The Admission Benchmarking Study

A Study of
the Cost-to-Recruit a Traditional Student
and the Admission Funnel
at NACCAP Member Institutions
Fall 2024 Edition

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Introduction

This is the 32nd annual Admission Benchmarking Study (ABS). As in previous versions, the study aims to help institutions compare their 2023-24 budget resources, staffing, return on investment, and admission funnel ratios to similar institutions for the recruitment of traditional undergraduate students who entered in the fall of 2024.

A few reminders on the project:

Spending and staffing metrics are helpful comparisons, but experienced enrollment leaders know that results stem from utilizing these resources effectively. The ABS data provides the opportunity to compare spending and staffing while also reviewing enrollment yield.

With any study like this, the ***NACCAP-wide numbers are less valuable than breakdowns into relevant categories****. For example, the study follows NACCAP's regional boundaries for these purposes and breaks participants into five undergraduate enrollment-size levels. Participants are also divided into CCCU Christian liberal arts (defined as governing-level membership in the CCCU), Bible college (defined as accredited by ABHE), and an "Other CLA" category (Christian liberal arts institutions who are not members of the CCCU comprise the majority in this category). Perhaps the most helpful grouping is the "watch list" feature where participants can customize a comparison list, allowing for a mix of regions and other key variables.*

The study does not include an analysis of the budget and staffing involved with recruiting post-traditional learners at the undergraduate or graduate level. Rotating surveys administered by the project team explore the complex issues of the cost-to-recruit and other recruitment benchmarks for graduate and seminary recruitment efforts on member campuses and through online or blended delivery modalities.

Data collection, verification and analysis for the 2024 ABS was performed by Dave Burke, President of Legacy Higher Ed and former Vice President of Fuller Higher Ed Solutions. Dave had assisted Tim Fuller in the execution and analysis of previous ABS studies, taking on the ABS Project Lead role in July 2023. Denise Cunningham, Andrew Wright and Phil Cook assisted with valuable and timely communication efforts related to member data submissions throughout the survey phase of the 2024 project.

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Methodology

There are 198 NACCAP members with undergraduate programs for traditional students. The chief enrollment officer at each institution was invited to participate in the study via email. Multiple reminders were sent to all potential participants, including those with partially completed data submissions, in efforts to maximize the number of completed surveys. These efforts resulted in

95 verified institutional submissions, a small increase from the 2023 project. Data from partial entries is not included in the summary information reflected in this executive summary, nor the supplemental reports found on the NACCAP research website.

Members who shared their data have access to the member-by-member results; summary results such as those outlined in this report are available to all NACCAP members and, through the postings on www.naccapresearch.org, to other interested parties. Participants sharing their data and receiving access to full study findings agree to keep the member-by- member results private from non-participating members and other higher education entities, including non-member institutions, associations, and consulting firms.

Participants completed four separate worksheets that outlined data elements as follows:

- Budget resources
- Enrollment data (new students and total)
- Staffing and salary information
- Admission funnel numbers for first-year students

The study's definitions and category labels were reviewed and updated for the 2024 edition, reflecting the changes in enrollment management practice and terminology. The project team carefully examined the data from each participant, compared it against key ratios and other validity tests to ensure accuracy, reviewed it against other participants' data, and then finalized it for inclusion in overall, regional, and enrollment size breakdowns.

A few notable changes/additions to the 2024 ABS Study include:

- **A nomenclature change in Part A from "Direct Mail" to "Search Strategies", intended to clarify the all-encompassing nature of the category, inclusive of ALL expenses related to top-of-funnel investments (i.e. name purchases, vendor fees, postage, collateral, etc).**
- **The addition of a separate category in Part A intended to collect with more specificity the expenses related to SWAG/Giveaway items since almost every institution invests in these**

promotional strategies.

- **The automatic transfer of funnel data related to first-year recruitment from the NACCAP Final 2024 Funnel Report into Part D of the ABS Survey, assisting in keeping final application, admit and enrollment numbers consistent across the NACCAP Research Project.**

- **The removal of the Institutional Vehicle Benefit category from Part C, having noted that this benefit has all but disappeared from NACCAP campuses across Northern America..**

Participants

As mentioned above, 95 NACCAP members participated in the Fall 2024 study. Participation by region and enrollment size is outlined in the chart that follows:

Participants

View Past Results 2024

2024 PARTICIPANT BREAKDOWN (95 TOTAL)

NACCAP Region		Enrollment *		Institution Type	
Canada	11	Smallest (< 450)	20	CCCU	58
Great Lakes	19	Small (451 - 799)	23	Bible College	14
Midwest	19	Medium (800 - 1199)	17	Other CLA	23
Northeast	7	Large (1200 - 1799)	19		
Northwest	7	Largest (> 1800)	16		
Southeast	24				
Southwest	8				

* defined as full-time enrollment in traditional undergraduate programs

The participation rates by category were very closely aligned with those of the 2023 ABS project, the most notable change being a 25% increase in participation from the “Large” institution category over last year. Once again we see representative samples from every region, enrollment size and institution type, lending credibility to the comparative results.

Study Limitations

Since most of the data found in the study is self-reported, careful analysis of key elements is performed throughout the submission and verification phase of the project. A significant number of email and phone/virtual conversations between the Project Lead and various participants led to a higher standard of accuracy and consistency than otherwise would be realized considering the level of complexity and interpretation involved in certain sections of the survey.

Common "trouble-spot" themes addressed in the 2024 ABS with its participants included:

- The appropriate documentation and/or inclusion of expenses related to the new "SWAG" budget category
- The correct definitions of "Applications" and "Completed Applications" in Part D
- Professional and support staff FTEs (and related salary expenditures by category), as well as appropriate classification of "Recruitment Staff FTE" numbers.
- Categorizations of funds deployed to attract prospective students at the top of the funnel, whether through Advertising, Digital Media or Search Strategies.
- Accurate reporting of Athletic Recruitment expenditures based on various investments typically involved in that process (coaches' travel, recruitment software, hosting activities, etc).
- Inconsistent categorization of professional versus support professionals within the Admission office, leading to incorrect salary metrics and FTE numbers in each category.
- Student employment expenditures often not correlating well with plausible hourly wage numbers.

One ever-present reality in reporting and gathering data is the increasing number of institutions with centralized marketing functions. In this model, much of the decision-making about marketing activity and all or nearly all the funding for publications, advertising, search strategies, and the website is centralized for the university, making it challenging to isolate funds devoted solely to the recruitment of traditional undergraduate students.

Athletics recruiting poses some of the same challenges. On some campuses, support for athletics recruiting comes from the admission budget. On other campuses, athletics controls these funds, and enrollment leaders must gather and share data so that the cost-to-recruit a student is as accurate as possible.

The results of the study are reviewed in the pages that follow. As we continue to build awareness and dialogue around these emerging budgetary trends, we remain confident in the overall value of the study, providing good comparisons in the key budget, staffing, and funnel categories critical to enrollment managers and the institutions they serve. Please get in touch with the project team with questions about data.

