments. The overall acceptance rate for four-year public institutions was the same (in 1999) as it was in 1992 at 68 percent. In contrast, the overall acceptance rate for four-year privates declined from 68 percent in 1992 to 60 percent in 1999. These acceptance rates, in combination with the retrospective judgments, give a pretty clear indication that admissions standards in four-year private institutions were higher in 2000 than in 1992.

Figure 9
Mean Years of High School Study Required
at Four-year Institutions



Further evidence on admissions standards comes from requirements for study in specific subject areas (see Figure 9). Institutions were asked in all four surveys how many years of study were required in several areas of study to be considered for admission. The average number of years reported was computed and then compared over the years of the surveys. These averages

give a clear indication that, in four-year public and private institutions, there have been steady increases in requirements in mathematics, physical sciences, biological sciences, and social studies between 1979 and 2000. Only English and foreign languages show no clear trends.

Admissions Policy and Practices

The role of the Admissions Committee for having primary responsibility for establishing broad admissions guidelines has declined over time (36 percent of the institutions in 1979 to 24 percent in 1999). The role of the State Legislature and/or the State Higher Education Commission for establishing broad admissions guidelines among public institutions has increased significantly since 1979. As a result, responsibility for developing admissions policies is more widely distributed in two and four-year institutions than in the past. In 1992, 53 percent of the reporting institutions indicated the Chief Admissions Officer set specific policies for admissions. By 2000, only 37 percent of the reporting institutions indicated that the Chief Admissions Officer implemented specific policies. Currently, the responsibility for setting specific policy for admissions is distributed among an Admissions Committee (19 percent), Chief Enrollment Management Officer (19 percent), Executive Council of Deans (14 percent), Chief Executive Officer (16 percent), or Board of Trustees/Governing Board (15 percent).

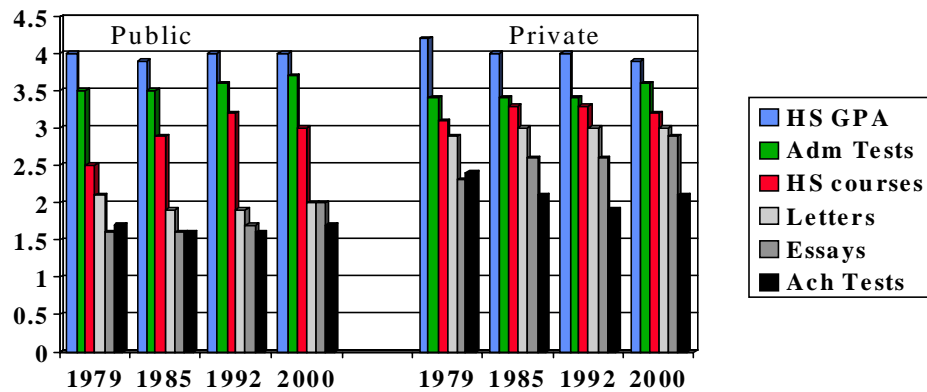
Both two-year and four-year institutions are making greater use of electronic transmission of transcripts including FAX than in the past (30 percent in 1992 compared to 35 percent in 2000), application on-line or by diskette is greater than in the past, and greater use is being made of market analysis software, prepay tuition plans, a common application, and e-mail. Clearly, admissions offices are making much greater use of computer and telecommunication technology than in the past.

Admissions Factors

Each of the four surveys asked admissions officers in four-year institutions, to rate the importance of a number of admission factors (see Figure 10). In each survey, the most important factor, in both public and private institutions, was high school GPA or rank. Second in importance in all four surveys were admissions test scores like ACT or SAT I. Third in importance in all four surveys was the pattern of high school coursework. Following these top three factors, there is some divergence between public and private institutions. Four-year private institutions tend to put more emphasis on letters of recommendation and essays (personal statements), which tie for fourth place in importance with college-level work in high school. In four-year public institutions, college-level work in high school is ranked fourth, with letters of recommendation and essays tied for seventh rank. Four-year private institutions also consider interviews to be relatively important, ranking seventh. Interestingly, subject-specific achievement tests scores (like SAT II or subject-specific tests developed at the local college level) have never ranked very high in importance for admission in either public or private institutions, although they are emphasized more in privates than in publics. Achievement scores are of special interest now because one state, California, has recently proposed that admissions test scores be replaced with achievement scores for admissions decisions (Atkinson, 2001).

