



INSIGHT PAPER

# **A Guide to the Direct-Admission Landscape**

What Radical Streamlining of Students' Paths to Matriculation  
Means for Enrollment Leaders

# Enroll360

Project Director

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# Executive Summary

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## The Report in 10 Conclusions

- Direct admission is entering a new era**

1 Direct admission, in its present incarnation, shows important continuities with the past (including states playing a leading role) but is also taking on new characteristics—ones that promise to increase its beneficial impact on students and on your enrollment outcomes. New non-state initiatives are playing an important part in this development.

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- Direct admission is becoming an increasingly important way to compete for students**

2 Schools adopting DA enjoy a competitive advantage insofar as it enables them to better engage students during the recruitment process, relative to competitors who are not doing DA or are doing an inferior version of it. Maintaining that competitive edge as DA becomes more widespread will depend on continued innovation in your DA approach.

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- “Direct admission” is used to refer to different things**

3 The term “direct admission” is commonly applied to a variety of practices that differ in important ways. For this reason, it is important to start related conversations with clarification about which version of it you’re talking about, especially when thinking through whether or not your institution will embrace direct admission.

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- Fully realized direct admission has two animating principles**

4 The most effective DA approaches are based on two key elements: 1) proactively informing students that they qualify for admission, and 2) reducing to an absolute minimum steps that students must take to receive and confirm admission offers (which includes ensuring that information they are required to submit is easy for them to provide).

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- Direct admission is a clear win for students**

5 While it remains uncertain how big an impact DA will ultimately have on colleges, it is a clear plus for students — because of its potential to convince more of them that they are, in fact, “college material” and because it minimizes the very considerable stress associated with conventional application processes.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

**6 Direct admission can expand the pool of college-goers**  
While evidence regarding the ability of direct admission to boost enrollment is mixed, it has consistently been shown to increase the number of students who are admitted to colleges (especially underrepresented students).

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**7 Direct admission could be more or less of an adjustment for you**  
For institutions that already admit students mostly on the basis of self-reported HS GPA and whose applications are very simple, the type, amount, and timing of work performed by admissions teams is unlikely to change radically under DA. For schools with more complex applicant-vetting processes, direct admission will be a bigger adjustment.

---

**8 Direct admission has relevance across school segments**  
While direct admission will find the broadest application among the nation's least selective institutions, there are compelling use cases for it at all levels of selectivity, even if those use cases might ultimately apply to smaller portions of an institution's admit pool (e.g., to students with especially high academic ability).

---

**9 Effective recruitment marketing remains important under direct admission**  
All the things that recruitment marketing helps you do more effectively at present remain pertinent under DA. That includes identifying students to recruit, building affinity with them, getting your offers in front of students, framing those offers in terms that appeal to them, building competitive aid awards into your offers, and maximizing yield.

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**10 Direct admission has unrealized potential for improving college access**  
DA disproportionately benefits underrepresented students, having been shown to significantly boost the rates at which they apply to college. More consistently translating that benefit into higher enrollment will depend on making college more affordable for these populations.

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# Direct-Admission Basics

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SECTION

1

# A Fuzzy Term

## No settled definition

One source of confusion around direct admission is the fact that the term is used to describe things that are very different, and a standard definition has yet to emerge.

For this reason, it is important to start related conversations with clarification about which version of it you're talking about, especially when thinking through whether or not your institution will embrace direct admission.

## Coming clarity

Some consensus does finally seem to be emerging about what the term means. Or, at the very least, we can identify a set of related practices it tends to be associated with—practices that share a common aim of making it easier for more students to get admitted.

The pages that follow sketch out that vision in greater detail.

## Some of the Very Different Things That Get Called "Direct Admission"

<b>Guaranteed-admission plans</b>	States guarantee any student meeting eligibility criteria admission to a public college or university
<b>Proactive admission</b>	Colleges reach out to students with offers of admission before they apply
<b>Straight-to-program admissions</b>	Students are admitted directly to particular academic programs, bypassing the general admissions process
<b>Stripped-down applications</b>	Ultra-streamlined forms that minimize information students must provide to get an admit offer
<b>Automated admission</b>	Admit offers are generated automatically for any student whose self-reported GPA/test score meets a minimum threshold
<b>Talent-recruitment programs</b>	Colleges proactively offer admission to students with particular talents (e.g., student athletes)

Source: EAB research and analysis.



# “Direct Admission,” as Addressed in This Report

## Animating principles

To keep from getting lost in the weeds, it is helpful to understand that the most effective direct admission programs are built on a combination of two basic premises: proactively reassuring students regarding their admissibility, and reducing to an absolute minimum the steps students must take to receive and confirm offers of admission.

## Wording matters

The way in which direct-admission programs inform students of their eligibility is a conspicuous point of difference between them, with some simply notifying students that they meet an institution’s admit criteria and others going so far as telling students they are already admitted. (This claim may be more or less accurate depending on the school’s direct admission approach; some schools require each student to complete a traditional application, after the admit offer has been made, in order to accept their offer and in order to be officially admitted.)