The report is organized into three main sections. The first, **Cost-to-Recruit a Student**, includes information on budgets, enrollment, staffing, salaries, athletics recruiting, and several key performance ratios. The second, **Admission Funnel**, analyzes first-year funnel data, trends, and metrics. The third, **Using This Study,** reviews applications of the data to individual campus settings.

Cost To Recruit a Student

A primary focus of this study is determining both institution-specific costs to recruit one new student and averages across the whole participant group, regions, and enrollment levels. The cost of recruiting a student includes typical budget items like travel, publications, direct mail, digital media and other forms of advertising, campus visits, phone, postage, and office supplies. Professional and support staff salaries, student wages, and fringe benefits are also included, the latter through an estimated “tax” applied uniformly across all participants to account for institutional differences. Discussions with external experts on personnel and finance in recent years suggested 30% was a reasonable estimate for a benefits “tax” (including the value of tuition benefits for employees and their dependents), at least for US participants. Forecasts suggest this percentage may rise as the cost of providing benefits increases and wages remain somewhat flat. This study does not include other factors such as the square footage the admission office occupies or “taxes” for shared services such as custodial, maintenance, or IT.

The chart below outlines how the average cost-to-recruit a student has changed since the initial study of the fall 1993 cycle. If there were a headline/title for this year’s executive summary, it would have read **“Read All About it - Overall Cost-to-Recruit for NACCAP institutions decreases for the first time since 2017!”**. Indeed, the average cost-to-recruit went downwards over 6% from 2023 to 2024, reversing a 6-year trend, including the largest increase in the history of the study in 2022. Although this year’s number is far closer to the 2022 number than the $3,912 of the “good ol’ days” in 2021 (before the $4,000 threshold was obliterated the following year), it is a breath of fresh air to witness the reversal of a deeply concerning trend upwards in recent years.

A couple participation realities potentially affecting cost-to-recruit figures are worth mentioning here:

- As previously mentioned, the most notable increase in participation for 2024 was among the “Large” category institutions, which account for the 2nd lowest cost-to-recruit average in the study.
- The Bible College category, which carries the highest cost-to-recruit averages, remained static in terms of participation numbers this year at 14 (having dropped significantly in 2023). This

continued drop in Bible College participation plays a part in stifling the potential of aggressive overall cost-to-recruit increases across the study..

From a broad perspective the mix of participation, especially related to a similarly characterized cohort from 2023, strongly suggests that the NACCAP membership experienced some success overall in its recruitment efficiencies in 2024, driving down the cost-per-student and enjoying some tangible relief from the trendline seen in the previous few years. However, as we will see, that reality was in large part due to the performance of NACCAP's smaller institutions.

On a related note, as is noted in the **2024 Final Funnel Report Executive Summary**, there were some encouraging signs in terms of increased new student enrollments and the realization of goals this past fall. Fewer institutions reported missing their goals, and a higher percentage reported exceeding the previous year's new student enrollment number. However, as you'll see upon closer inspection (see the link above), not all segments of the NACCAP membership fell in alignment with the overall success metrics seen in aggregate.

FALL OF	COST TO RECRUIT A STUDENT	INCREASE OVER PREVIOUS YEAR	FALL OF	COST TO RECRUIT A STUDENT	INCREASE OVER PREVIOUS YEAR
2024	$4,630	-6.22%	2008	$2,464	5.93%
2023	$4,937	4.16%	2007 **	$2,326	12.37%
2022	$4,740	21.18%	2006 *	$2,070	-1.99%
2021	$3,912	1.53%	2005	$2,112	-1.45%
2020	$3,853	7.67%	2004	$2,143	5.36%
2019	$3,578	5.52%	2003	$2,034	-0.54%
2018 ***	$3,391	8.07%	2002	$2,045	7.80%
2017	$3,138	-5.20%	2001	$1,897	2.54%
2016	$3,310	3.01%	2000	$1,850	5.35%
2015	$3,214	7.15%	1999	$1,756	4.65%
2014	$2,999	5.15%	1998	$1,678	6.07%
2013	$2,852	-0.53%	1997	$1,582	1.80%
2012	$2,867	12.42%	1996	$1,554	3.88%
2011	$2,551	0.12%	1995	$1,496	-0.40%
2010	$2,547	1.99%	1994	$1,502	6.22%
2009	$2,498	1.37%	1993	$1,414	
			Total Increase		227.45%

Note
* spring new students included for first time
** survey oversight switches to NACCAP from CCCU
*** budgets for Athletics Recruitment and Outside Assistance included separately for the first time

An analysis of institution-by-institution data reveals the following Cost-to-recruit differences By Enrollment Size: (for participants in both the 2023 and 2024 ABS project)

- Smallest - 9 institutions decreased, 4 increased.
- Small – 10 institutions decreased, 7 increased, 2 remained flat (within $100 of 2023)
- Medium – 4 institutions decreased, 7 increased, 2 remained flat
- Large – 2 institutions decreased, 7 increased, 3 remained flat

Largest – 3 institutions decreased, 5 increased, 2 remained flatThe comparative cost to recruit a student overall, by region, and by enrollment size is outlined in the following chart (and in ABS summary documents on www.naccapresearch.org).

COST TO RECRUIT A STUDENT — 2024		COST TO RECRUIT A STUDENT — 2024	
All Participants	$4,630	Smallest #	$5,918
Canada	$4,778	Small #	$4,263
Great Lakes	$5,057	Medium #	$4,684
Midwest	$4,258	Large #	$4,339
Northeast	$5,711	Largest #	$3,837
Northwest	$4,884	Bible College	$6,487
Southeast	$4,081	CCCU	$4,421
Southwest	$4,777	Other CLA	$4,026

Over the span of this research, an inverse relationship between enrollment and cost-to-recruit – the larger the enrollment, the lower the cost to recruit – has been evident. In general, the cost-to-recruit is higher at rural institutions than urban/suburban institutions, partly due to increased travel costs but primarily the lack of a large, local group of potential students. Other factors that typically reduce the recruitment cost include brand strength, selectivity, and strong denominational ties (although some denominational colleges indicate that any advantages might be offset by the need to invest heavily in denomination- specific activities).

The following chart shows how the cost-to-recruit a student by category has changed over the last five years of this study. Some of the trendlines stemming from this year's data are interesting to observe:

- Every region except the Northwest and Southeast not only outperformed their 2023 benchmarks but reached cost-to-recruit levels around or lower than their 2022 numbers two years ago. In contrast, however, the Northwest and Southeast regions reported the highest levels in their history in 2024.

- The two smallest size categories accounted for the entirety of the cost-to-recruit *decline* this year, with the three largest categories all increasing in cost-to-recruit from 2023. In fact, the 20 "Smallest" participants experienced an aggregate reduction in cost of almost 23% from the 2023 cohort (with 2/3 of last year's cohort participating again in 2024), and well below even the 2022 benchmark for that group.

- NACCAP's Bible Colleges dominated the turnaround metrics with a 26% overall reduction in cost-to-recruit, reverting to below 2022 levels. Non-CCCU Christian Liberal Arts institutions enjoyed a more modest 7% decrease, while the CCCU cohort saw an overall *increase* of 5%.

