THE NEW NORMAL

2022 Niche Senior Enrollment Survey

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NORMAL

Over 27 million students and parents use Niche annually and half of college-bound seniors create a profile to research, discover, and apply to colleges.

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Summary

The college search has changed dramatically and more quickly than ever before.

With the uncertainty of the past few years, student priorities surrounding price sensitivity and the channels where they perform their search have changed, likely permanently. The number of students enrolling in college is declining year over year, and most colleges across the country are feeling the pressure. Now more than ever, it's important for colleges to build student-centric strategies that fit today's students. With over 21,000 responses, Niche's seventh annual Senior Enrollment Survey provides you with enrolling students' feedback and insights to inform your enrollment and marketing strategies.

New this year are insights from college-bound students' behaviors on Niche. With half of college-bound high school students choosing Niche to discover and choose their college, student behaviors on the platform provide a unique perspective into how the college search timeline is changing, and how certain demographic groups are being disproportionately impacted.

The Timeline is Changing

Data from both Google Search and Niche is clear- the seasonal patterns of student search and recruitment are changing. While prior classes showed a significant peak in search activity and traffic during the summer and fall of their senior year, that timeline is now starting earlier and lasting longer. Niche data shows a significant dragging out of search activity into the spring of their senior year—notably with traditionally undersupported groups starting their search even as late as January. The takeaway? Institutions need to rethink the traditional admissions cycle and be prepared to meet students where they are through the spring of their senior year. Recruiting and nurturing interest late in the cycle is key to succeeding in this new normal.

Cost and Application Barriers

As the timeline changes, traditional application and yield models have shifted. Survey data and Niche trends show students continuing to express interest in and apply to more schools than ever. But while students are applying to more colleges than ever, cost and the length and requirements of applications mean they are eliminating colleges from their list **earlier** than ever. The vast majority of survey respondents, 81%, turned away from colleges they wanted to learn more about because of high sticker costs—they never waited to see how much financial aid they would receive. Now more than ever, colleges need to rethink how they are pricing themselves, relying on financial aid, and when that aid should be presented to avoid losing students early in the funnel.

Meeting Students Where They Are

The trusted sources for college search are changing and it's critical to meet students where they are. Google searches about standardized tests are down while more students than ever turn to Niche, social media, friends, and current students to learn what it's really like. High-school students are becoming less likely to engage directly with institutions and instead are doing more of their search independently online. This may be because they want engaging and relevant communication that speaks to their interests, but just 44% of respondents said that they had received personalized and relevant outreach

Google searches about standardized tests are down while more students than ever turn to Niche, social media, friends, and current students to learn what it's really like.

from colleges. Understanding student concerns and desired outreach channels will help you to provide students with the right message, in the right channel, at the right time.

Between the loss of face-to-face support from their teachers and counselors and the uncertainties in the world as a whole, this year's class has had a disruption to almost their entire high school experience that has caused them to adapt in unforeseen ways. Rather than continuing to hold dear to the old structures and processes of college admissions and marketing it's important to adapt and meet them where they are. As student search continues to change it's important to continually optimize your recruitment efforts in this new normal.

Navigating the White Paper

The Senior Enrollment Survey data and insights are organized according to a student's college search process. The white paper begins with an overview of changing inquiries, visits, applications, and acceptances. Following will be the student considerations and trends for recruiting and engaging with them, followed by issues of cost and stressors that might result in melt and retention issues. Throughout, we suggest that you compare the student feedback to your own processes and consider where you can better meet students where they are to remove barriers to enrollment.

Want to learn more?

In addition to the survey results that follow you can dive deeper into some key results to inform your tactics through our podcast and webinars. There will also be segmented results to speak to some key demographic groups. Learn more on the **Enrollment Insights blog**.

Methodology and Respondent Demographics

This year, the seventh year conducting the Niche Senior Enrollment Survey, we received completed responses from 21,866 students.

Students who had not made their decision yet were disqualified since we want to focus on the process of search through enrollment. The survey was sent to seniors who had registered a profile on the Niche platform, available on the site for unregistered users, and findable from searches. The survey was open from April 15 to June 12, 2022 to allow students time after the May 1 deadline that some institutions use.

There was no significant change in the race or ethnicity of respondents, but there was an increase in students choosing not to provide this optional field.

There was no significant change in the race or ethnicity of respondents, but there was an increase in students choosing not to provide this optional field. If a respondent identified as Asian or Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, we provided additional options to gain further insight into their ethnic identity. We provided these options as they are suggested by the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center "Everyone Deserves to Be Seen" policy brief, among other resources. In the results below, any Asian ethnic group that represented at least 0.5% is shown while others are grouped as Asian - Other. We provided over thirty choices for race and ethnicity, so for space in some charts they will be grouped; however, in the interactive visualizations on the **Niche Enrollment Insights blog**, they will all be available for exploration.

Household income quintiles from students were largely representative, with some students choosing not to respond and others not knowing their household income. Student responses as to their parents' education level varied in some places from the most recent US Census data. There were twelve percentage point fewer students who responded and reported that their parents highest level of education was a high school diploma and more reported that their parents' highest level of education was a Master's degree.

LESS THAN A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA	7%
HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA	14%
SOME COLLEGE, NO DEGREE	9%
ASSOCIATE DEGREE	7%
BACHELOR'S DEGREE	24%
MASTER'S DEGREE	17%
DOCTORAL OR PROFESSIONAL DEGREE	6%
CHOSE NOT TO RESPOND	15%

AFRICAN AMERICAN OR BLACK	14%
AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE	<1%
ASIAN - CHINESE	3%
ASIAN - FILIPINO	1%
ASIAN - INDIAN	2%
ASIAN - KOREAN	1%
ASIAN - PAKISTANI	1%
ASIAN - VIETNAMESE	1%
ASIAN - OTHER	2%
CAUCASIAN OR WHITE	32%
HISPANIC OR LATINX	16%
MIDDLE EASTERN OR NORTH AFRICAN	1%
MULTIRACIAL	11%
NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER	<1%
I DO NOT KNOW	1%
CHOSE NOT TO RESPOND	15%

UNDER $25,000	11%
$25,000-$49,999	16%
$50,000-$79,999	15%
$80,000-$130,000	16%
ABOVE $130,000	9%
I DO NOT KNOW	18%
CHOSE NOT TO RESPOND	16%

Survey Results

SEARCH TRENDS THROUGH ACCEPTANCE

- The majority of students started their search after their junior year; 24% started during the summer before senior year, 27% during the fall semester of their senior year, and 7% during the spring semester of their senior year.

- Only 17% of students started their college search before junior year, and surprisingly there was no difference indicated by household income or parents' education level.

- Low-income students were more likely to have started their search during their senior year (39% compared to 28%) and students who were not from low-income families were more likely to have started their search during their junior year (30% compared to 21%).

- Students who considered only 2-year colleges were almost three times as likely to start their search during their senior year, especially during the spring semester with 16% of spring starters only considering 2-year colleges.

Inquiry Behavior

The trend of fewer students going to college websites to fill out inquiry forms continued this year. Compared to the class of 2020, 75% more students reported not filling out any college's inquiry form.

28% of students did not fill out any inquiry forms on a college website and another 26% only filled out one or two. Low-income students were more likely to fill out inquiry forms, as were students who considered 2-year colleges.

INQUIRY FORMS FILLED OUT

	2022	2021	2020
0	28%	19%	16%
1	12%	12%	14%
2	14%	11%	11%
3	13%	13%	12%
4	8%	8%	9%
5+	25%	37%	38%

IN-PERSON VISITS

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
0	19%	28%	15%	7%	6%	5%	5%
1	22%	21%	18%	15%	15%	14%	15%
2	21%	19%	20%	20%	20%	19%	19%
3	15%	13%	16%	19%	20%	20%	18%
4	8%	6%	9%	11%	12%	12%	12%
5+	15%	12%	22%	27%	27%	30%	32%

APPLICATIONS

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
1	11%	11%	15%	14%	14%	14%	12%
2	10%	10%	12%	12%	13%	12%	12%
3	10%	11%	12%	12%	13%	13%	12%
4	10%	9%	10%	10%	12%	11%	11%
5+	59%	59%	51%	51%	48%	50%	53%
10+	26%	25%	20%	20%	16%	17%	20%

Virtual and Campus Visits

There was a reversal of the trend of students not visiting any campuses prior to enrolling. However, there are still almost three times as many students reporting not taking any visits now as there were before the pandemic.

Only 13% of students who are not from a low-income household reported not visiting any campuses, much less than the 25% of low-income students who reported taking no visits. Income correlates very closely to the number of visits. Only 7% of the highest quintile students reported not visiting any campuses and the share increases to 27% of the lowest income quintile students.

Application Trends

There was no significant change in the trend of applications submitted this year compared to last. The percentage of students reporting they submitted 10 or more applications edged up one percentage point to 26%.

Here again there was a connection between household income and the number of applications being submitted, though a more strange one. Looking at students who reported submitting only one application, only 7% of students from households earning over $130,000 fell in that category, 10% of students coming from households earning between $25,000 and $130,000 did, and 12% of students from households earning less than $25,000 only submitted one application. At the other extreme, 38% of students from households earning over $130,000 reported submitting ten or more applications. This dropped to 24% for those from households earning $50-130,000, then up to 28% for students from households earning $25-50,000, and up to 29% for those from households earning less than $25,000.

Almost half of students who exclusively considered 2-year colleges reported submitting only one application. This is contrasted by those who exclusively considered 4-year

colleges and universities, where only 8% submitted only one application. They were also significantly more likely to submit more than ten applications than those who only considered 2-year institutions.