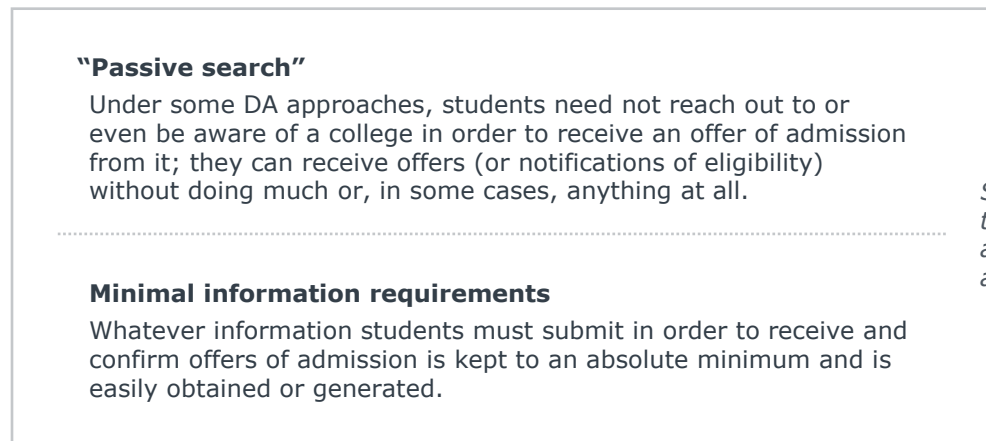
## Two Defining Features of Fully Developed Direct-Admit Approaches

### Proactive assurance



Different ways of framing the message have varying levels of impact (and accuracy)

### Radical streamlining



# How Direct Admission Is Operationalized

## An interpretive framework

Regardless of the many and varied forms that direct admission programs take, all have the four key components described on the right. Taken together, these elements provide a helpful framework for analyzing any given direct-admission approach you might be considering.

## Other things to keep in mind

Beyond the four essential features shown on the right, direct-admission programs can vary in important respects.

One is the degree to which they leverage whatever effort students must invest in the process—for example, by making a single profile they complete available to many recruiting colleges and universities.

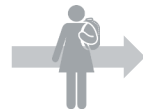
Another is the extent to which offers of admission are communicated to students proactively. The most effective approaches make it so that a student need not take any action to learn that they qualify for admission.

## Four Key Components of Direct-Admit Programs



### Criteria for student eligibility

All DA programs have at their heart a set of criteria used to identify eligible students. In the most effective programs, these criteria are simple, clear, and few in number (as this makes it maximally easy for students to submit all required information).



### A process for identifying eligible candidates

Some DA programs require students to provide the information used to determine their eligibility. Other approaches obtain the necessary information without having to involve students—for example, some programs use state-managed repositories of academic records to determine student eligibility (having first given students the chance to opt out).



### An approach to student notification

The most hands-off direct admission programs rely on students to find out about the program and to determine whether they qualify. More hands-on approaches use sophisticated communication flows to ensure that students actually see admit offers and related information.



### A process students follow to accept offers

Direct-admit programs vary in terms of steps they require students to take after an offer has been made. Some require students to fill out the institution's standard application or an abbreviated version of it, even though the admit offer has already been made, in order to be officially admitted.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

# How Direct Admission Is Meant to Benefit Students

## Lots to like

While much of this report focuses on how direct admission impacts colleges and universities, it is best understood, first and foremost, as a way to help students; it is they who ultimately benefit most clearly from it.

## Benefit beyond admission

The material at right describes the many ways in which that is true.

While direct admission may be thought of, narrowly, as a way to maximize the odds of students getting admitted to a college or university, it helps students in other ways as well.

One of the more compelling is positively impacting student mental health, which is a critical concern given the crisis levels that related problems have reached among today's youth. More than half of surveyed students rank applying to college as the most stressful thing they have experienced in their academic life. It is easy to imagine how big a difference eliminating the most onerous of tasks related to it, as direct admission does, would make to students' well-being.



## A Major Win on Many Fronts

✓	<p><b>Increased odds of receiving an admit offer</b></p> <p>Direct-admission programs enable students to receive offers without having to do much or, in some cases, anything at all</p>
✓	<p><b>Definitive reassurance on eligibility</b></p> <p>Direct admission lays to rest concerns students might have about whether they could get into college or if they will be able to succeed after enrolling</p>
✓	<p><b>Reduction in stress</b></p> <p>DA programs' streamlining eliminates application components that students find most daunting, such as personal essays and letters of recommendation</p>
✓	<p><b>Lessened research burden</b></p> <p>Students don't need to know that a school exists in order to receive an admit offer from it</p>
✓	<p><b>A morale boost</b></p> <p>Students do not get rejections, as they only hear from schools that want them</p>
✓	<p><b>Potential to reduce undermatching</b></p> <p>Because students hear from more participating colleges whose eligibility criteria they meet, the odds of them missing great schools they could get into is reduced</p>
✓	<p><b>Reassurance on affordability</b></p> <p>Direct-admission offers that tell students how much financial aid they will receive can help address students' concerns about affordability</p>

Source: EAB research and analysis.

# How Direct Admission Promises to Benefit Colleges

## An open question

While direct admission has many obvious benefits for students, how large a net impact it will ultimately have on colleges and universities is less clear.

## Two main areas of focus

While widespread adoption of direct admission could, in theory, increase college-going rates and thereby also increase the size of colleges' pools of prospective students, it is not clear that the related benefits would extend beyond particular school segments. One reason is that the demographics that benefit most from direct admission are also those least able to pay for a four-year college education.

Another theoretical benefit for schools is the potential for direct admission to increase an institution's market share by enabling it to more effectively engage prospective students relative to its non-DA competitors. While this benefit is likely very real, little stands in the way of other schools adopting direct admission; lasting competitive advantage will therefore depend on schools continuing to innovate in their direct-admission approach.