COST TO RECRUIT A STUDENT — 2020-2024					
Category	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
All Participants	$3,853	$3,912	$4,740	$4,937	$4,630
Canada	$4,145	$3,568	$4,848	$5,876	$4,778
Great Lakes	$4,181	$4,627	$5,702	$4,620	$5,057
Midwest	$4,216	$3,713	$4,433	$5,128	$4,258
Northeast	$4,591	$4,995	$6,063	$7,687	$5,711
Northwest	$3,371	$3,874	$4,426	$4,827	$4,884
Southeast	$3,186	$3,287	$3,840	$3,798	$4,081
Southwest	$3,142	$3,258	$4,720	$5,291	$4,777
Smallest #	$4,988	$4,833	$6,534	$7,659	$5,918
Small #	$3,714	$3,611	$4,380	$4,789	$4,263
Medium #	$4,092	$3,863	$4,354	$4,344	$4,684
Large #	$3,170	$3,507	$3,915	$3,697	$4,339
Largest #	$2,909	$3,106	$3,699	$3,568	$3,837
Bible College	$4,826	$4,884	$6,575	$8,743	$6,487
CCCU	$3,532	$3,679	$4,292	$4,216	$4,421
Other CLA	$3,870	$3,681	$4,392	$4,323	$4,026

The most up-to-date five-year trend now presents a bit differently than the previous few, since we no longer see an uninterrupted aggregate trend in the upwards direction with respect to cost-to-recruit. In fact, many of the categories in the table above reflect a correction to levels below the 2022 numbers, although most still a long way off of the relatively low cost-to-recruit benchmarks seen in 2021 and previously.

Spending by Category

Although detailed numbers are accessible to participants in the summary documents on the NACCAP Research Website, a few budget expenditure highlights are worth sharing in this executive summary document as we compare 2024 investment averages with those from the previous year.

In the 2023-24 budget year, the participating institutions spent just over $156 million on salaries, fringe benefits, student wages, and all other student recruitment expenses, an average of approximately $1.64 million per institution. The average investment amount increased from $1.51 million in 2023 and $1.37 million in 2022, reflective of both participation variables and increased spending year over year for many institutions, particularly this year in the areas of Search Strategies & Athletics Recruitment, following significant 2023 increases in Travel, Campus Guest Experiences and Advertising.

- Search Strategies spending experienced a sharp 26% increase overall in 2024 after a significant decline the previous year, vaulting from $128,354 to $162,427. Only one enrollment category continued a decrease in search spending, that being the "Small" category, while the two largest cohorts produced the largest percentage increases of 29% (Large) and 31.5% (Largest).
    - It is notable that the four largest Search spenders this year did NOT participate in the 2023 study, potentially driving the spending averages up in their respective categories and the overall study as well.
- Another significant difference reported in the 2024 study was the decrease in spending on Outside Assistance, dropping 22% from the previous year. This change could be a combination of participation differences and actual behavior change in this regard (e.g. one of the "largest" institutions investing significantly in Outside Assistance in 2023 cut their spending in this category by almost 50% in 2024.)
- Athletics Recruitment rocketed up *again* this year around $9,000 to $56,623, marking nearly a 50% increase in just the last two years since 2022. A comparative look at the recent history reveals both participation changes <u>*and*</u> some significant increases in this category from repeat participants contributing to this phenomenon.

The new category of "SWAG/Giveaways was given its own entry field this year for the first time in the study's history. Understanding that the reallocation of those expenses from another category (commonly Advertising and/or Campus Guest Experiences) translates to some differences in other sections of the budget analysis, it is interesting to note the inaugural numbers surrounding this new entry:

- Overall average SWAG spending - $29,602
    - Bible Colleges - $11,061
    - Other CLA - $27,332
    - CCCU - $33,805
- Highest SWAG Spend - $200,000
- Lowest SWAG Spend - $2,145
- Predictably, the SWAG expenditures traveled according to institution size, with the "Largest" category spending more than double the next closest (Large) cohort, and almost 8 times the "Smallest" category.

I would be remiss not to mention, representing an organization that cares deeply about the professional development of its membership, that Professional Development investments were fairly consistent with 2023, with a very small increase reported in the average expenditure number. As always, it bears repeating that training, developing and <u>keeping</u> talented staff members is foundational to enrollment success at NACCAP institutions, and opportunities like NACCAP's LDEP program stand ready to support those efforts.

Staffing/Recruiting: Size of Staff and Relevant Ratios

NACCAP institutions participating in this year's study spent an average of 49.03% of their budget resources on personnel, including salaries, fringe benefits, and student wages. This number *slightly* reversed a four-year downward trend in the proportion of budget committed to personnel, with last year's share being 48.9%.

One of the most frequently discussed topics within this study is how the staff resources an institution has committed to the recruitment/admission function compare to relevant benchmarks. The study gathers staffing information in three categories:

- Professional staff
- Recruiting staff (a subset of professional staff defined as those who have a recruitment territory)
- Support staff

Each category is reported in an FTE format to capture the portion of an employee's time devoted to the undergraduate admission/recruitment function or recruitment (in the case of the recruitment FTE).

2024 saw the largest Professional FTE change in the last half-decade, with an average increase of 0.5 FTE (although 6 of the 16 categories experienced declines), while recruitment staff FTEs remained static overall. The Southwest Region and Largest institutions both carried an increase of almost two full FTEs into their 2024 recruitment cycle.

For a more detailed view of staffing changes and trends by NACCAP membership category, see the tables that follow on the next page.

As noted previously, the most compelling trend of note was the fact that the budget metrics in terms of cost-to-recruit improved, the first time that has occurred since 2017. The enrolled-student-to-staffing ratios also saw overall improvements in the 2024 recruitment cycle.

Below is an overview of staffing FTEs by category for the last five years of the study:

STAFF SIZE — PROFESSIONAL STAFF FTE						STAFF SIZE — RECRUITING FTE					
Category	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Category	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
All Participants	8.6	8.2	8.8	9.2	9.7	All Participants	5.8	5.6	5.9	6.1	6.1
Canada	6.6	6.0	5.9	7.3	6.9	Canada	5.1	4.7	4.6	5.6	5.0
Great Lakes	9.5	9.0	10.4	9.5	9.2	Great Lakes	6.0	5.7	6.5	6.1	6.3
Midwest	7.5	7.2	8.0	8.5	9.3	Midwest	5.5	5.2	5.7	5.2	5.4
Northeast	8.8	9.4	8.7	9.8	10.1	Northeast	5.4	6.1	6.3	7.3	6.2
Northwest	8.4	8.1	9.0	8.3	8.8	Northwest	5.2	5.2	5.8	4.8	5.3
Southeast	8.7	7.8	7.6	9.8	10.4	Southeast	6.2	5.5	5.2	6.5	6.4
Southwest	11.5	11.4	13.5	11.6	13.4	Southwest	7.2	7.2	8.8	7.7	8.0
Smallest #	4.5	4.0	3.9	5.0	4.4	Smallest #	3.1	2.8	2.9	3.6	3.1
Small #	6.5	6.8	7.4	7.2	7.3	Small #	4.6	4.6	4.8	4.5	4.6
Medium #	8.7	8.6	9.2	9.6	9.5	Medium #	5.8	5.9	6.6	6.8	6.2
Large #	9.5	10.4	10.7	11.0	10.8	Large #	6.7	7.2	7.2	7.5	6.9
Largest #	16.0	15.6	15.5	16.6	18.4	Largest #	10.2	10.2	10.2	10.4	10.6
Bible College	4.6	4.1	3.7	4.9	4.3	Bible College	3.0	2.9	2.7	3.5	2.7
CCCU	10.1	9.6	10.1	9.9	10.6	CCCU	6.7	6.5	6.8	6.5	6.7
Other CLA	8.1	7.7	9.6	10.5	10.6	Other CLA	5.8	5.3	6.3	6.9	6.5