There are some indications of trends over time in the importance of admissions factors. The percentage of institutions indicating that high school GPA or rank was “Very important” has increased steadily since 1979, while the percentage indicating that GPA or rank is the “Single most important’ factor has steadily declined. This shift away from single most important to very important tends to balance out, however, and results in no change over time in the average importance of GPA or rank. In contrast, admissions test scores show a steady increase

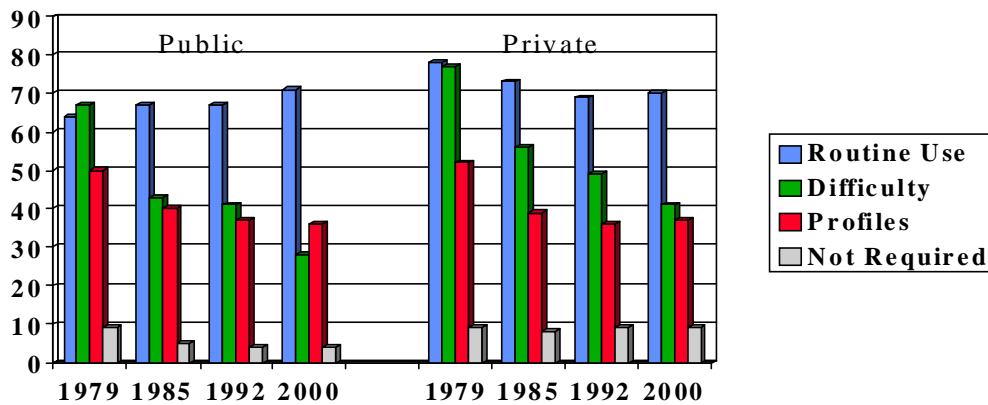
Figure 10. Importance of Various Factors in Admissions to Four-year Institutions



in the percentage of institutions regarding them as “Very important,” with a decline in the percentage of institutions indicating that admissions test scores are “Moderately important.” Very few institutions have ever indicated that admissions test scores are the “Single most important” factor. Thus, the average importance of admissions test scores appears to have increased since 1979. This trend was also observed in surveys conducted by the National Association for College Admission Counseling (2000, 2001).

There has been no change in the percentage of institutions requiring admissions test scores. Over 90 percent of responding institutions have reported that admissions test scores were required in all four surveys since 1979 (see Figure 11). The lack of trend in the use of admission test scores was also reported by Breland (1999).

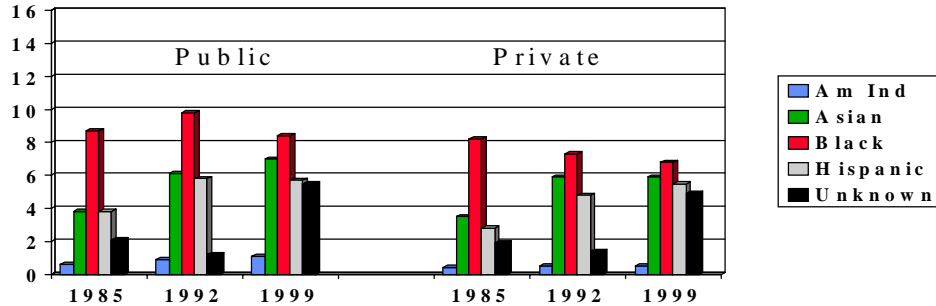
Figure 11
 Use of Admissions Test Scores
 at Four-year Institutions
 (Percentages of Institutions Responding)



Equity

Equity issues were addressed in the last three surveys, but they were not addressed in 1979. Those institutions providing enrollment data indicate an increasing representation of women and a decreasing representation of men among first-time, first-year students . As shown in Figure 12, the representation of American Indian, Asian, and Hispanic students increased appreciably since 1985, while the representation of Black and White students among first-time, first-year students has declined between 1985 and 1999 (the last year for which enrollment data were collected). These changes in subgroup representation are undoubtedly related to the substantial increase in the percentage of students who do not disclose their racial/ethnic identity, but precisely how this affects subgroup representation is not known. Between 1992 and 1999, the percentage of students who did not disclose racial/ethnic identify increased from 1.2 to 5.5 percent in four-year public institutions and from 1.4 to 4.9 percent in four-year private

Figure 12. Subgroup Representation Among First-time, First-year Enrolled Students in Four-year Institutions



institutions. Although college enrollment rates (the percentage of high school graduates going directly on to college) reported by the U. S. Department of Education (2000) have increased substantially between 1979 and 1999, the increase in direct enrollment rates for Black and Hispanic students was not as high as that for White students. This information is not reported for American Indian and Asian students.