## Two Main Benefits



### A larger overall prospect pool

Students who traditionally might not have considered themselves "college material" change their minds after receiving a proactive admit offer, and those who historically would have dropped out of the application process due to its complexity now become admits. Both factors could increase the pool of college-goers.

A mitigating factor in this regard is that the demographics that benefit most from direct admission are the same ones that most struggle to afford a four-year education and are, therefore, least likely to enroll.



### Another way to compete for students

Institutions issuing direct-admission offers are better able to capture student attention, sustain student engagement, and, therefore, convert students. Additionally, students are less likely to complete applications of competing institutions that don't offer direct admission.

The degree to which these factors are competitive advantages will decrease as direct admission becomes widespread.

## Direct Admission May Become "Mandatory" for Many Institutions



Colleges will have little choice but to adopt direct admission once their competitors do

Source: EAB research and analysis.

# Demonstrated Impact, Unrealized Promise

## Examining DA's track record

Although direct admission only recently started grabbing headlines in a big way, there have been working examples of it in the field for years—for the most part, state-run guaranteed-admission programs.

These programs, while sometimes different in important respects from newer non-state DA initiatives, can still teach us important things about the impact direct admission has on students and colleges. Findings from related studies are shown on the right.

## A mixed picture

As can be seen, results are mixed. While direct admission definitely did move the dial on enrollment in Idaho after it rolled out its guaranteed admission program, the benefit to four-year institutions was small, and it had no impact on enrollment among Pell-eligible students.

Findings from a large randomized trial of direct admission were similarly equivocal, showing increases in the application rate but no change in likelihood of students enrolling.

## A Retrospective Study of the State of Idaho's Program



**+4–8%**

Increase in first-time undergraduate enrollments

**+8–15%**

Increase in in-state undergraduate enrollments

- Enrollment gains mostly benefited **2-year, open-access** institutions
- Minimal to no impact on enrollment of **Pell-eligible** students

## A Randomized Control Trial Via the Common App



32,000 students, not limited to any particular demographics, randomized to either receive a DA offer and application-fee waiver or business-as-usual admit processes. Ten recruiting colleges and universities participated in the trial.



**+2.7%**

Percentage point-increase in proportion of students submitting a college application<sup>1</sup>

**+2x**

Higher likelihood of students applying to schools offering DA versus schools not offering it

**0%**

Change in likelihood of students enrolling

1) A 12% proportional increase over the baseline rate.

Source: Taylor K. Odle and Jennifer A. Delaney, "Experimental Evidence on 'Direct Admissions' from Four States"; EAB research and analysis.

# Latent Potential for Underrepresented Students

## An application boost

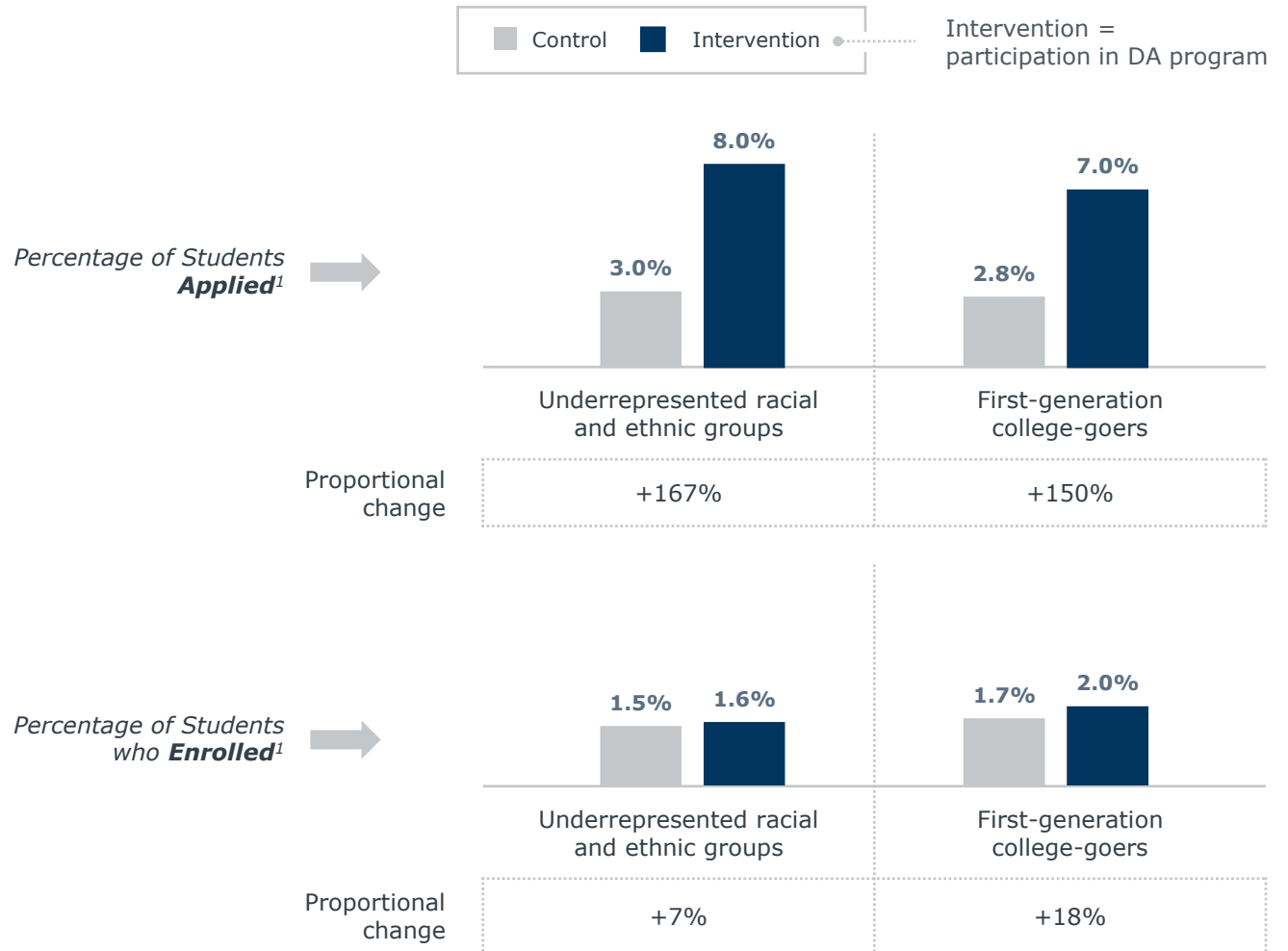
Direct admission appears to be most impactful for underrepresented students.