Another way to look at the difference between Professional Staff FTE and Recruiting FTE is demonstrated in the following chart. This difference can be defined as administrative or professional staff overhead. As enrollment leadership responsibilities increase, recruiting expectations (and a portion of FTE load) typically decrease. This overhead benchmark is worth watching to ensure an office functions as efficiently as possible with overhead kept to a productive minimum. “Productive” may be the more critical word in this pairing than “minimum” when finding the right balance in professional staff overhead. A large team lacking in middle management may mean the enrollment leader struggles to either find time to think strategically or does not spend adequate time with each direct report. Cross-departmental collaboration and professional development/networking opportunities may also suffer.. A team, however, with *too many* layers may lack efficiency and cost the institution more in compensation.

PROFESSIONAL STAFF OVERHEAD*					
Category	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
All Participants	2.8	2.6	2.8	3.1	3.6
Canada	1.5	1.2	1.3	1.7	2.0
Great Lakes	3.5	3.3	3.9	3.4	2.9
Midwest	2.1	2.0	2.3	3.2	3.9
Northeast	3.4	3.3	2.4	2.4	3.8
Northwest	3.2	2.8	3.2	3.5	3.5
Southeast	2.6	2.3	2.4	3.3	4.0
Southwest	4.3	4.1	4.6	4.0	5.4
Smallest #	1.4	1.2	1.1	1.4	1.3
Small #	2.0	2.1	2.6	2.8	2.7
Medium #	2.9	2.7	2.6	2.8	3.3
Large #	2.8	3.3	3.5	3.5	3.9
Largest #	5.8	5.4	5.4	6.2	7.7
Bible College	1.6	1.2	1.0	1.4	1.5
CCCU	3.4	3.1	3.2	3.4	3.9
Other CLA	2.4	2.4	3.3	3.6	4.1

* defined as the difference between professional staff and recruiting staff FTE

We see in 2024 that professional staff overhead continued the growth trend we noted last year, suggesting that there is a potential trend toward increasing middle-management non-recruiting roles in a number of institutions across North America. Interestingly, the Southwest Region, which saw a notable *decrease* in Professional Staff overhead in 2023, rebounded significantly to add, on average, 1.4 non-recruitment positions back into the mix. In fact, almost *all* of that region's repeat participants widened the gap between total professional staff and recruitment staff, signaling an increase in investments in middle-management and possibly CRM/Data-related management staffing as well.

One of the most frequently asked questions about this study relates to the number of new students a professional staff member does/should generate. Presidents and board members often ask this question, looking to either evaluate the performance of their current team or calculate the potential return on investment in an additional admission counselor. As a reminder, the Recruiting FTE in this study represents the proportion of the Professional Staff FTE who recruit students directly (as in managing a recruitment territory or population) as opposed to supporting these efforts through administrative oversight (most vice presidents/deans/directors) and other tasks (data and systems, admission marketing, campus visit, tele-counseling, or communication flow coordination, etc.).

The summary numbers below create a comparison point to answer these questions or at least begin to answer them. Enrollment managers and others should exercise caution in applying these numbers, recognizing that there are many other factors at work in determining the effectiveness of an enrollment team or admission counselor. Consider the difference, for example, in the work of an admission counselor responsible for recruiting students solely within a 25-mile radius of a suburban or urban campus with that of a counselor on a rural campus responsible for a four-state area in the Great Plains. Consider recruiting for a campus with a long history and strong reputation against the far different challenge of recruiting for a lesser-known campus. Both examples underscore the note of caution expressed above.

In addition, consider the impact of the work coaches do to recruit student-athletes on many NACCAP campuses, often bearing the primary responsibility for generating initial interest and moving the student to the point of application and beyond. This is explored in detail in a later section. On average, ABS participants credited athletics recruitment as a decisive factor in 37.4% of the fall 2024 new students, just a slight decrease from 2023, so this must be factored into the consideration of admission counselor and team productivity.

The following ratios reflect an efficiency measure and return on investment in staff. **We are now seeing a two-year positive trend in this ratio, with a 1.72% improvement this year to add to last year's large 4.73% rebound.** However, the ratio remains a distance from pre-Covid numbers and only inching its way northward. In fact, there is a 10-student-per-staff difference looking back a decade to 2014 numbers, representing significant changes in efficiencies over that time period. **That difference represents almost 100 newly enrolled students for the "average" professional FTE of 9.65 across the NACCAP membership.**

NACCAP — RATIO OF NEW STUDENTS TO PROFESSIONAL STAFF FTE: 1993-2024

Fall of	New Students Per Professional Staff FTE	Change From Previous Year
2024	38.9	1.72%
2023	38.3	4.73%
2022	36.5	-4.72%
2021	38.3	-3.42%
2020	39.7	-6.45%
2019	42.4	-1.78%
2018 ***	43.2	-4.28%
2017	45.1	6.41%
2016	42.4	-8.02%
2015	46.1	-5.26%
2014	48.7	-0.90%
2013	49.1	-1.12%
2012	49.7	-2.89%
2011	51.1	-5.90%
2010	54.3	3.84%
2009	52.3	-1.07%
2008	52.9	-4.51%
2007 **	55.4	-6.26%
2006 *	59.1	2.78%
2005	57.5	-1.54%
2004	58.4	0.69%
2003	58.0	-3.49%
2002	60.1	0.50%
2001	59.8	-1.97%
2000	61.0	4.81%
1999	58.2	-3.48%
1998	60.3	-2.27%
1997	61.7	1.98%
1996	60.5	-4.27%
1995	63.2	0.96%
1994	62.6	-5.72%
1993	66.4	
Total Efficiency Change		-41.40%

Note

* spring new students included for first time
** survey oversight switches to NACCAP from CCCU
*** budgets for Athletics Recruitment and Outside Assistance included separately for the first time

As mentioned above, the study breaks out professional staff with specific recruiting responsibilities. Since year-to-year comparisons offer limited value initially, the following chart reflects the differences by region and enrollment for the last five years of the study. Efficiency, as measured by the number of new students produced per recruitment FTE, showed continuing progress this year, repeating its performance in 2023 with 11 of 16 categories gaining ground over the previous study. The overall gain for all participants was more modest than in 2024, at around 2 students per institution. Gold star goes to the Northeast region, gaining an average of 19 students per recruiter over 2023, with almost all repeat participants from the previous year experiencing *significant* increases in their ratios.

