

The 7 Things Students Think About When Choosing a College

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What happens when a high-school student from a low-income family wants to attend a private college 100 miles away, but has a parent whispering in her ear to look closer to home? The "Survey of Admitted Students: Targeting Yield Strategies," may provide some answers, as well as more questions. seb_ra/iStock

The report, produced by Eduventures, a consulting company, and written by Kim Reid, a principal analyst there, distilled insights from more than 100,000 high-school students nationwide.

It identified seven key "decision segments" on the minds of aspiring college students: affordability, availability of a desired program, reputation/academic quality, career outcomes/job opportunities, value of education for cost, feeling of fit, and proximity to home.

Eighty percent of students cited one of those seven factors as a driver of their enrollment choice, the study found. Other considerations included "hands-on" learning experiences, a sense of community, flexible schedules, and easy access for family visits.

For enrollment managers, of course, the process involves not just identifying potential applicants' reactions to a given college, but also finding a way to apply that knowledge, connect with students throughout the recruitment process, and win them over, Reid says.

"I think the most important thing is to consider how they can personalize as much as possible, by really getting to know students from an individual level," she says.

Some useful trends stand out, the report notes. For example, among students from families with lower-than-average income, in-state public colleges tend to be the last ones crossed off their list of choices. The survey found that 24 percent of the students who decided to attend in-

state public institutions cited affordability — the most prevalent factor among that group.

"If you are a public university," Reid says, "you're going to have a lot more students falling into that affordability-decision segment. That means your students are making decisions at the family level to a much greater degree. So you should be thinking about those families and the discussions they're having around their tables — the critical financial decisions — and the stress that is putting on the family unit, and not just the student."



Working Smarter, Not Harder, in Admissions

A team-based approach to initial reviews can often save time and may allow for better evaluations

Among students who chose private institutions, the factor they cited most often in their college-going decisions was "reputation/academic quality."

"There are students who have greater means who are saying, 'Well, I can afford to look at some of these institutions that cost a little bit more, and I'm not locked into being an in-state student, because I believe I can afford something else.'" Reid says. "Even though there are still quite a few students who still fit into those affordability buckets who look at private institutions, those students aren't as largely driven by affordability in comparison."

Public colleges do a good job of marketing their value for two- and four-year degrees, she says, but the message sometimes prompts students to conclude that "cheaper" means lower quality. Those colleges can promote their signature programs to help attract wealthier students, who have more options.

Private institutions, for their part, must consider how perceptions of unaffordability affect their ability to attract students from lower-income backgrounds, often minorities. [Financial aid](#) is on their minds from the beginning, Reid says.

"I think private institutions are always straddling that line of knowing they've got to be able to maintain their revenue and be able to operate, especially if they're a tuition-driven institution," she says. "They could have limited ability to accept students who can't afford their institutions. They know that."

"But at the same time, if they're not-for-profit, they're mission-driven. The smartest private institutions are really thinking about how to provide some kind of sustainable access to students that they believe are critical to their mission."