As shown in the data on the right, which comes from the same 30,000-student Common App trial shown on the preceding page, direct admission more than doubled the rate at which students from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, as well as first-generation college-goers, applied to college. This is a clear reflection of the fact that, as Melanie Heath of the Lumina Foundation has put it, “complicated systems are for those with the time, support, and resources to figure them out.”

## A remaining financial barrier

Also notable, however, is the fact that the ultimate downstream benefit for those students, in terms of the numbers who ended up enrolling, was far smaller—which is widely believed to reflect a problem of affordability. Unlocking the full potential of direct admission for underrepresented students will depend on solving this challenge.

## Can We Better Capitalize on DA’s Greatly Increased Application Rates?



1) This is specifically for direct-admit schools. “Applying” in the intervention group means submitting an application in response to a direct-admit notification.

Source: Taylor K. Odle and Jennifer A. Delaney, “Experimental Evidence on ‘Direct Admissions’ from Four States;” EAB research and analysis.

# Early Days for the “New Direct Admission”

## A recent inflection point

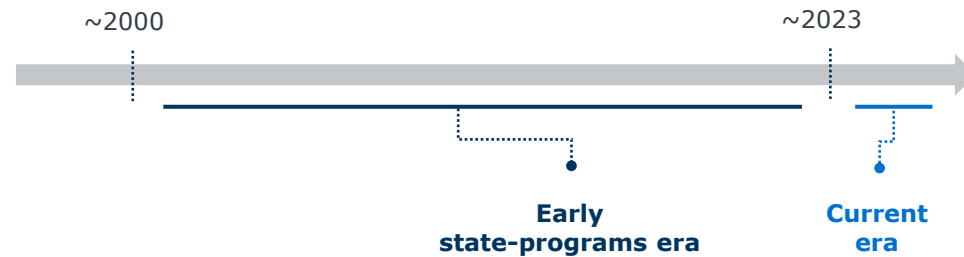
Sometime around 2023, higher education began to see rapid and widespread change in the direct-admission landscape, as described in the graphic on the right—change that has been profound enough to suggest that this important admissions approach has entered a new era.

## How much will change?

Direct admission, in its latest incarnation, shows important continuities with the past (including states playing a leading role) but is also taking on new and unfamiliar characteristics—ones that may well increase its beneficial impact on admissions practice and enrollment outcomes.

While it is hard, in these early days of the new direct admission, to weigh in with confidence on its impact and associated best practices, this report will sketch out some likely answers based on the best available information and on some informed speculation.

## A Rough Timeline of Direct Admission’s Recent History



	Early state-programs era	Current era
Total number of DA programs	Few	Many
Programs sponsored by non-state organizations	Few	Many
Programs that span multiple states	Few	Many
Programs open to private institutions	Few	Many
Integration with college-search platforms <sup>1</sup>	None	Extensive
Programs supporting true proactive admit offers	No	Yes
Program proliferation	Slow	Rapid
Market conditions	Neutral	Favorable
Pace of innovation	Slow	Rapid

1) E.g., Apply, Niche.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

# State-Run Direct-Admission Programs

## A long history

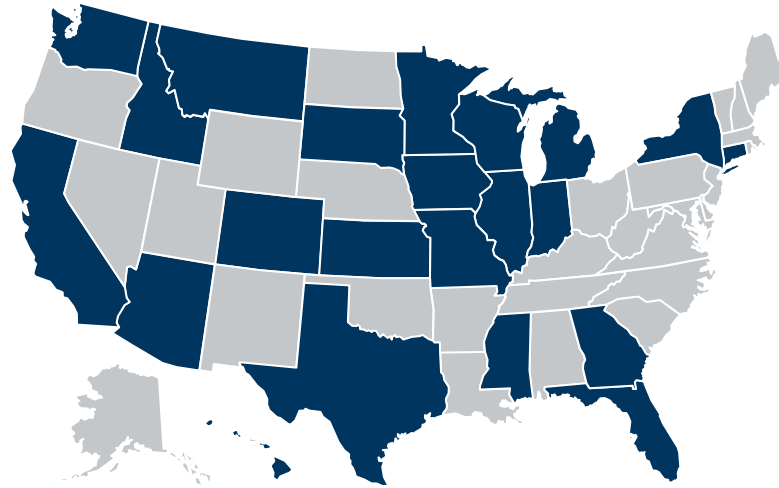
As noted earlier, state governments and offices of higher education were pioneers of direct-admission practices such as guaranteed admission programs and percent plans. Idaho’s program, especially well known due to high-profile research published on its outcomes (see page 13), was established in 2016, and initiatives in Texas and Florida have been in place for more than two decades.