Students who started active searching during their junior year or earlier applied to more colleges than those who started during the summer before senior year or during their senior year. Of the earlier searchers, 29% applied to three or fewer colleges and 29% applied to ten or more. Of those who started during their senior year, 37% applied to three or fewer, and 20% applied to ten or more. For the spring of senior year starters, 51% applied to three or fewer, including a quarter that only applied to one college.

54% of students reported that there were colleges that they wanted to apply to but did not, or did not complete their application. The most common reasons were because of application fees (26%), length of the application (22%), too many requirements to complete (19%), and it was too confusing (13%).

58% of underrepresented minorities did not apply or complete applications they wanted to. Application fees, the number of requirements, and confusion were more likely to be factors for them.

57% of first-generation students did not apply or complete applications they wanted to. Application fees, the number of requirements, and confusion were more likely to be factors for them.

59% of low-income students did not apply or complete applications that they wanted to. Application fees, the number of requirements, and confusion were more likely to be factors for them.

"Prestige carries a lot of weight. As someone who wants to become a surgeon, I was under the impression going to a less prestigious institution would harm my chances of getting into a medical school."

ACCEPTANCES

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
1	17%	16%	20%	19%	21%	19%	17%
2	14%	14%	16%	16%	18%	18%	17%
3	14%	14%	15%	15%	16%	16%	17%
4	12%	12%	12%	12%	12%	13%	12%
5+	43%	44%	37%	36%	31%	32%	35%

College Acceptances

There was no significant change in the number of colleges students reported being accepted to.

The concern over not being accepted to a dream college continues to be disproven for most students; 78% of those with a first choice reported being accepted to it.

At two ends of the spectrum, 4.0+ GPA students and less than 2.0 students reported the lowest acceptance rate to first-choice colleges at 76%. Students reported the highest likelihood between 2.5 and 3.5 GPAs at 83%.

WHAT STUDENTS ARE LOOKING FOR IN A COLLEGE

62% of students said that a college's brand and name recognition influenced their decision and only 5% said that it does not matter at all.

Brand was least important to American Indian or Alaska Native students (46%) and white students (53%) and was most important to Chinese (85%), Indian (84%), Korean (83%), and Vietnamese (83%) students.

Name recognition was more important to students who considered 4-year colleges than 2-year.

The types of colleges considered did not change much this year from 2021. The share of students considering 2-year career or technical schools doubled to 6% and consideration of 4-year for-profit colleges increased from 4% to 5%, but other types of colleges all remained the same.

Campuses in urban and suburban areas gained popularity and suburban campuses were no longer the most appealing—72% found urban campuses appealing and 65% found suburban campuses appealing. Small town settings decreased from 42% to 40% in appeal, rural campuses declined from 33% to 22% in appeal, and fully online campuses fell in appeal from 17% to 6%.

Student interest compressed to mid-sized universities. Interest fell in large institutions from 46% to 38% and small colleges from 50% to 39% but interest in mid-sized colleges (5,000-15,000 students) rose from 63% to 81%.

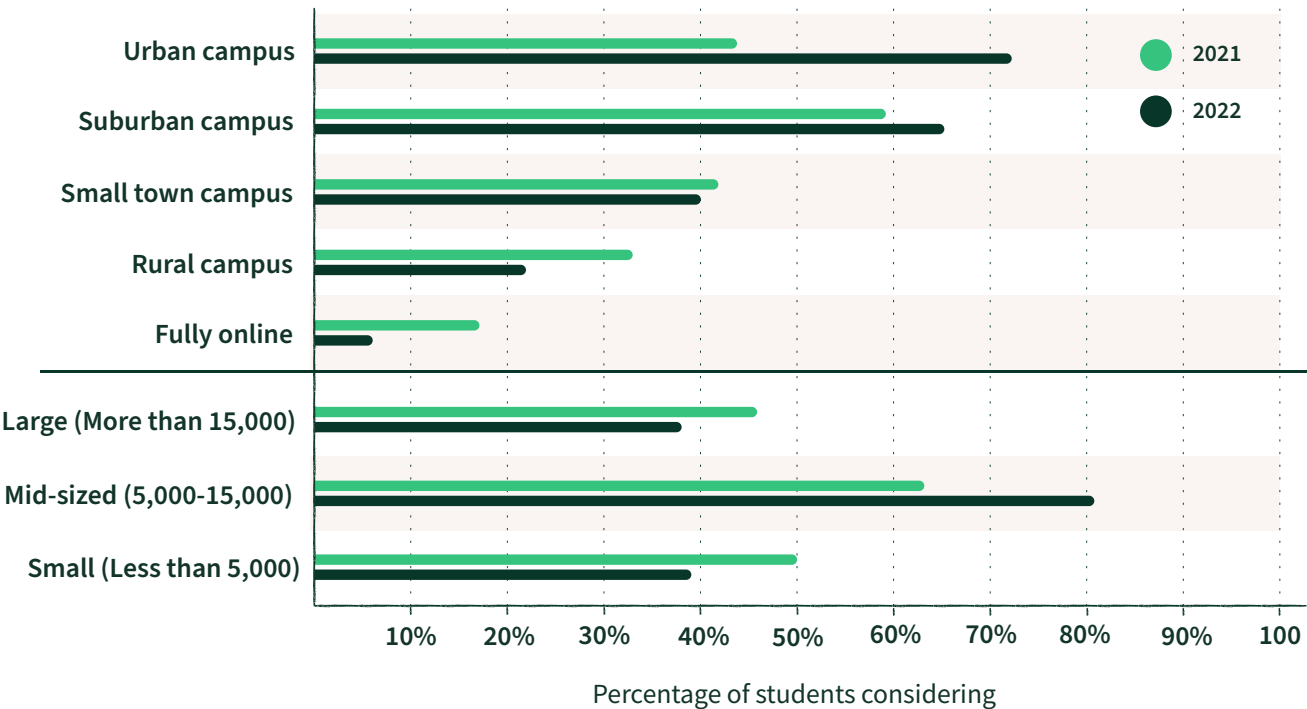## WHAT MADE YOU FEEL THE WAY YOU DO ABOUT NAME RECOGNITION?

"Prestige tends to carry a lot of weight. As someone who wants to become a surgeon, I was under the impression that going to a less prestigious institution would harm my chances at getting into a good medical school."

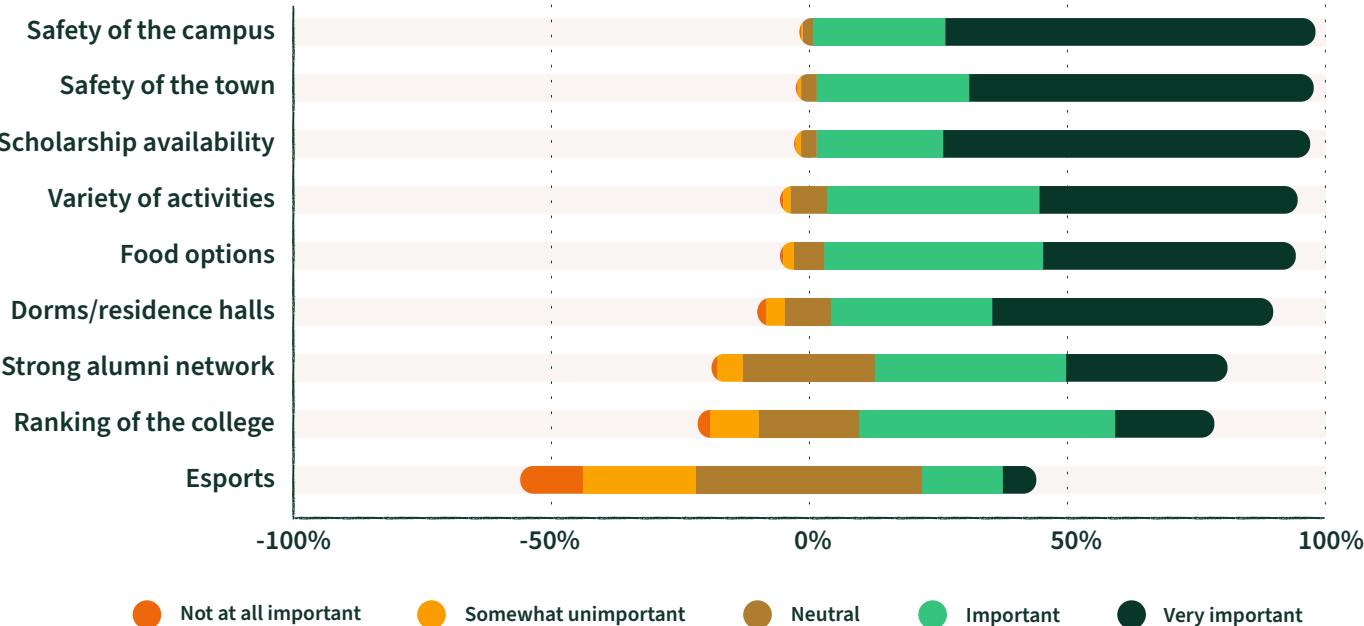*"I didn't want to go to a school nobody had heard of."*

"As a student who has been encouraged to take the most rigorous courses all throughout their 12 years of schooling, adults make it seem like if you do not get into a "good" school, all of your hard work was for nothing. This toxic mentality also feeds into student life and culture, making it seem as if we are all competing to get into amazing schools that simply have name recognition, and not because we genuinely enjoy the college or university."

"How popular the school is doesn't matter. It's all about the education you'll be receiving."

Campus Size and Setting Preferences

Urban campus

Suburban campus

Small town campus

Rural campus

Fully online

Large (More than 15,000)

Mid-sized (5,000-15,000)

Small (Less than 5,000)

● 2021
● 2022

10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100

Percentage of students considering

Preferred Campus Features

Safety of the campus

Safety of the town

Scholarship availability

Variety of activities

Food options

Dorms/residence halls

Strong alumni network

Ranking of the college

Esports

-100% -50% 0% 50% 100%

● Not at all important ● Somewhat unimportant ● Neutral ● Important ● Very important

Physical Campus Characteristics

Over half of the students said that they considered colleges further than four hours from home.