NACCAP — RATIO OF NEW STUDENTS TO PROFESSIONAL STAFF RECRUITING FTE					
Category	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**
All Participants	58.8	57.2	55.3	61.3	63.2
Canada	40.8	43.9	43.4	41.1	45.5
Great Lakes	54.7	54.1	60.3	54.9	50.4
Midwest	50.0	56.0	51.4	67.3	63.9
Northeast	54.9	48.2	43.8	40.0	59.0
Northwest	66.6	65.7	66.5	82.0	82.9
Southeast	64.4	56.7	56.4	71.2	71.6
Southwest	107.1	97.1	60.3	63.5	77.2
Smallest #	34.1	37.1	31.5	37.0	33.1
Small #	54.9	53.7	55.4	55.5	56.8
Medium #	57.1	59.0	52.3	52.8	56.7
Large #	71.7	66.7	64.9	69.6	74.7
Largest #	86.3	88.9	83.8	106.7	103.1
Bible College	39.5	33.8	32.3	36.5	30.2
CCCU	65.6	64.3	60.5	67.6	70.7
Other CLA	57.4	57.8	60.4	61.2	64.1

As with the cost-to-recruit data, there is a correlation between enrollment size and this Recruiting FTE. Typically, the larger the college, the larger the number of new students generated per counselor; this is evident in the data this year (other than the Small/Medium categories for the third year in a row). This correlation reveals more about institutional momentum and marketing strength than it does about individual admission counselor effectiveness or productivity.

In addition to the notes of caution mentioned above, it is essential to understand what this last ratio does not, or at least may not mean, for staffing decisions. It does not mean, for example, that a CCCU campus looking to grow by 63 new students should expect that the mere addition of a full-time admission counselor focused exclusively on recruiting will accomplish this goal. On some campuses, the best way to focus more energy and effort on recruiting new students may be to hire another support staff who can relieve counselors of routine tasks that keep them from building relationships with prospective students. On other campuses, admission counselors may be highly efficient and focused already with reasonably sized territories where further sub-division may not add to efficiencies and generate a positive return on investment; instead, the institution may need to make additional investments in marketing to build overall awareness, improve its welcome experience/admission office space, and/or develop a better mix of programs.

New Student Patterns by Term and Enrollment Type

The new student enrollment patterns for 2024 are remarkably similar to the previous ABS in 2023. Total new students reported by this year's participant cohort, at 39, 629 was about 3,500 more than last year, but the fall semester share of the total number emerged as near-identical to its 2023 comparison, at 92.6% (versus 92.5% last year). This continues a three-year run in which the fall number outweighs the spring number more heavily than at any time in the last decade. While spring semester enrollment is generally neither typical nor preferred, campuses that organize themselves to leverage spring enrollment, including support services and new student orientation, may see solid returns on investment. On most NACCAP campuses, fall-to-spring attrition and December graduates outnumber new spring semester students, creating a net loss in enrollment. Housing is often available, as is space in classes, creating a further rationale for some spring semester recruitment initiatives.

According to the Final 2024 Funnel Report Final 2024 Funnel PowerPoint Report, of the 58,563 new students who enrolled at participating institutions in Fall 2024, 18.5% were transfers, returning downwards to around the 2021 and 2022 percentages after a small increase to 19% in 2023..

What do these ratios mean for individual campuses? Comparing individual campus ratios to overall, regional, or enrollment-based ratios may reveal a potential source of untapped students. On the other hand, a low transfer ratio may reflect institutional strategy out of a position of enrollment strength, indicating a strong preference for enrolling new students for four years, not two or three.

Athletics Recruiting

Athletic recruits are a critical component of enrollment results for many NACCAP colleges. For this study, participants were asked to enter the percentage of their fall 2024 new student class who were recruited student-athletes. This was defined as a new student for whom “a member of the athletics staff conducted the majority of their recruitment.” Many admission offices track this information carefully in conjunction with athletics leadership; others provide “good faith estimates” based on roster sizes.

As the following chart shows, there is quite a variance in the reliance on student-athletes to meet enrollment goals, with 7 campuses (primarily smaller campuses and often Bible colleges) not offering intercollegiate athletics or reporting coaches do not recruit and 12 colleges reporting that 75% or more of their new students came through the athletics pipeline. Since student-athletes comprised 37.44% of the 39,629 total fall 2024 new students, this is a critical partnership to maintain and optimize.

2024

Category	% Athletes	High	Low	Total New Students	Total Athletes
Total	37.44%	96%	0%	39,629	14,837
CCCU	38.85%	96%	0%	26,793	10,409
Bible	33.29%	81%	0%	1,132	377
Other CLA	36.43%	82%	0%	11,704	4,264

2023

Total	38.77%	89%	0%	36,159	14,099
CCCU	42.29%	89%	7.75%	24,132	10,205
Bible	34.57%	88%	0%	1,042	360
Other CLA	32.17%	79%	0%	10,985	3,534

It is valuable to factor the work of coaches into the overall productivity ratios of recruitment teams. Through conversation with veteran enrollment leaders a few years ago, a formula was developed to recast the productivity/recruitment FTE as follows:

Spectators plus (30% of recruited student-athletes) / recruitment FTE = Weighted Productivity

This formula accounts for admission counselors’ impact while partnering with coaches to recruit student-athletes. Using this formula, the average recruitment yield/recruitment FTE drops from the aforementioned 63.2 students per counselor to a yield of 50.85, still a boost of over 6 students per counselor over last year's recalculated 44.3 adjusted student/recruiter ratio.

This is a reminder of the need to develop other initiatives which match some of what makes athletics attractive to potential students (and their parents). Honors programs, music ensembles, leadership development programs and specific academic program initiatives are all excellent examples of programs with the potential to attract spectators.

Compensation

The study captures salary information for new admission counselors and other professional positions in the admission office. New counselor salary information is shared on a college-by-college basis for participating institutions; other salary information is reported in summary form only since it represents the individual salary information for a specific person. "Length of service" and "Time in current position" data are also gathered to provide additional context for salary figures. No attempt is made to capture variances in fringe benefits from institution to institution or between positions.

The following chart shows average compensation patterns for the last four years of the study. The most helpful comparisons are within regions or enrollment categories since they account for differences in the cost of living or institutional resources. Additional information, including salary means by region and enrollment size, is available in the summary documents from this study.

ADMISSION PROFESSIONAL SALARY SURVEY 2021-2024

Category	2021-2022 Salary	Change	2022-2023 Salary	Change	2023-2024 Salary	Change	2024-2025 Salary
Starting Counselor	$34,328	4.91%	$36,013	4.14%	$37,504	3.97%	$38,991
Senior Counselor	$41,490	1.49%	$42,107	3.69%	$43,660	6.35%	$46,432
Assistant Director	$43,914	5.28%	$46,233	4.59%	$48,354	5.63%	$51,074
Associate Director	$50,252	2.99%	$51,753	7.82%	$55,801	0.33%	$55,987
Director of Admission	$61,225	6.16%	$64,998	0.55%	$65,358	7.85%	$70,488
VP/Dean of Enrollment	$103,257	3.62%	$106,999	1.87%	$108,997	2.16%	$111,354

Average starting counselor salaries reported in 2024 follow directly the institutional size categories, with the largest cohort paying the most, and the smallest offering the lowest starting salaries. The average counselor salary is near-indistinguishable between the CCCU and "Other CLA" categories.