## A recent surge in interest

Interest in such initiatives has spiked lately, with more than a quarter of existing state direct-admission programs having been founded in the past 12 months.

Note that all of these programs do not necessarily meet both direct admission criteria outlined earlier in this report—i.e., proactively notifying students of eligibility and radically streamlining the application. Collectively, they are perhaps better described as “DA or DA-adjacent” approaches. See “partial direct admission” page 41.

## States with Direct-Admission Programs



■ Have a DA program

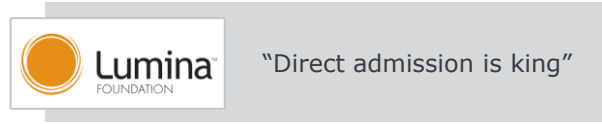
## A Recent Surge in Adoption

**27%**  
Of programs started in the past 12 months

## Recent Lumina-Foundation Grants for DA-Related Projects

### Representative Examples

<b>\$750K</b>	Illinois Board of Higher Education	A project to directly admit community college transfer students and high school seniors statewide to Illinois universities
<b>\$750K</b>	Northern Arizona University	A project to expand the school’s universal admissions program with nine Arizona community college districts
<b>\$150K</b>	Washington Student Achievement Council	A project for a proactive admissions process integrating financial aid eligibility



Source: EAB research and analysis; Melanie Heath, "The Great Admissions Redesign: Three things we learned when we asked the nation to redo college admissions," The Lumina Foundation, February 29, 2024.



## A simple idea...



Students meeting eligibility criteria are guaranteed admission to state colleges and universities

## ...with infinite permutations

*Some Important Ways in Which State-Sponsored Direct-Admission Programs Vary*

Student-eligibility criteria	On what criteria is eligibility based?
	Can schools set their own eligibility thresholds?
Participating institutions	Do all state schools participate?
	Can private institutions participate?
Communications	Are students notified of their eligibility?
	Who notifies students of their eligibility?
	Are students told which schools they qualify for?
Application policy	Do qualifying students still need to fill out an application?
	Is the application the same for qualifying and nonqualifying students?

Examples seen in the field:

- Student has GPA  $\geq$  3.0 or minimum index score (based on SAT math and reading score multiplied by GPA)
- Minimum index score based on student's ACT composite score, high school GPA, and the number of high school courses completed in core subject areas
- Student graduated in top 10% of their class or showed a distinguished level of achievement in designated college prep programs or satisfied college readiness benchmarks on the ACT/SAT

Variations include high schools, state boards of higher education, and recruiting colleges

For most state-run programs, the answer is "yes"

Source: Jessica Callahan, "States with Automatic or Guaranteed College Admissions Policies," Connecticut Office of Legislative Research, March 3, 2021; EAB research and analysis.

# Non-State Direct-Admission Programs

## A steep growth curve

While the last 12 months saw a big jump in the number state-sponsored direct-admission programs nationally, recent years have also seen rapidly growing interest in privately managed initiatives.

Commonly sponsored by application- and college-search-aggregator platforms, the most prominent of these private initiatives saw the number of participating colleges grow by 85%, in aggregate, from 2023 to 2024.

## A positive feedback loop




What does the near future hold?

It is hard to imagine the trend reversing; rather, a snowball effect seems more likely. Schools whose competitors have implemented direct admission will have no choice but to do the same, creating a self-reinforcing process that will pull in ever more institutions.


This seems especially likely given that non-state initiatives more often develop the two key elements of fully realized direct-admit programs referenced earlier in this piece—proactive notification and radical streamlining—relative to state programs.

## Number of Colleges Participating in Non-State DA Programs

Selected Platforms, Entering Class Year 2023 vs. 2024

		2023	2024	% change
 EAB	Enroll360 Match <sup>1</sup>	125	164	+31%
 common app	Common App DA	14	70	+400%
 NICHE	Niche DA	24	68	+183%