Only 18% of students reported that they only considered colleges within an hour of home.

Only 38% of first-generation college students reported considering a college more than four hours from home, compared to 53% of their peers.

As household income increased the likelihood of considering colleges more than two hours from home increased. Of low-income students, 58% considered enrolling more than two hours from home compared to 86% of students from households earning more than $130,000 per year.

Safety remained the top concern for students when considering different features of campus. On-campus safety edged out the safety of the town or community around campus 97% to 96%.

Scholarship availability was the third most important factor in a campus for students with 95% who placed importance on it.

Campus Cultural Characteristics

Only one-quarter of students said that HBCU status was important to them, but that rose to 59% of African American or Black students. More than a quarter of Pakistani and Hispanic or Latinx students did as well.
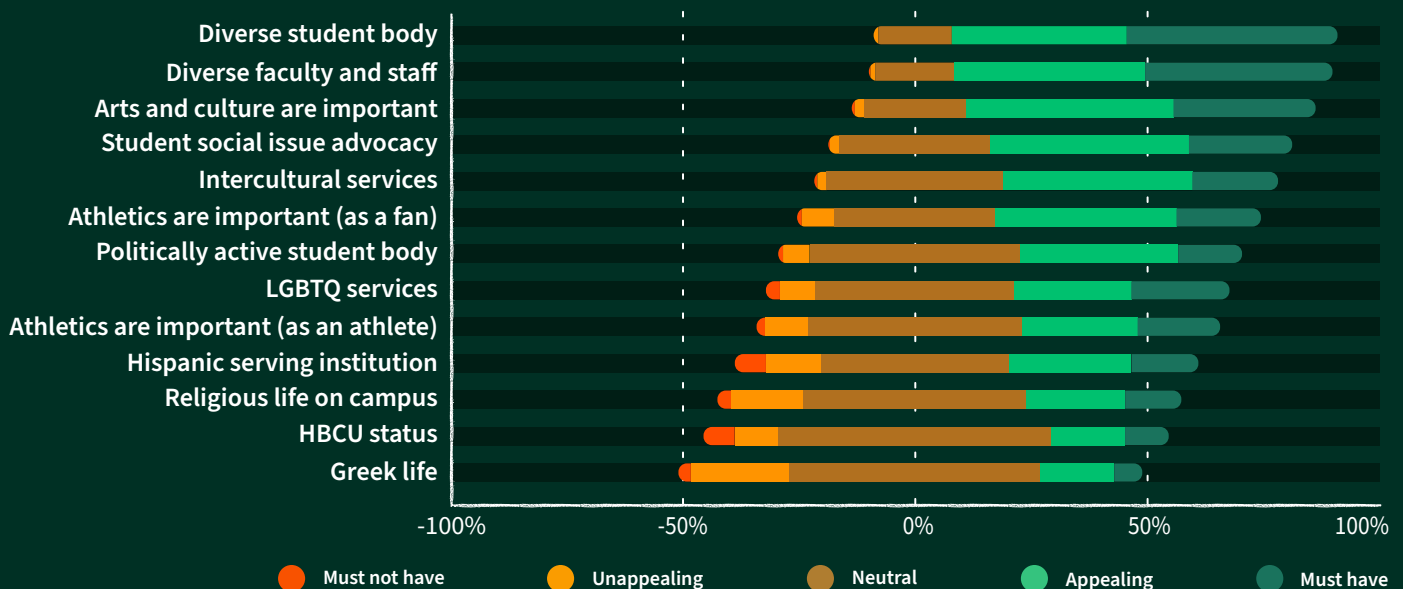
Diversity remained the most important community factor to the Class of 2022. There were 84% of respondents who said that a diverse student body is appealing with 46% of those saying that it was a must-have feature. Diversity among faculty and staff was the second most important with 81% wanting it and 40% of those saying it was a must-have feature.

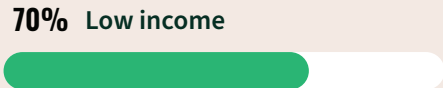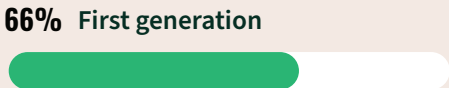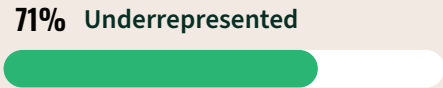Diversity was important to both underrepresented (89%) and not underrepresented students (79%).

Arts and culture continue to be more important than athletics, a trend that started early in the pandemic during surveys. More than three-quarters of students want arts and cultural activities emphasized in a campus community compared to 57% wanting a strong athletics fan experience and 43% wanting athletic participation emphasized.

Only one community factor was a detractor—Greek life. There were more students saying that they do not want a campus to have Greek

Campus Community Preferences

Legend: Must not have · Unappealing · Neutral · Appealing · Must have

75% All students

71% Underrepresented

66% First generation

70% Low income

56%

Counselor at school

70% of those who had one supporting them

37%

Family

44% of those whose parents were supporting them

17%

Friends

6%

IEC

40% of those who used one

9%

Someone else

Of those who were told they had to submit scores when not required

STANDARDIZED TESTING

Three-quarters of respondents reported taking a standardized test (SAT/ACT/CLT) while in high school, and 46% of those that did take one or more reported submitting their scores to all colleges regardless of whether it was required or not. Another 22% did not submit it to any college.

First-generation, underrepresented minorities, and low-income students were all much less likely to have taken a standardized test. Those who did report taking an exam were also significantly less likely to have submitted it to colleges as part of their application.

Two-thirds of students reported believing that submitting their test scores to a college that didn't require it would help their chances of being accepted.

First-generation, underrepresented minorities, and low-income students were less likely to think that they needed to submit standardized test scores when they were not required; 60% of all three groups still believed that they did, however.

Only 2% of students were told that they still had to submit test scores to a college that doesn't require it, an improvement from prior years. Low-income students were more likely to report being told they still had to submit scores.

Of students who report being told that they had to submit scores to colleges that don't require it 70% of those with a school counselor reported that they told them this, 44% of those with parents supporting their search were told by them, 40% of those using an independent education consultant were told by them, 17% were told they had to by friends, and 9% were told by others including online forums and on social media.

	COLLEGES	
	ALL	SOME
ALL STUDENTS	25%	38%
UNDERREPRESENTED	21%	37%
FIRST GENERATION	20%	38%
LOW INCOME	22%	35%

STUDENTS WHO BELIEVE SUBMITTING NON-REQUIRED STANDARDIZED TEST SCORES HELPED THEIR ACCEPTANCE CHANCES

	ALL STUDENTS	UNDERREPRESENTED	FIRST-GENERATION	LOW-INCOME
BELIEVE SCORES GAVE BETTER CHANCE	25%	21%	20%	22%
BELIEVE COLLEGES PREFER SCORES	38%	37%	38%	35%
WERE TOLD SCORE WERE REQUIRED	2%	2%	2%	2%

"When a college took their time out to figure what my interested major was and give me information, it really stood out."

MAKING THE ENROLLMENT DECISION

College websites were the most important method of researching colleges with 90% of respondents reporting it as important. The next most used resources were college search platforms such as Niche at 78%, net price calculators at 71%, a visit to the college at 68%, virtual tours at 55%, and virtual events at 51%.

Underrepresented minorities, low-income students, and first-generation students all reported that college search platforms such as Niche, net price calculators, virtual tours, and virtual events were more important. They also said that visits to a campus were less important in their research.

With the majority of students valuing college search platforms we also sought to understand where they were doing their research. Most used Niche (84%) and Common App (66%).

Beyond that, 37% used Cappex, 28% used CollegeXpress, 19% used US News & World Report, 19% used College Vine, 18% used Big Future, 15% used Princeton Review, 1% used Peterson's, and 7% used a different platform.

Influencers in the Search Process

Three-quarters of respondents reported that family was influential in the enrollment decision. The next most influential group were current students at a college with 64%, then friends at 61%, then online reviews at 55%.

Alumni stories are often found on websites and in comm flows, but seniors were much more likely to say that online reviews were influential than alumni.

Family was even more influential for Filipino, Korean, and Middle Eastern or North African students. They were less influential to Vietnamese, Hispanic or Latinx, or Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander students.

Online reviews were more influential to Middle Eastern or North African students, all Asian ethnicities, and African American or Black students. They were less important to American Indian or Alaska Natives.

Friends were much more influential to American Indian or Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander students but were significantly less influential in the decisions of African American or Black students.

Just over half of students said that admissions counselors influenced their decision but they were significantly more influential for Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, African American or Black, and Hispanic or Latinx students. They were also more influential for first-generation students, low-income students, and students reporting a GPA below 3.0.

Students reporting a GPA of **4.0 or higher were less influenced by admission counselors at colleges but were more influenced by faculty and current students at a college.**

COMMUNICATING WITH STUDENTS

The Importance of Personalization and Relevance

Personalized and relevant communications were very important to students; 73% reported that they were influential in their decision making and only 2% said that they had no influence.

Personalized and relevant communications were even more important to students who wanted to attend an HBCU with 85% of respondents saying that it influenced their decision. Colleges delivered on this preference, — 62% of these students said that they received personalized and relevant information from colleges.

Low-income students were are more likely to have been influenced by personalized and relevant outreach from colleges.

Personalized and relevant information was

more likely to have influenced African American or Black students, Indian students, Vietnamese, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander students.

Compared to surveys of juniors and seniors in the fall, there was a marked increase in the number of students who reported that they received personalized and relevant outreach from colleges. Only 10% said that they still felt like all colleges look and sound the same and 44% said that outreach was very personal and specific to their interests.