A few other interesting points of note:

- The average "years in this position" for chief enrollment officers was 4.6 years in 2024. This is exactly one year less than reported in the 2019 pre-Covid ABS, at 5.6 years, reinforcing the notion that the last half-decade has spurred somewhat of a significant exit of seasoned enrollment leaders from NACCAP institutions.

- Even considering cost-of-living differences, the chief enrollment officer compensation variance is starkly wide, with the highest paying region (Southwest) *doubling* the lowest (Southeast) and 26% higher than the next-closest (Northeast). The relative size of many of the institutions in the Southwest plays a large role in that differential of course, but the disparity is interesting nonetheless.
- Senior Counselor and Assistant Director salaries experiences another sizeable increase in 2024, supporting our previous notion that *some* institutions are taking seriously the charge to invest in their top performers and use promotions and compensation increases to stem the "turnover tide" so common in the college recruitment landscape.

Below is the full salary table broken down by all 16 ABS categories:

2023 AVERAGE SALARIES BY POSITION AND CATEGORY

Category	Starting Counselor	Senior Counselor	Assistant Director	Associate Director	Director of Admission	VP/Dean of Enrollment
All Participants	$37,504	$43,660	$48,354	$55,801	$65,358	$108,997
Canada	$41,504	$50,776	$56,792	$61,154	$73,867	$103,937
Great Lakes	$37,926	$41,412	$48,404	$52,597	$62,747	$109,235
Midwest	$35,792	$41,080	$45,598	$54,099	$62,881	$101,609
Northeast	$40,201	$45,130	$48,304	$56,055	$72,774	$129,667
Northwest	$39,197	$43,084	$55,187	$57,366	$76,023	$112,688
Southeast	$33,123	$39,387	$42,014	$53,277	$57,112	$104,966
Southwest	$45,613	$54,922	$60,047	$69,078	$82,200	$122,536
Smallest #	$33,049	$41,118	$33,800	$49,436	$50,514	$76,101
Small #	$36,700	$41,916	$49,381	$54,879	$59,089	$101,799
Medium #	$40,370	$47,868	$51,806	$53,739	$73,413	$111,875
Large #	$37,899	$42,254	$46,908	$53,258	$69,327	$117,073
Largest #	$40,922	$44,455	$50,439	$61,854	$77,860	$145,014
Bible College	$31,581	$43,707	$35,070	$57,436	$44,389	$72,626
CCCU	$38,654	$43,466	$49,757	$55,476	$68,715	$116,698
Other CLA	$38,385	$44,320	$48,336	$56,333	$66,704	$109,759

Education Levels

Participants were asked to list the minimum degree requirements for five levels of professional admission staff positions – admission counselor, assistant director, associate director, director, and vice president/dean. The results are as follows (college-by-college details available to participating institutions on request). Of the 95 participating institutions in 2024:

- All but six require a minimum of a bachelor's degree for employment as an Admission Counselor.
- Assistant or Associate Director – 6 require a master's degree; 88 consider a bachelor's degree the minimum level of education.
- Director – 34 institutions require a master's degree, one indicated they would hire someone with less than a bachelor's degree, and the balance require a bachelor's degree.
- VP/Dean – 21 institutions consider a bachelor's degree the minimum qualification, 7 require a doctorate, and the remainder require a master's degree.

In most cases, this question about qualifications was answered by the person occupying the chief enrollment officer position, typically the vice president or dean. The question of minimum qualifications for a chief enrollment officer might have been answered differently by a president. A vice president with a master's degree might conclude that they have minimal credentials, for example, even though the president might choose to require a doctorate the next time the position is open. A vice president with an earned doctorate might conclude that their successor would be required to have the same degree when, in fact, the president might see this differently.

The Admission Funnel

The study measures five key recruitment data points and the yield rates they produce. The institutional view of the recruitment process, whereby many potential students produce a relatively small number of matriculating new students, is commonly referred to as the admission funnel. Unlike the funnels used in kitchens and garages, everything put into the top of this funnel does not come out the bottom! The funnel concept illustrates the narrowing process from inquiry through application to eventual enrollment – some colleges and universities carry this concept further, extending the funnel to persistence to the sophomore year, graduation, and even to the point of becoming a productive member of the alumni association. While the funnel concept is typically well understood by most enrollment leaders, in the author's experience, the context in this section addresses some of the misperceptions and "myths" of the funnel often present in the minds of other college leaders and board members.

Funnel dynamics have changed over time as more and more students bypass the inquiry stage and first appear on the college's radar when they apply for admission. This change has forced colleges to rework communication plans to fill gaps in institutional messaging. In many ways, the inquiry, and to some extent the application, has become a much less significant metric to track.

Definitions are critical in developing meaningful comparisons – for purposes of this study, the five key recruitment data points were defined as follows for the study's exclusive focus on new students in traditional undergraduate programs:

1. Inquiries – potential first-year college students who expressed interest in the institution. For example, this number was not to include those who were targeted with direct mail efforts but never responded.
2. Applicants – potential first-year college students who *submitted* an application, typically through online means.
3. Completed applicants – potential first-year college students who applied for admission and *submitted all other required documents* (SAT/ACT scores, high school transcript, recommendation(s), etc.) so that an admission decision could be made on their behalf. This category often gets confused with the Applicant category since someone who "completes" the online application has also finished a step.

4. Admitted applicants – potential first-year college students admitted to the institution, regardless of their eventual college choice.

5. Enrolled students – as the label implies, those potential first-year college students who decided to enroll at the institution.

While not included in this study, the "pre-applicant" category is also worth considering and using as the basis for strategy and tactic focus. It typically consists of those who started but never completed the online application, had test scores or transcripts sent without applying, or submitted their FAFSA data but never applied. Students that visited campus and have yet to apply could also fit in this pre-applicant category.

Six different yield rates emerge from these five key funnel points and are presented in the summary documents.

As experienced enrollment managers know, the funnel analogy falls apart at some critical points since more at the top of the funnel, either inquiries or applications, does not necessarily result in more new students unless:

- There are systems in place to handle increased application traffic.
- The staffing levels are adequate to deal with more applications.
- These new inquiries or applications progress through the funnel at the same rate as they have previously. Historic yield rates that were probably developed from high-yield sources (SAT/ACT scores, alumni and current student referrals, unsolicited inquiries from the institutional website, etc.) are likely to be higher than new sources of leads from students not as familiar with the college.

This is a reminder of several important admission funnel principles:

- More applications (or inquiries) are not always a good thing if they are the wrong “more” in terms of mission fit.
- The point is not to get more applications; the point is to enroll more students, and more applications may distract you from the most important goal.