**85%**  
aggregate growth rate  
across the three platforms



# >400,000<sup>1</sup>

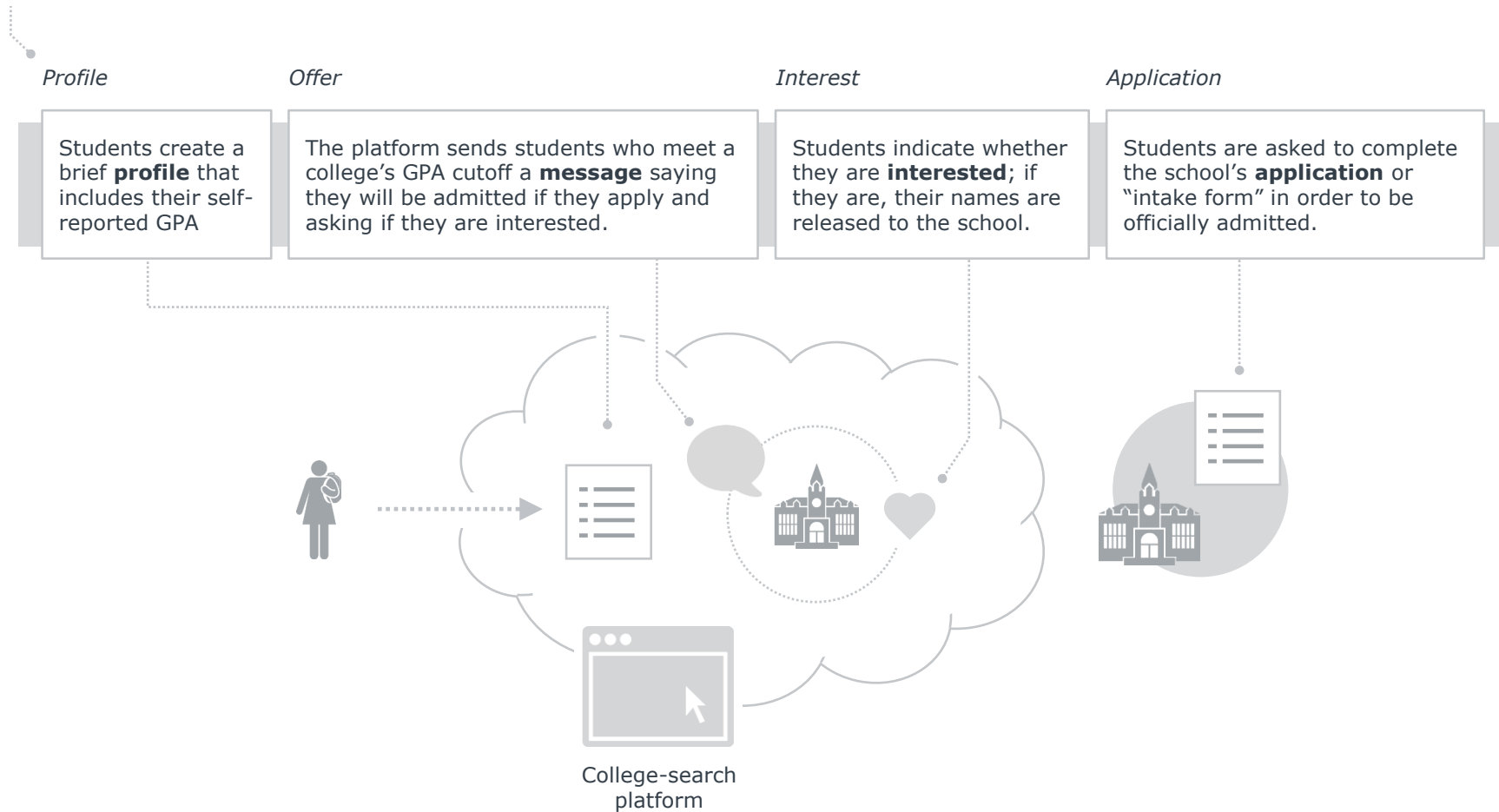
Students received direct-admit offers via a non-state DA program for entering class 2024

1) This figure almost certainly understates the true number significantly, as it accounts for activity on just one of the non-state platforms and does not include direct-admit offers made after October 2023.

Source: EAB research and analysis. Emma Whitford, "Hundreds Of Colleges Now Offer Automatic Admission To Students," *Forbes*, November 2, 2023; Michael T. Nietzel, "Direct Admissions: How Students Can Be Accepted To College Without Ever Applying," *Forbes*, November 25, 2022.

## A Generic Example of a Non-State Direct-Admit Platform

Some approaches require a slightly more detailed profile up front (e.g., including a transcript), which doubles as an application—i.e., it provides all the information needed to officially admit a student



Source: EAB research and analysis.

# College-Run Direct-Admission Initiatives

## A DIY approach

While most existing direct admission programs are managed by third parties, such as state offices of higher education or student-facing college-search sites, some schools are piloting their own versions of it.

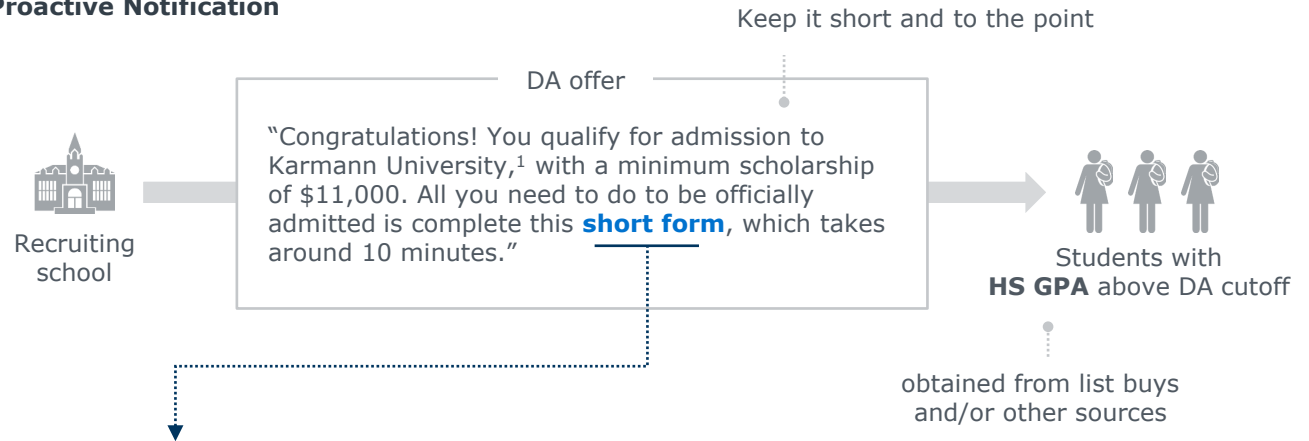
As illustrated on the right, the basic idea is that a school sends proactive notices of eligibility directly to students whom they have deemed admissible—based, for example, on GPA and/or test-score information acquired from sources such as College Board and Encoura.