Students from every Asian ethnic group were less likely to say that they received personalized and relevant information and were more likely to have reported that all colleges sound alike.

Overwhelmingly, students reported that information about their intended major from a college is what made them more interested in that college. The second most frequently mentioned topic was student life. Topics around diversity and financial aid were also frequently mentioned in free-response.

WHAT ABOUT THE MAIL CAUGHT YOUR ATTENTION?

"[The school] had a lot of virtual events that were specifically targeted towards my major and future career plans, like a video conference about what classes I should take if I'm planning to go Pre-Health."

"When a college took their time out to figure out what my interested major was and give me information about my major it really stood out."

"They sent a detailed checklist for prospective students."

"Some information from colleges that made them stand out more than others were Zoom meetings to inform considering students about the student life with current students."

"The information about clubs and the student life made me more interested in some colleges over others. You can always find out academically what happens but the student life for on-campus students is just as important."

"Info about sustainability efforts, or efforts to include diversity and inclusivity into curriculum and community."

Importance of Relevant Outreach

IMPACT OF PERSONALIZED COMMUNICATION

HOW MUCH DID PERSONALIZED COMMUNICATION INFLUENCE YOUR INTEREST IN A COLLEGE?

VERY INFLUENTIAL	**30%**
INFLUENTIAL	**43%**
UNSURE	**20%**
NOT VERY INFLUENTIAL	**5%**
NOT AT ALL INFLUENTIAL	**2%**

HOW PERSONALIZED

HOW PERSONAL AND RELEVANT WAS THE OUTREACH YOU RECEIVED FROM COLLEGES?

VERY PERSONAL AND SPECIFIC TO MY INTERESTS	**44%**
SOMEWHAT PERSONAL	**46%**
THEY ALL LOOK AND SOUND THE SAME	**10%**

WHAT ABOUT THE EMAIL CAUGHT YOUR ATTENTION?

"Bright colors and a well-decorated campus caught my eyes."

"The school showed some of its perks on the ad like parking for freshmen, a free dining plan, and the number of programs it had."
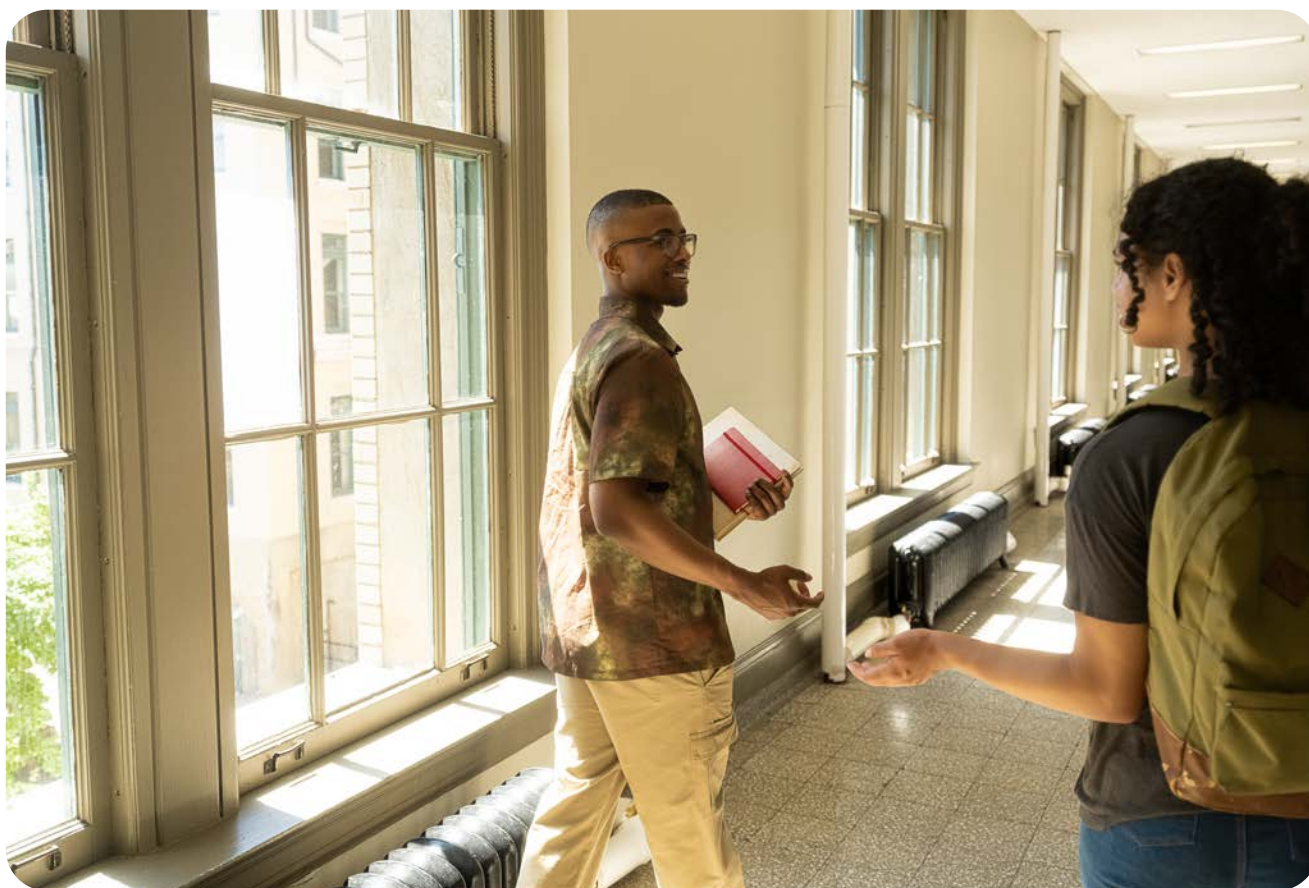
"The pictures they used emphasized the culture of the college."

"I liked how their emails were very detailed and easy to understand."

"The emails I normally opened were personalized emails, since it made me feel like I actually caught the attention of a University and they were interested in me, not just a general email that was sent out to everyone."

"Majors and extracurriculars offered. Diversity and campus scenery. Financial aid and merit scholarships."

"It had good information and real stories from students along with pictures."

WHAT ABOUT THE MAIL CAUGHT YOUR ATTENTION?

"It was well laid out, named me personally, even handwritten, which was nice! Good pictures too, and good descriptions. Explained about the college."

"It was a college t-shirt and showed pictures of the campus."

"Impressive statistics and pictures that made the campus look appealing."

"There was a section of the pamphlet that included majors and price, not just sports and student life."

"I got the opportunity to apply to two schools for free (no application fee) and I was able to get an answer in about three weeks."

Earning Student Consideration

The best way to earn a student's consideration is through a conversation with someone from the college; 30% of respondents said that they considered a college they hadn't heard of before after a conversation with someone from that college. Family recommendations were close behind at 29%, an email from the college at 26%, and recommendations from friends at 25%. Only 13% of students said that they only applied to colleges they had already heard of.

For students who considered 2-year colleges, rankings and mail were less effective at earning consideration if they had not already heard of the college.

For students who considered 4-year colleges, **finding them on Niche and rankings were more effective at earning consideration** if they had not already heard of the college.

For students who identify as underrepresented minorities, **an email from Niche was more effective**. Recommendations from their family and friends were less effective.

Remarketing ads continue to prove to be more effective than more widely targeted digital ads as only 7% of students said that they applied to a college they hadn't heard of before because of a digital ad. Common features mentioned by students were bright colors in the ad as well as pictures of students and programs that were relevant to their interests.

PREFERRED OUTREACH FREQUENCY

	WEEKLY	MONTHLY	FEW MONTHS	NEVER
EMAIL	59%	33%	7%	1%
MAIL	29%	48%	20%	4%
TEXT	27%	32%	23%	18%
CALL	12%	24%	28%	36%
VIDEO	7%	19%	28%	46%

Influential Communication Channels
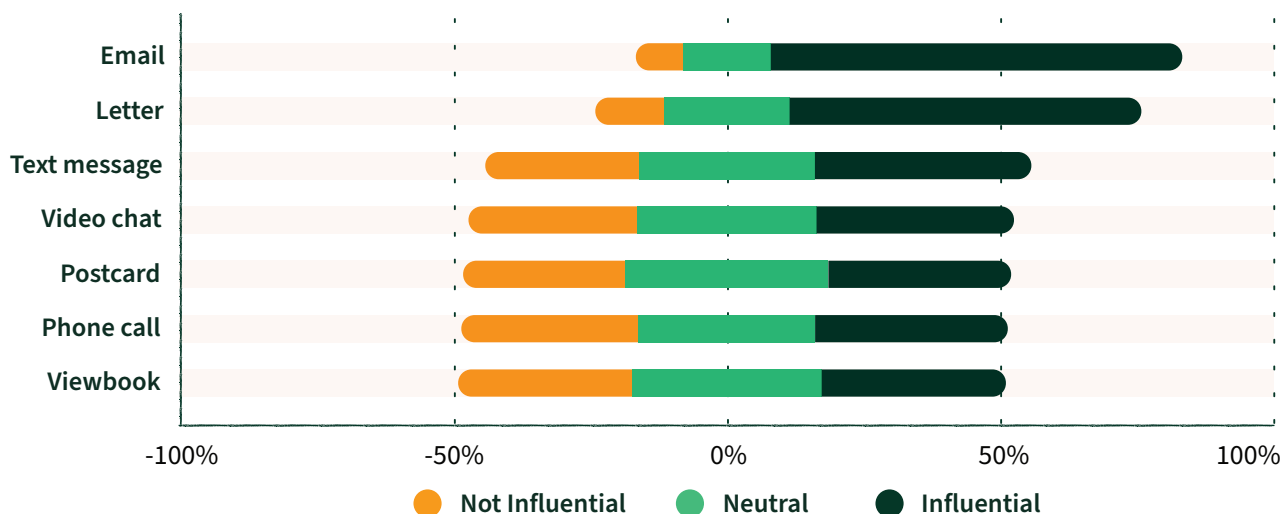
PREFERRED CHANNELS OF OUTREACH

There were only two communication channels that the majority of respondents rated as influential in the search and decision-making process: email (75%) and letters (64%). Text messaging was the third highest-rated with 40% saying that it was influential. Video chats were the fourth highest-rated, but only slightly more students reported it being influential as not influential. Almost as many students said that postcards, phone calls, and viewbooks were influential, and the least likely to be rated as influential were postcards.