This study focuses exclusively on potential first-year college students. Transfers are not part of the funnel discussion herein.

The issue of completed applications is increasingly critical as a measure of applicant interest – surprisingly enough, many participants do not track this regularly. An uncomplicated way to calculate this number is to add the number of students who were denied admission (completed the application process, were considered for but not granted admission) to the total admit number. Dividing this completed application number by the total application number yields the completion rate outlined in the study, as presented in the following example:

CALCULATING A COMPLETION RATE

Category	Number
Applications	1,566
Denials	51
Admits	871
Completed Applications	922
Completion Rate	58.9%
Admission Percentage	94.5%
Denial Percentage	5.5%

This study has highlighted the importance of completion rates for the last two decades. The challenges to reaching and maintaining a healthy completion rate have increased with heavy investment in direct mail, "fast app" strategies, and the introduction of The Common App, designed to make applying easier for students. In some cases, making the application process more straightforward is a worthy goal, especially if an institution requires no-longer-relevant or inappropriate steps, given their level of selectivity. However, the ultimate goal of a recruitment process is to enroll (and retain) as many great fit students as possible. Increasing application totals may not always be a means to this end, and increasing the completion rate may be a more productive strategy for some institutions than increasing application totals.

A low completion rate may be a sign of one or more of the following factors:

- An application that takes minimal effort to complete can lead to misleading application totals.
- Application requirements that are too rigorous – a good admission office exercise is comparing your application requirements to your top five competitors regularly. Requiring three recommendations at a time when your competitors do not require any should inspire reflection on the reasons for each recommendation and its actual utility in making admission decisions. Additionally, many institutions discontinued their standardized testing requirements during the pandemic and remain test-optional to this day.
- The need for additional focus on completion rates by territory managers – set a completion rate goal for your team based on your recent performance and relevant NACCAP benchmarking data, then hold them accountable to achieve this goal.

The example above also highlights one of the most misunderstood concepts in admission, perpetuated by *U.S. News & World Report* and other college publications reporting "acceptance rates," which make campuses appear much more selective than they are. In most of these publications, the reported acceptance rate compares admitted applicants to total applicants, not completed applicants.

Why does this matter? Misreporting acceptance rates gives a misleading picture of selectivity and even the academic climate on the campus, discouraging some potential students and giving a false impression to others. It also props up a myth of selectivity about higher education in general. For example, applying the U.S. News "logic" to fall 2024 NACCAP data would change the acceptance rate from a realistic 91.8% to a misleading 63%. As is well understood by now, NACCAP institutions are not denying 37% of our applicant pool.

The Funnel Study Summary documents from the 2024 Admission Benchmarking Study highlight both average numbers and yield rates along the funnel for the overall study as well as the regional and total enrollment breakdowns that are typically more helpful – here are a few highlights:

- On average, 23.4% of all inquiries apply for admission, a healthy increase from last year's 21.2%. These rates varied widely by region and enrollment size and, until this year, had remained relatively stable over the previous three studies. The variations in this rate are at least partially reflective of changes in participation.

- The average completion rate rebounded somewhat this year after a disappointing downward slide to 70.1% in 2023, coming in at 72.7%, just a touch below the 2022 mark. Still, as mentioned earlier in this study, enrollment leaders should focus their teams on improving completion rates by studying their causes and developing appropriate action plans, including making completion rate improvement an office and individual territory goal.

- 91.8 % of all completed applicants were granted admission. As has been stated in previous ABS reports, there is little room to grow the new student population at the typical participating institution by dropping admission standards. The consistency of this high admission rate also supports debunking the selectivity myth mentioned earlier.

- On average, 33.1% of all admitted students enrolled for fall 2023, a bit of a downward slide from the previous two years that say yield rates nearing 34% each. As the following chart suggests, this rate varied widely by region, enrollment, and type of institution.

The following chart highlights average yield rates down the funnel for this study's overall, regional, and enrollment categories. In other words, average yield rates <u>are not the same as those derived from the average inquiry, application, completed application, admitted, and enrolled numbers divided by each other</u> or the aggregate funnel metrics represented on the second chart.

AVERAGE YIELD RATES — 2024 STUDY					
Category	Inquiry to Application	App to Completed App	Completed App to Admitted	Admitted to Enrolled	Inquired to Enrolled
All Participants	23.4%	72.7%	91.8%	33.1%	5.4%
Canada	30.7%	78.9%	94.4%	48.9%	11.2%
Great Lakes	18.0%	71.9%	88.6%	26.1%	3.2%
Midwest	32.4%	67.5%	94.1%	35.1%	6.5%
Northeast	10.4%	83.0%	87.6%	24.3%	1.8%
Northwest	20.6%	80.3%	87.7%	23.3%	3.2%
Southeast	23.7%	67.1%	94.0%	39.1%	5.9%
Southwest	18.2%	78.9%	90.7%	21.8%	3.2%
Smallest #	37.9%	65.4%	94.8%	51.6%	11.4%
Small #	21.7%	71.5%	90.0%	33.3%	4.8%
Medium #	16.6%	77.9%	92.9%	27.6%	3.7%
Large #	20.7%	74.1%	88.6%	24.6%	3.0%
Largest #	18.4%	76.0%	93.4%	25.7%	3.2%
Bible College	36.5%	68.9%	95.8%	55.7%	12.4%
CCCU	18.1%	73.6%	90.6%	26.3%	3.0%
Other CLA	29.0%	72.6%	92.4%	36.6%	7.1%

2024 NACCAP BENCHMARKING STUDY
First-Year Funnel Aggregate Data

Given the overlapping interests of many students in more than one NACCAP member, these aggregate numbers do not represent individual student interest (other than the final enrolled number).

	Fall 2024 Total	Fall 2023 Total
Inquiries	**1,552,729**	**1,460,261**
Applications	**208,969**	**179,183**
Completed Applications	**143,808**	**116,863**
Admits	**131,822**	**105,341**
Matriculants	**30,348**	**27,224**
	Yield Rate	**Yield Rate**
Inquiry to Application	**13.5%**	**12.3%**
Application to Complete	**68.8%**	**65.2%***
Complete to Admit	**91.6%**	**90.1%**
Admit to Enrolled	**23%**	**25.8%***
Inquiry to Enrolled	**1.9%**	**1.9%**
Application to Enrolled	**14.5%**	**15.2%**

Using this Study

Beyond gathering historical trends and comparison points, this study is most valuable to individual institutions attempting to determine how key ratios, spending levels, and the cost-to-recruit compared to peer institutions. Strategies employed by past participants to effectively utilize this study include:

- Tracking year-to-year patterns and setting targets – are you making progress against critical strategic metrics?
- Using the budget categories and funnel definitions in this study as a means of altering standard operating procedures to align with participants for comparison purposes
- Asking for customized salary comparisons by position
- Reviewing budget percentages and the priorities they reflect against key peer institutions/competitors and developing strategies accordingly
    - To reallocate resources
    - To leverage additional budget resources/staffing

When utilizing study data for these purposes, remember to find the proper comparison group and carefully consider institutional differences. There are many successful models for budgeting and staffing; the model that works for someone else may not work for you, given your unique setting and mission.