## In its infancy

Why is DIY direct admission not more widespread? Part of the explanation probably lies in the fact that the higher education community's intense and widespread interest in direct admission is a relatively recent phenomenon—i.e., it is possible that many schools for which it might be a good fit have simply not yet gotten around to it.

## Two Key Components of College-Run Direct-Admission Programs

### Proactive Notification



### Radically abbreviated "application"

Mandatory fields	Optional fields
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Name</li> <li>Birthdate</li> <li>Email address</li> <li>Mobile phone number</li> <li>Mailing address</li> <li>Desired entry term</li> <li>Anticipated major</li> <li>Gender</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Citizenship</li> <li>Military service history: self</li> <li>Military service history: family</li> <li>First-gen status</li> <li>History of higher ed attendance</li> <li>History of disciplinary action</li> <li>Criminal history</li> <li><b>Upload unofficial transcript</b></li> <li>Ethnicity</li> <li>SSN</li> <li>Interest in honors college</li> <li>Housing plans</li> <li>Parent contact info</li> <li>Parent education level</li> <li>Name of high school</li> <li>Anticipated graduation date</li> </ul>

Some approaches give students the option to do this later

1) A hypothetical institution.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

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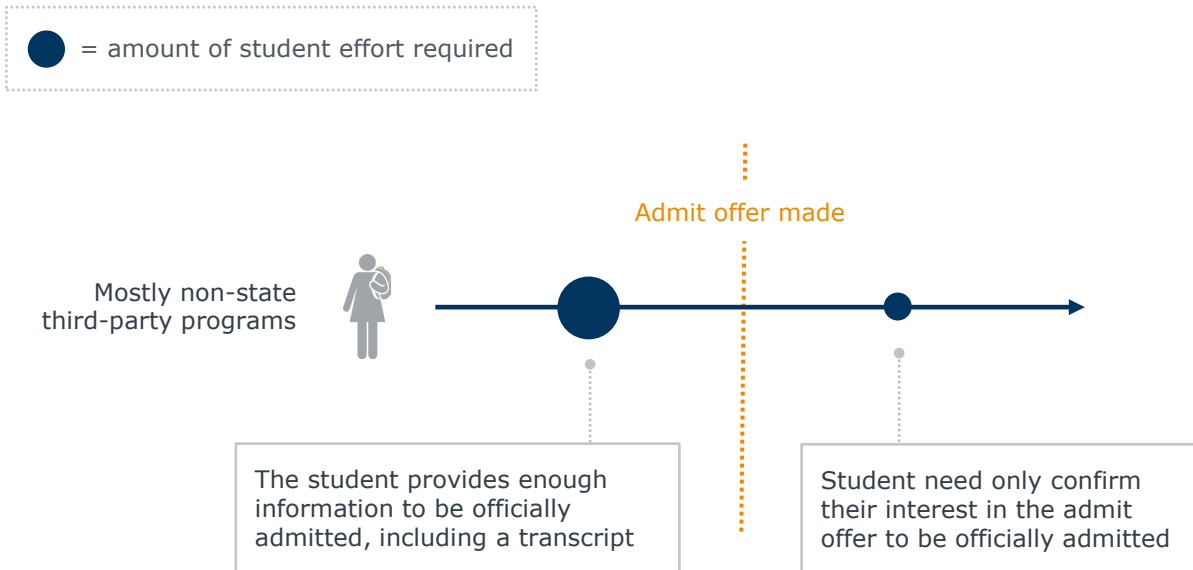
# Front-Loaded Versus Back-Loaded Programs

## How Much Student Effort Is Required and at Which Points in the Process?

Direct-admission programs seen in the field vary in several important respects, including how much information they require on a student before making a determination regarding their admissibility; when and how that information is gathered; the number and difficulty of actions students must take in order to receive and confirm offers; and the point in the process at which a student is notified of their eligibility for admission. These various parameters are illustrated in the diagrams on this and the facing pages, which describe several prevalent models of direct admission, within two main categories: front-loaded programs and back-loaded programs.

### Front-Loaded Direct-Admit Approaches

*Greatest Student Effort Required Prior to Admit Offer*



Differs from traditional admission insofar as 1) the information students must provide is far less than for a conventional application, 2) students need to submit the information only once to be offered admission to multiple schools, 3) students need not be aware of a school in order to receive an offer from it, and 4) students only receive offers, not rejections.