26% of students were swayed to apply to a college they previously hadn't been aware of because of a prospect email.

EMAIL

The most frequent themes mentioned by students were they felt the college was genuinely interested in them. Emails spoke to the program they were interested in, they liked the location of the college, emails covered financial aid, or emails contained pictures of the campus.

Email was the most desired form of communication with 99% of students reporting that they wanted to receive emails and 59% said that weekly emails were acceptable.

Email was significantly more influential to African American or Black students, but significantly less influential to Chinese or Korean students.

MAIL

96% of students wanted to receive mail from colleges and half of those want it to come monthly.

Mail from a college they hadn't heard of before influenced **only 22%** of respondents. Pictures of campus, information about their intended major, financial aid information, and swag were some of the most frequently mentioned content that caught their attention.

Letters were significantly more influential to African American or Black, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander students, but were significantly less influential to Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese students.

Viewbooks influenced almost half of American Indian or Alaska Native students.

PHONE CALLS

Less than two-thirds of respondents wanted to receive phone calls and it was most commonly desired to receive them every few months.

Over 40% of students in the south-central states reported phone calls influencing their interests and decisions.

41% of both low-income and first-generation students said that phone calls were influential in their decisions.

Preferred Messengers and Campus Connections

- Admission counselors were not the most desired people on campus students wanted to talk to. It was financial aid staff—84% to 75%.

- Indian and Middle Eastern or North African students were more interested in hearing from admissions counselors than their peers.

- Low-income students were more likely than their peers even to want to hear from financial aid staff.

- 70% of respondents wanted to hear from current students during the recruiting process.

- First-generation students were less interested in hearing from current students.

- Current students were more likely to want to be included in outreach by all Asian ethnic groups responding.

- As a student's reported GPA increased, their desire to hear from current students in outreach also increased—52% for those below a 2.0 to 76% for those with a 4.0 or higher.

- Hearing from current students was less interesting to students considering 2-year colleges.

- The majority of students wanted to hear from professors and student life staff as part of their recruitment process.

- While most students did not say they wanted to hear from college leadership, career services, or alumni at least 40% of students did want to.

- The majority of low-income students did want to hear from career services staff and leadership, unlike their peers.

- The majority of first-generation students wanted to hear from leadership during recruitment.

- The majority of all Asian ethnic groups responding said that they wanted to hear from alumni.

- The majority of African American or Black, Indian, Korean, and Pakistani students reported wanting to hear from college leadership during recruitment.

- Students who found HBCUs and HSIs appealing were 50% more likely to want to hear from college leadership during their recruitment. They were also more interested in hearing from alumni than their peers.

Phone calls were more likely to influence African American or Black, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Middle Eastern or North African students but less than a quarter of Chinese or Korean students said that they were influential.

TEXTING

82% of students want to receive text messages and it's most common for them to want monthly texts from colleges rather than weekly check-ins.

Almost half of low-income and first-generation students were influenced by text messaging from colleges.
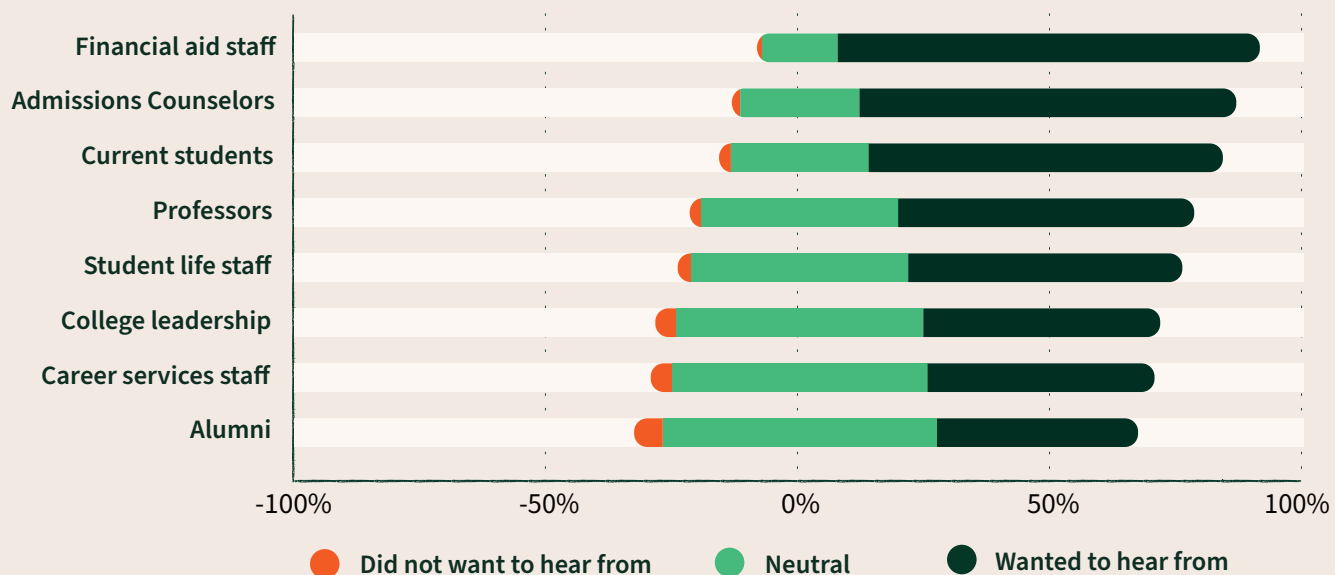
VIDEO CHATS

Only about half of students want to participate in a video chat with a counselor and the most commonly desired frequency was every few months.

Video chats were very influential for students reporting a GPA of 2.5 or below with almost half saying that tactic influenced them.

Hi Mary, we are so excited to welcome you to Niche University!
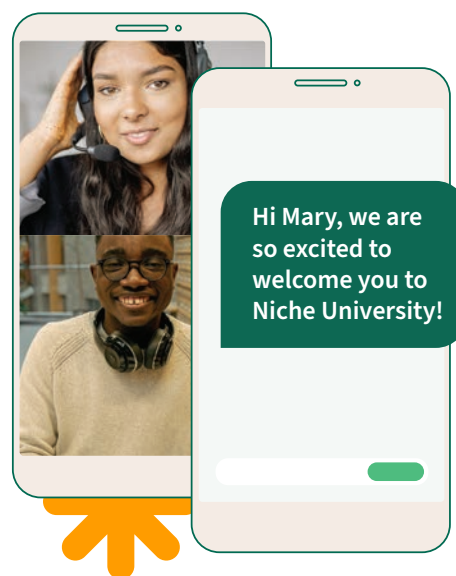
Who students want to hear from

| | Did not want to hear from | Neutral | Wanted to hear from |

Chatbots and Private Communities

There was no significant change in reported interest in engaging with chatbots or other automated systems. Only 7% found them very appealing, 23% appealing, 19% unappealing, and 10% said they were not at all appealing. Students who considered 2-year colleges, especially those who exclusively considered 2-year colleges, found chatbots more appealing to engage with for answers.

Most students reported that having a private group or community where they could meet other students before enrolling was appealing—51% did find it appealing and only 10% did not.

Reminder:
Meet your school counselor at 1:00pm today

Discuss college search and schedule a plan

How is the college search going?
I have some ideas for your calendar organization.

Thank you!
It's been stressful but helpful to have support.