Consider involving several team members in reviewing your institutional data, using the tools on the research site for displaying your data against some key benchmark groups or individual campuses. As you look at your data, imagine how it might appear to your president or CFO; how would you address their questions about it?

Your study of the data should result in some areas for further investigation and even short- and long-term goals to increase or restructure staff resources, improve your ratios, and develop more efficient processes and systems (doing more with less). Consider how you will share your analysis of the data and your resulting goals with your team and your leadership colleagues.

The data from the study raises several important questions, however. At a time when institutional resources are scarce and it costs more to recruit, are there alternatives to ongoing increases in recruitment and marketing budgets? The cost-to-recruit a student has increased by nearly 2 ½ times in 30 years; can the Christian college industry absorb this pattern in the future?

A careful study of the demographic projections from WICHE and other sources suggests the need for increased attention to recruiting (and retaining) students from more diverse backgrounds. What will this require regarding changes in staffing composition, recruitment strategy, and strategic partnerships?
When additional resources may not be available for this initiative, what should enrollment leaders stop spending money on to shift to this critical priority?

At tuition-driven institutions, increased net revenue comes from one or more of several sources:

- Enrollment growth (traditional, online, non-traditional, and graduate)
- More efficient use of existing resources in recruiting, financial aid, and marketing
- Improved retention

Increases in annual fund and endowment, changes in program mix (deleting unproductive curricular and co-curricular programs, adding new tuition generating programs), cooperative ventures with other institutions (group purchasing, partnerships, mergers/acquisitions), and the development of alternative revenue streams (summer conference revenue, athletics/academics camps, etc.) are other potential sources of net revenue. Since this study focuses on the enrollment of traditional new students, the next few paragraphs address some possible answers to the questions raised in the preceding paragraph.

As you consider the effectiveness of your investments in recruitment, here are some recommendations to consider with the goal of more efficient/effective recruitment operations and strategies:

- Technology and streamlining processes and systems – the authors continue to be surprised by highly manual operations in relatively sophisticated admission offices; as funnel volume grows through the aggressive top-of-the-funnel strategies and because of a buyer's market, manual processes are often not scalable without significant investments in additional staff. Does your ERP (and/or CRM) facilitate efficient data gathering, storing, retrieving, analysis, and application? Do you employ the use of an enrollment-focused CRM, and are you getting all the analytical and efficiency power out of that important tool? If not, what can you do to maximize this substantial investment? The Legacy Higher Ed team often finds campuses hindered by a lack of training and re-training when it comes to maximizing the power and potential impact of the CRM.

- Organizational capabilities – to borrow language from the author Jim Collins, do you have the right people in the right seats on the bus? Do you have enough of the right people? Are they doing the right things repeatedly, reflecting best practices for their positions? Finding the right people for crucial recruitment tasks is critical to efficient, effective operations. How is your team configured to gather data, develop strategies, provide welcoming experiences for campus guests, lead at several levels, build critical campus partnerships, and recruit students? How well do you onboard new team members, and what kinds of professional development and growth programs have you implemented to encourage good people to grow and persist?

- Admitted student research consistently points to faculty and current students as highly influential on enrollment decisions. Are you leveraging these influencers in your midst, both during the campus visit experience and through other forms of outreach? Find your

- "institutional evangelists" within those two groups, empower, and equip them to make an impact, show them the results of their partnership and thank them appropriatelyAnalytics and metrics – how carefully are you studying the return on investments you are making in marketing and recruiting? For example, the answer to enrollment declines is not solely increasing the volume of leads without carefully analyzing their likelihood to enroll at your institution and the necessary resources to communicate with and nurture them effectively. Aggressive, top-of-the-funnel strategies can backfire. Sometimes, focusing on more modest approaches to building the enrollment funnel may be better. In other cases, the high-volume approach must be accompanied by a focus on the systems, processes, and staffing (levels and deployment) necessary to maximize their impact. In all cases, it is essential to count the added cost versus the needed additional enrollment numbers, such as the return on investment.

Another target for analytics and metrics is other peer and aspirational campuses. What can you learn from studying their metrics like funnel ratios and the cost-to-recruit a student? Close attention to the data might reveal some successful and efficient peers, creating opportunities for conversation with them.

The data in this study focuses exclusively on admission and recruitment factors such as budget, staffing, and funnel ratios; and on some promotional/marketing factors. In the language of the classic "4 Ps of Marketing," issues related to Product (Programs), Place, and Price (and People) are also critical in achieving strategic enrollment health.

For example:

- Does the college offer the right programs in the right delivery modality with appropriate levels of student engagement in the learning process? Are you relevant to your target audience? Do you know what it costs you to deliver each program?
- Are faculty functioning as great classroom professors and personal mentors for students exploring their sense of calling in light of their gifts and talents?
- Does the physical environment, the factors of Place, help drive enrollment decisions? Experienced higher education campus planners often use the term "arrival branding" to describe how a campus appears to a first-time visitor; what first impressions does your campus create? How easy is it to find your Welcome Center (and a place to park near it)? How does your physical environment support the notion that you offer a high-quality education?
- How is Price factored into the enrollment equation through financial aid and other strategies?
- How do your communication strategies of all types support the value proposition and make the case for why you are worth choosing?
- Are you organized for marketing success and to prioritize enrollment marketing? What messages are you using to drive traffic to your website and move students down the funnel?
- Are you alone in this effort, or are others in key functions helping you? Wise enrollment leaders are experts at mobilizing key campus partners to help achieve enrollment goals.

As a reminder, participants agree not to share the college-by-college results of this study with other members, organizations, etc. The summarized results are considered public information and, as such, will be posted on www.naccapresearch.org, utilized as the basis for presentations at the annual NACCAP conference, and used in other forms and venues.

Individual campus analysis of ABS data is available upon request, either as part of a virtual workshop or an on-campus focus session. There is no cost for this analysis (other than travel costs if the workshop is conducted on a campus).

About the Project Team

Dave Burke served as the Project Leader for 2024 NACCAP Admission Benchmarking Study. He began his consulting career at Credo in 2015 following almost 20 years in admissions and enrollment management at his alma mater, Azusa Pacific University. During his tenure at APU, Dave served on the NACCAP Board from 2002 to 2008. Upon joining Tim Fuller at Credo, Dave began to assist Tim with NACCAP Research responsibilities, continuing in this apprenticeship after joining Fuller Higher Ed Solutions as Vice President in 2022. Dave temporarily took over the NACCAP Research Lead role upon Tim's passing in June of 2023, and maintained that responsibility following the launch of his enrollment consulting company, Legacy Higher Ed, in January of 2024.

Dr. Denise Cunningham, Vice President of Strategic Partnerships and Initiatives, and Andrew Wright, Director of Research and Data Analytics, contributed to the execution of the Admission Benchmarking Study this year in their new roles, following a NACCAP staff reorganization in 2024 and the addition of Andrew's role in early 2025.

For more information about this study, please get in touch with Dave at dave@legacyhighered.com

For more information about Legacy Higher Ed please visit www.legacyhighered.com.