Subgroup enrollment is ultimately the result of application rates (applications per enrolled first-time, first-year student), acceptance rates (the percentage of applications accepted), and enrollment rates (the percentage of those accepted who enroll). Asian students have traditionally applied at higher rates than other subgroups of students (see Figure 13). The application rate for Asian students in 1999 was 6.8 applications per enrolled first-time, first-year student in four-year public institutions and 9.6 in four-year private institutions. These application rates for Asian students were up substantially from 4.5 (in public) and 5.1 (in private) in 1992. However, only 57 percent of Asian applications to public institutions and 46 percent to private institutions were accepted in 1999. These Asian acceptance rates were down

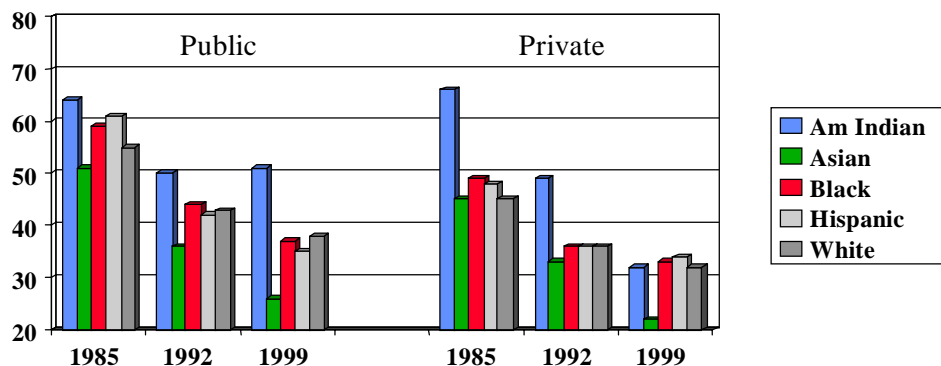
from 64 percent in privates and 56 percent in publics in 1992 (see Figure 14). The enrollment rate for Asian students in 1999 was only 26 percent in publics and 22 percent in privates.

Black students had the second highest application rate in 1999 (5.8 in public institutions and 6.2 in privates), but the lowest acceptance rate in public institutions (47 percent). The Black student acceptance rate in private institutions was 50 percent, slightly higher than that of Asian students. The enrollment (yield) rate for Black students in 1999 was 37 percent in public institutions and 33 percent in privates. For five highly selective private institutions, Bowen and Bok (1998) reported Black student yield rates (for 1989) of about 27 percent, as compared to over 50 percent for White students. The decline between 1985 and 1999 in Black student representation among first-time, first-year students is most likely related to a decline in acceptance rates (from 65 to 47 percent in publics and from 61 to 50 percent in privates), but it is also probably related to declines in yield rates and to the increase in students of unknown racial/ethnic identity. The lower acceptance rates are probably related to affirmative action challenges in several states that occurred in the late 1990s and affected enrollments in 1998 and 1999. It has been reported by two institutions on their web sites (University of California and University of Texas), however, that black representation is almost back (in 2001) to where it was prior to these challenges.

Hispanic student application rates increased from 2.3 to 5.0 in public institutions and from 3.5 to 5.7 in four-year private institutions between 1985 and 1999. But Hispanic student acceptance rates declined from 69 percent to 57 percent in publics and from 59 to 52 percent in privates during this period. Hispanic student enrollment (yield) rates also declined in both public and private institutions (see Figure 15). Although Hispanic student representation in four-year institutions increased overall between 1985 and 1999, as noted above, it did not increase between

1992 and 1999 in four-year public institutions. This lack of increased representation in public institutions may have been related to the affirmative action challenges of the late 1990s as well as to the increased representation of students not disclosing racial/ethnic identity.

Figure 15. Yield Rates for Different Subgroups
in Four-year Institutions
(Percentages of Accepted Who Enroll)



The Future of College Admissions

Both the U. S. Department of Education (1999) and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (1998) project a gradual increase in the numbers of high school graduates until about 2008 or 2009, when the number is expected to peak at about 3.2 million (which is only slightly more than the previous peak of 3.1 million in 1978). After this peak in 2008 or 2009, a gradual decline in the numbers of high school graduates is projected. Accordingly, it would appear that for the next several years the college admissions demographic situation will be in some ways similar to that of the late 1970s.

The increases in enrollment will vary considerably from state to state, however. The largest increases will occur in California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Arizona. These increases will be largely a result of immigration. Most states will have minimal enrollment gains, and about five states are expected to either lose undergraduates or gain only slightly: West Virginia, Kentucky, Maine, Iowa, and Mississippi (Carnevale & Fry, 2000).

There will be some important differences, however. It has been projected from U. S. Census data that the number of White undergraduates will rise from 9.5 million in 1995 to 10 million by 2015. Nevertheless, the representation of White students, as a percentage of all undergraduates, will decline to 62.8 percent in 2015. More important than this overall national

change in undergraduate representation, however, is the projected change within states. In ten states, the absolute number of White undergraduates (not just the percentage) will decrease. The largest decreases in White undergraduates are expected in five states: New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, and Michigan. Black, Hispanic, and Asian students will represent 80 percent of the increase in undergraduates. Minority undergraduates will outnumber White students in the District of Columbia, California, Hawaii, and New Mexico. The number of Hispanic and Asian undergraduates will increase more rapidly than the number of Black undergraduates (Carnevale & Fry, 2000).

These demographic projections suggest that the challenge of improving equity in admissions will continue to be an important issue in college admissions over the next several years.

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