SUPPORT IN THEIR COLLEGE SEARCH

The number of students who reported receiving support during their college search increased this year back to a pre-pandemic amount of 85%. Parental involvement continued to increase to 58% and the share of students receiving counseling support at school decreased from 61% to 58%.
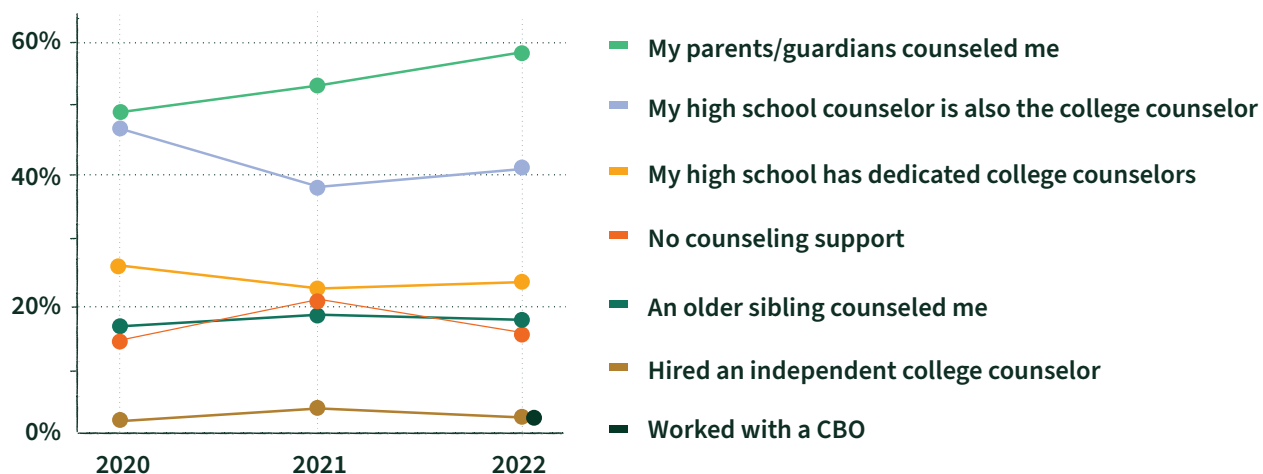
First-generation students were less than half as likely to report that their parents were supporting them in their search—32% compared to 67%.
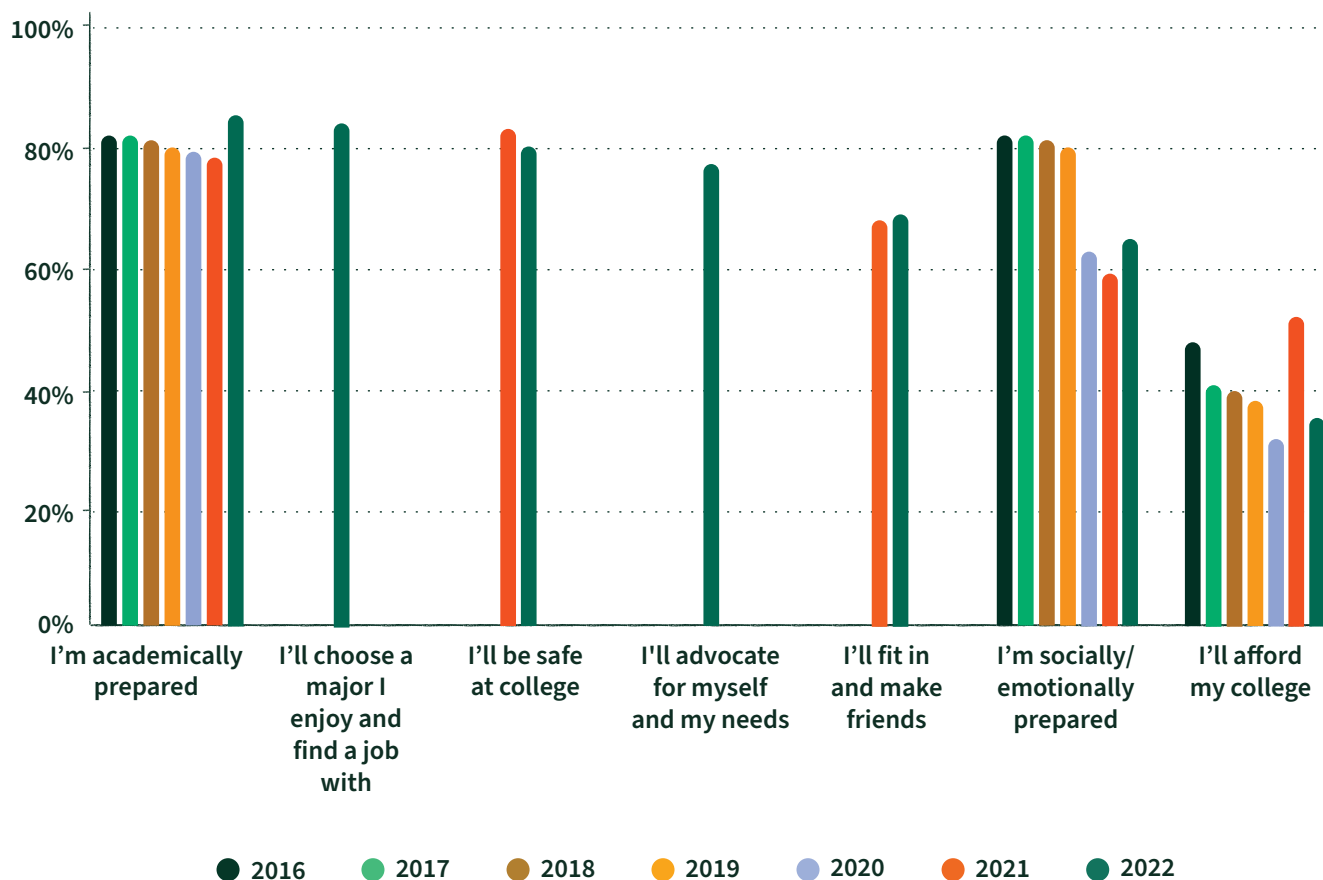
Underrepresented minorities were more likely to have counseling support at their school (62%) than their peers (55%).

Only 52% of students in the east north central and east south central census regions reported having a school counselor supporting them in their search, the lowest of any region. By state, Alaska (26%), West Virginia (33%), South Dakota (37%), Kansas (40%), Arizona (44%) , Nevada (45%), and Indiana (45%) reported the lowest rates of students receiving counseling support at their high schools. Students from Washington D.C. were most likely to report receiving support at school (93%).

Support in Their Search

Legend:
- My parents/guardians counseled me
- My high school counselor is also the college counselor
- My high school has dedicated college counselors
- No counseling support
- An older sibling counseled me
- Hired an independent college counselor
- Worked with a CBO

Confidence trend

X-axis categories: I'm academically prepared; I'll choose a major I enjoy and find a job with; I'll be safe at college; I'll advocate for myself and my needs; I'll fit in and make friends; I'm socially/emotionally prepared; I'll afford my college

Legend: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022

STUDENT CONFIDENCE

The majority of students this year expressed confidence in every question asked except for their ability to afford the college at which they are enrolling—only 35% said that they were.

Over 80% of students reported that they were confident that they are academically prepared, will be able to choose a major they enjoy and will find a job with, and will be safe at college.

The share of students reporting confidence in their academic preparation increased this year from 78% to 85%.

Student confidence that they will be socially and emotionally prepared for college rebounded to pre-pandemic levels with 65% saying that they were confident. This is still the second-least confident response.

Only 30% of low-income students reported confidence that they could afford the college they are enrolling in this fall. Those who only considered 2-year institutions were slightly more confident (32%). Receiving financial aid from the college did make a significant difference, 33% of those who did receive financial aid were confident they could afford college compared to 18% of those who did not.

Only 29% of first-generation students were confident they could afford college. Receiving aid from their college boosted their confidence to 31% compared to 21% of those who did not.

Confidence in affordability was highest amongst international students (42%) and those living in the Middle Atlantic census region (38%).

International students were the least confident that they would be safe while at college.

Vietnamese (68%), Chinese (71%), and Filipino (72%) students were the least confident that they would be safe at college.

Only 70% of students who identify as gender nonbinary and 68% of those who identified as other gendered reported that they felt safe going to college.

Only 65% of low-income students reported being confident they would fit in and make friends at college, compared to 73% of their peers.

Confidence that a student would fit in and make friends varied significantly by gender identity. Male respondents were 77% confident, female respondents were 67% confident, nonbinary respondents were 59% confident, and other gendered respondents were 51% confident.

With the exception of Indian students, Asian respondents were significantly less confident that they would fit in and make friends in college.

STUDENT PRICE SENSITIVITY

Price sensitivity has continued to increase rapidly. This year 81% of respondents reported that they eliminated colleges from consideration and did not apply because of the total cost, or "sticker price." This is up from 73% in 2021, 68% in 2020, and 56% pre-pandemic.

First-generation and low-income students were more price sensitive than their peers, especially at higher total costs. They were also more likely to say that they would only consider colleges whose total cost is under $10,000 per year.

Work and Loan Plans Over Time

● % Who plan to work while enrolled   ● % Who plan to take loans their first year
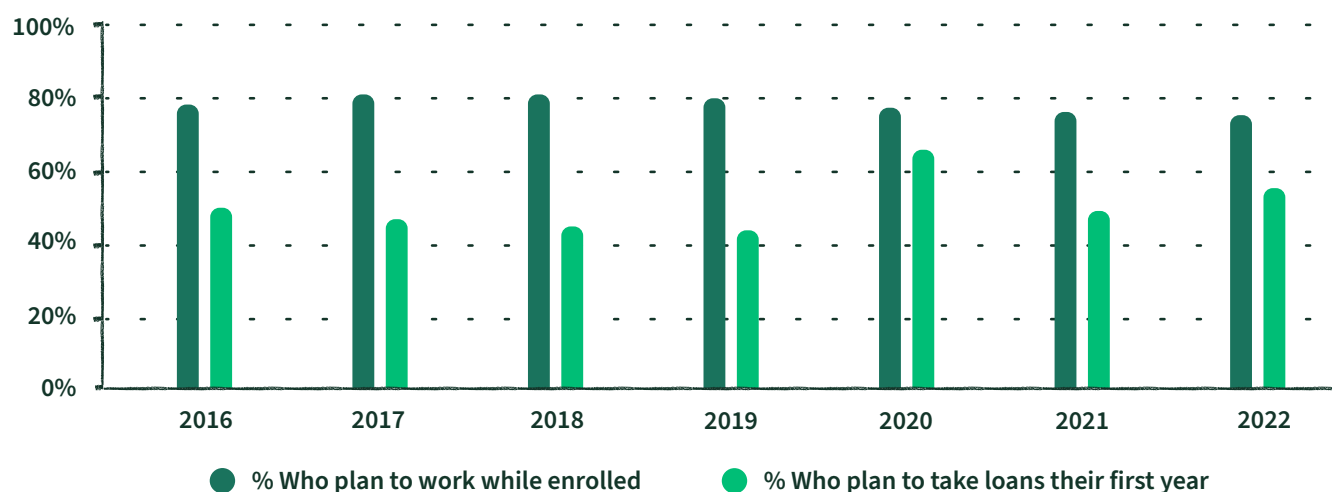
PRICING TABLE	Median in-state cost	% of students who considered this type who would also consider at this cost	Median out-of-state cost	% of students who considered this type who would also consider at this cost
2 YEAR PRIVATE	**$21,689**	**73%**	—	—
2 YEAR PUBLIC	**$8,267**	**100%**	**$12,127**	**88%**
4 YEAR PRIVATE FOR-PROFIT	**$24,792**	**89%**	—	—
4 YEAR PRIVATE NOT-FOR-PROFIT	**$35,369**	**79%**	—	—
4 YEAR PUBLIC	**$14,997**	**95%**	**$25,220**	**84%**

FINANCING THEIR EDUCATION

82% of enrolling students reported that they applied for outside scholarships and grants, and 2% said that they did not but their parents did it for them. Of those who did apply, 12% started during their junior year, 14% the summer before senior year, 46% during the fall semester of their senior year, and 28% waited until the spring of their senior year to start applying for scholarships.

Respondents in the lowest income quintile were, unfortunately, the least likely to report that they applied for scholarships.

First-generation students were also less likely to report that they applied for scholarships.

Almost all respondents reported that they filed a FAFSA to receive need-based aid. However, while 93% of all enrolling students said that they filed a FAFSA, only 90% of the neediest students did.

Just over one-third of students reported that they plan to take out loans their first year and another 36% said that they haven't decided yet.

Students who filed a FAFSA were also much more likely to say that they were planning to take on a loan—36% compared to only 20% of those who reported not filing a FAFSA. They were equally likely to have not decided yet.

As household income increased so did the likelihood that students reported they were planning to take on loans, especially higher loan amounts. For the lowest income students, 29% said that they were taking a loan. For the wealthiest students, it increased up to 39%.

Underrepresented minorities were less likely to report that they were taking on loans their first year.

Students who were not confident that they can afford the college at which they are enrolling were also more likely to be taking on loans and four times as likely to be taking on a loan of $20,000 or more in their first year.

Three-quarters of students said that they plan to work while enrolled in college and another 19% have not decided yet.

70% of students who were confident they can afford the college at which they are enrolling reported that they're planning to work, compared to 81% of students who are not confident.

While cost is often stated as a very important factor and a major concern, students who were accepted to at least two colleges didn't necessarily choose to enroll at the less expensive option. There were 13% of respondents who reported that they are enrolling at a college that was much more expensive than their other options, 18% are enrolling at a college that is more expensive, and only 36% are enrolling at a college which was less expensive than their other choices.

Students from high-income families were more likely to enroll in a college that was more expensive than their other options, but the lowest income students were less likely. Middle-income families were less likely to enroll at more expensive colleges.

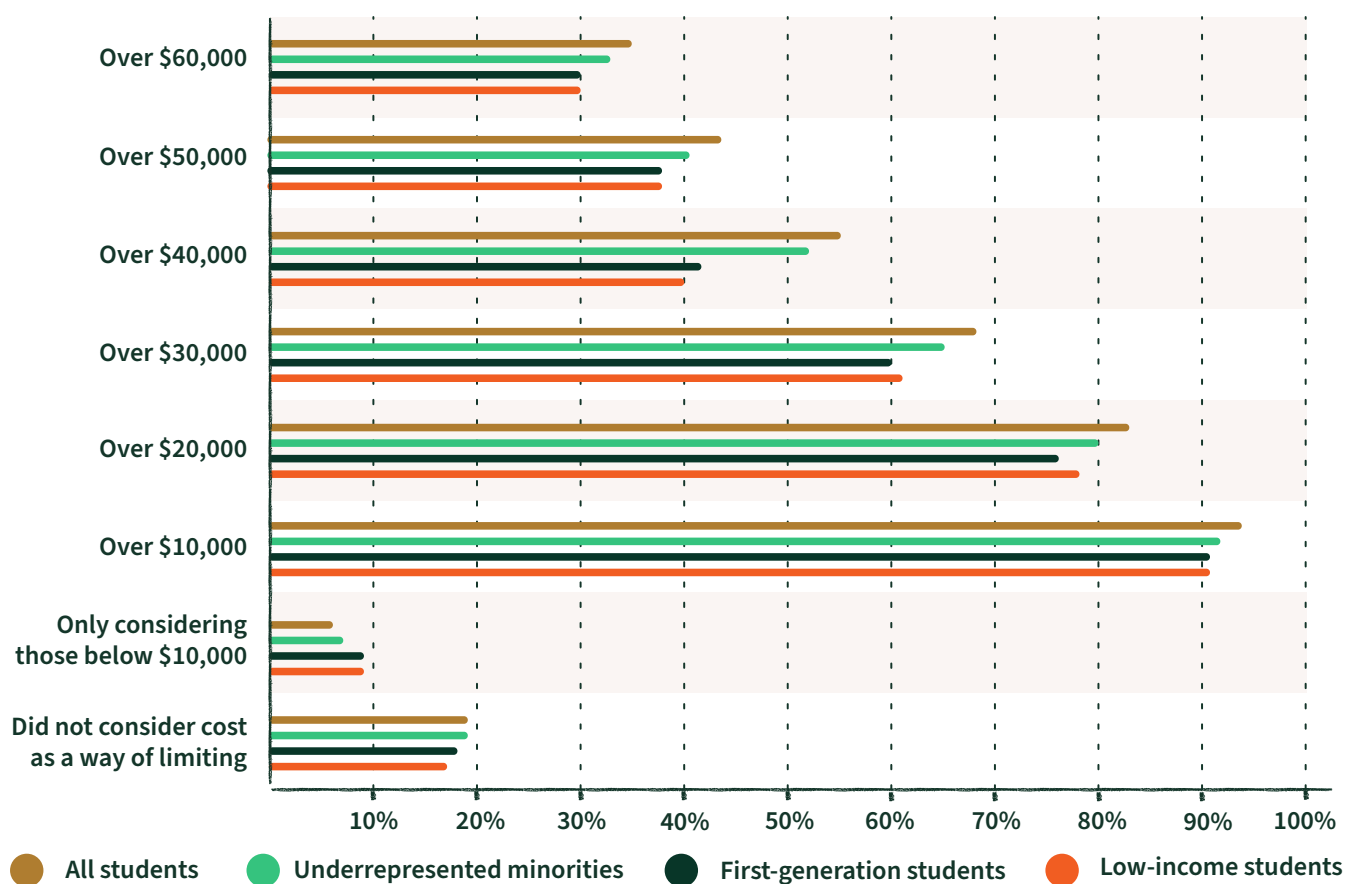First-generation college students were more likely to enroll at less expensive colleges.

Students who reported that they were not confident that they could afford the college they're enrolling at were also much more likely to report that they're enrolling at a college that is more expensive than their other options—38% compared to 25%.

74% of students reported receiving financial aid from the college they're attending. Merit aid was most common with 56% saying that they received it followed by 39% saying that they received need-based aid. Athletic and arts scholarships were much less common with 3% and 4% of respondents reporting that they received them respectively.

Only 58% of low-income students reported that they received aid from the college at which they're enrolling.
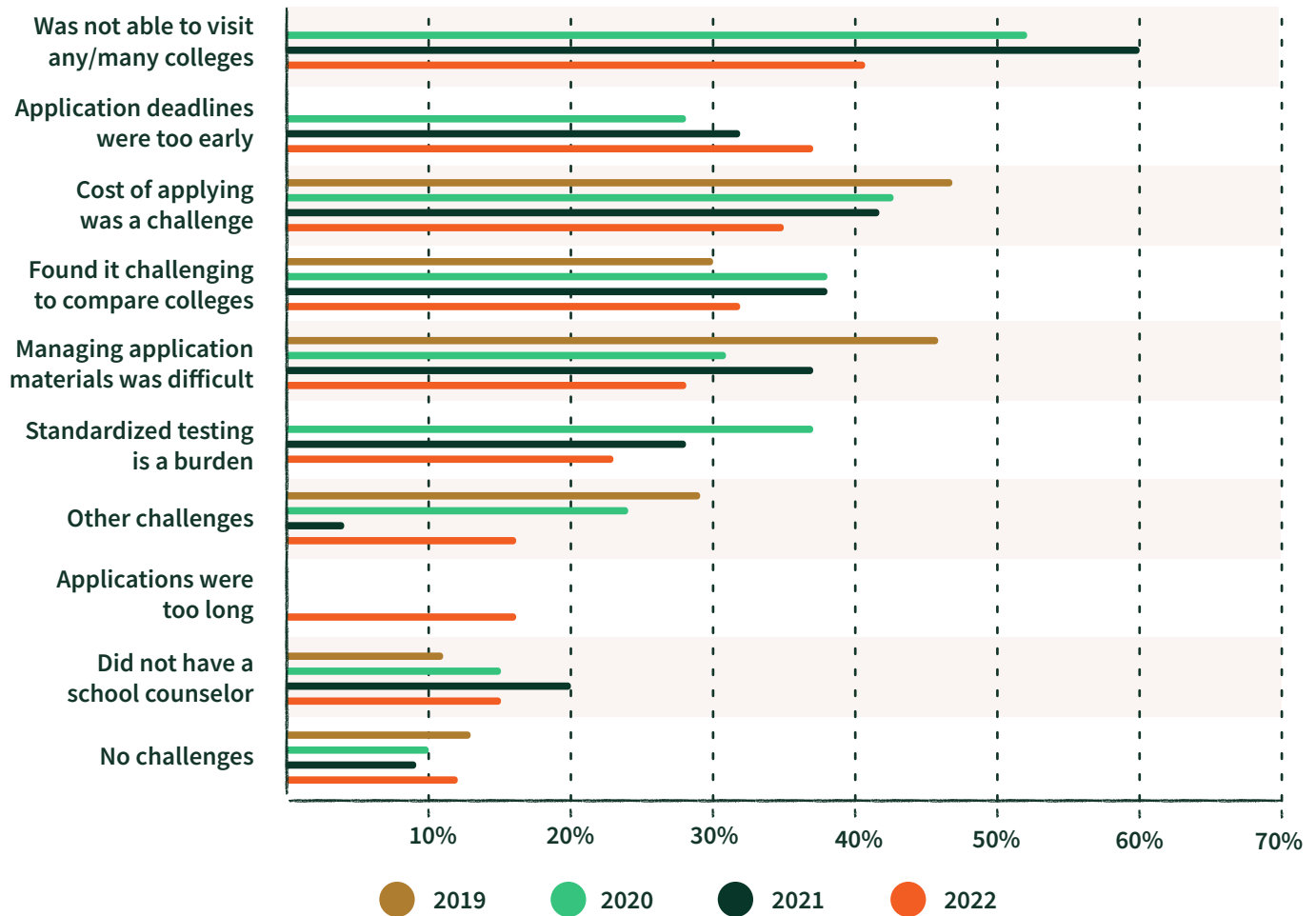
Price Sensitivity

Categories (top to bottom): Over $60,000, Over $50,000, Over $40,000, Over $30,000, Over $20,000, Over $10,000, Only considering those below $10,000, Did not consider cost as a way of limiting

Legend: All students, Underrepresented minorities, First-generation students, Low-income students

Student Loan Trends

Categories (top to bottom): None, Yes, <$10,000, Yes, $10,000-$19,999, Yes, $20,000-$29,999, Yes, > $30,000, Not decided

Legend: 2020, 2021, 2022

Student Challenges Over Time

Legend: 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022

CHALLENGES FACED BY STUDENTS

The amount of students feeling they were not able to visit any colleges dropped to the lowest level since the start of the pandemic. Visits was still the most common challenge students reported facing; 41% citing it as a challenge.

Early application deadlines continued to increase as a challenge for students as it jumped from 28% in 2020 to 32% in 2021 and finally to 37% this year.

Application fees continued to decline as a concern with 35% of students reporting it as a challenge. This could also be related to the sharp increase in students ruling out colleges based on the total cost, instead choosing to apply to colleges with lower or no fees.

As the share of students reporting that they weren't taking a standardized test increased, fewer reported submitting their scores to colleges, and now that more than two-thirds of colleges are not requiring test scores, we also saw a continued decrease in the percentage of students who reported standardized testing was a challenge for them.

There were 16% of respondents who said that applications were too long, an issue that 22% of students also said prevented them from submitting or completing applications.

Fewer students reported that managing application materials was a challenge, a decline to 28% from 46% in 2019.

The New Normal

STUDENT BEHAVIORAL DATA

Over 27 million students and parents use Niche annually and half of college-bound seniors create a profile to research, discover, and apply to colleges.

The search timeline flattened—the class of 2022 started engaging on Niche earlier and pushed their search later than prior classes. There were increases in searchers starting freshman and sophomore years as well as continuing the search into spring of senior year and decreases in the share of engagement in the summer before senior year and during the fall semester of senior year.

75% of all colleges added to high-achieving white students' lists occurred by October of their senior year, but this didn't happen until December for their high-achieving African American and Hispanic peers.

White students were the least likely to have started their search by the end of their sophomore year and Asian students were the most likely. This shifted by the end of the summer before senior year with the majority of Asian students having already built their list and underrepresented minorities now lagging behind their peers. That trend continued and nearly a quarter of underrepresented students began adding colleges to their list during the spring of their senior year. Compared to survey results, fewer students said that they started actively researching during the spring of their senior year, but there was a lag between the research and starting to build their list of colleges to apply to and visit.

The share of logins was significantly higher April through June of their sophomore year (2020) compared to prior classes. We saw similar behaviors across the classes of 2021 and 2020, suggesting that lockdown provided more time to start their college search earlier. This does not, however, explain the extension of the search later into the spring of their senior year.
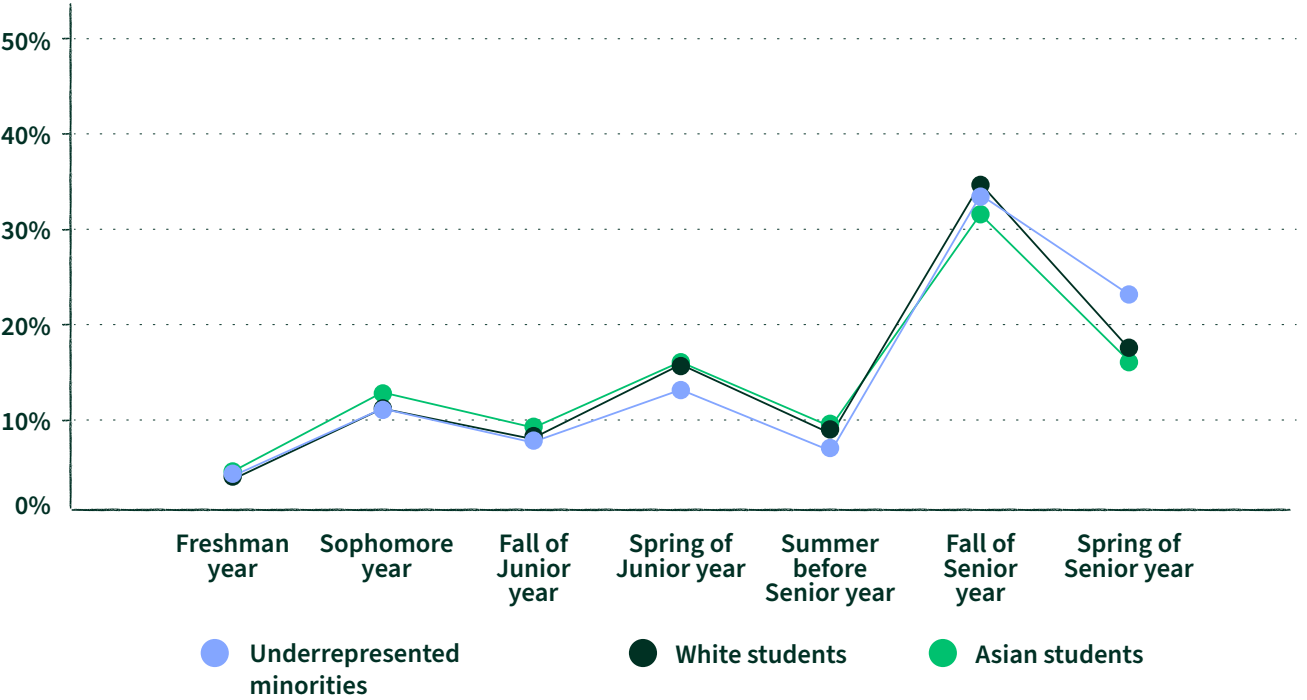
New in this year's Senior Enrollment Survey is student behavioral data on the Niche platform.

Share of Total Logins by Class

Legend: ● 2022 ● 2018-2021
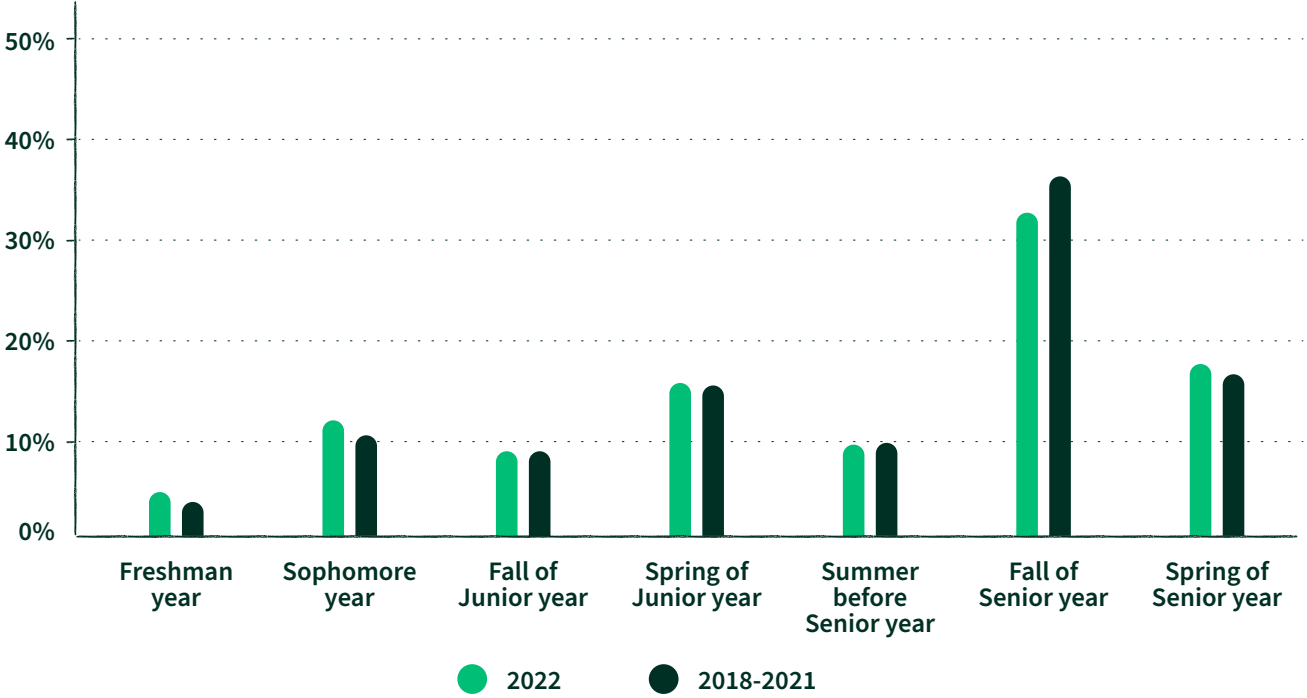
Search Engagement by Race or Ethnicity

Legend: ● Underrepresented minorities ● White students ● Asian students