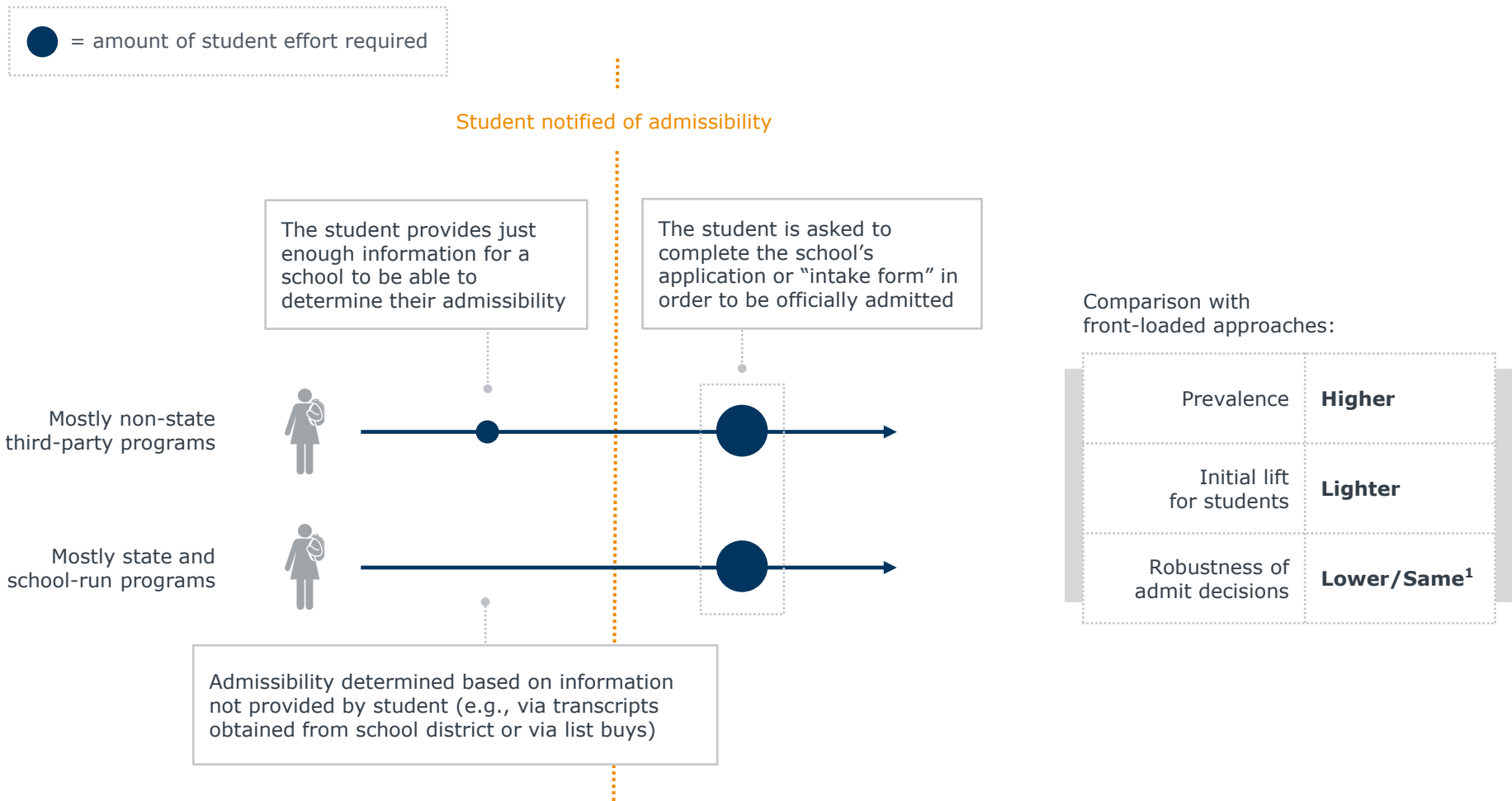
Comparison with back-loaded approaches:

Prevalence	<b>Lower</b>
Initial lift for students	<b>Heavier</b>
Robustness of admit decisions	<b>Higher/Same<sup>1</sup></b>

1) Higher relative to back-loaded approaches that do not provide access to student academic records before admissibility is determined, same for those that do.

## Back-Loaded Direct-Admit Approaches

*Greatest Student Effort Required After Notification of Admissibility*



1) Lower for programs that do not provide access to student academic records before admissibility is determined, same for those that do.

# A Note on Aid Awards Within Direct-Admit Offers

## Cost concerns

While complaints about the high cost and poor value of college have never been absent from the headlines for long, such messaging has become more relentless than ever.

Furthermore, students seem to be acting on their related doubts to a level not seen before; the rate at which students are opting out of higher education has reached historic highs, and such trends are no longer limited to the lowest-income demographics.

Couple this with the often limited understanding students have of the difference between sticker price and what they'll actually pay and the urgent need for related messaging from your end becomes clear.

## A compulsory communication

For the reasons mentioned above, letting students know how much grant aid they'll get should be a mandatory part of your DA-offer communications.

## Various Approaches Possible

Least impactful



Most impactful

No information on aid award		Few schools will choose to entirely omit financial aid award estimates from their DA offers. Given how spooked many students remain by institutions' sticker price, the stakes are simply too high to leave the matter unaddressed at this pivotal point in communication with prospective students.
Merit aid only	Minimum	If you base merit aid on students' HS GPA and you are worried about that GPA potentially changing (e.g., after being normalizing once a students' full academic record is received), you may want to frame the amount of merit aid you promise as a minimum they can expect to receive rather than an exact amount. This approach has the obvious drawback of understating the amount most students can expect to receive.
	Exact amount	If you base merit aid on students' HS GPA and are confident that the GPAs you have for them will not change significantly (see above), you can tell them exactly how much they will receive. This approach addresses the problem of understating aid awards associated with the "minimum" approach.
Total award package		Any school could, in theory, give students a fairly accurate estimate of their total aid award (and, therefore, net cost of attendance), including public grant money, based on analyses of student data from consumer databases and/or other sources.

Source: EAB research and analysis.



# A Note on Direct Admission for International-Student Recruitment

## A segment-focused approach

As noted elsewhere in this report, schools that choose not to apply direct admission broadly across their prospect pool may still find it to be a good fit for particular segments of students they are trying to recruit. Once such segment with an established DA history is international students; this category of students was, in fact, the first to be recruited in significant numbers by US colleges and universities via direct admission (outside of state-sponsored programs).

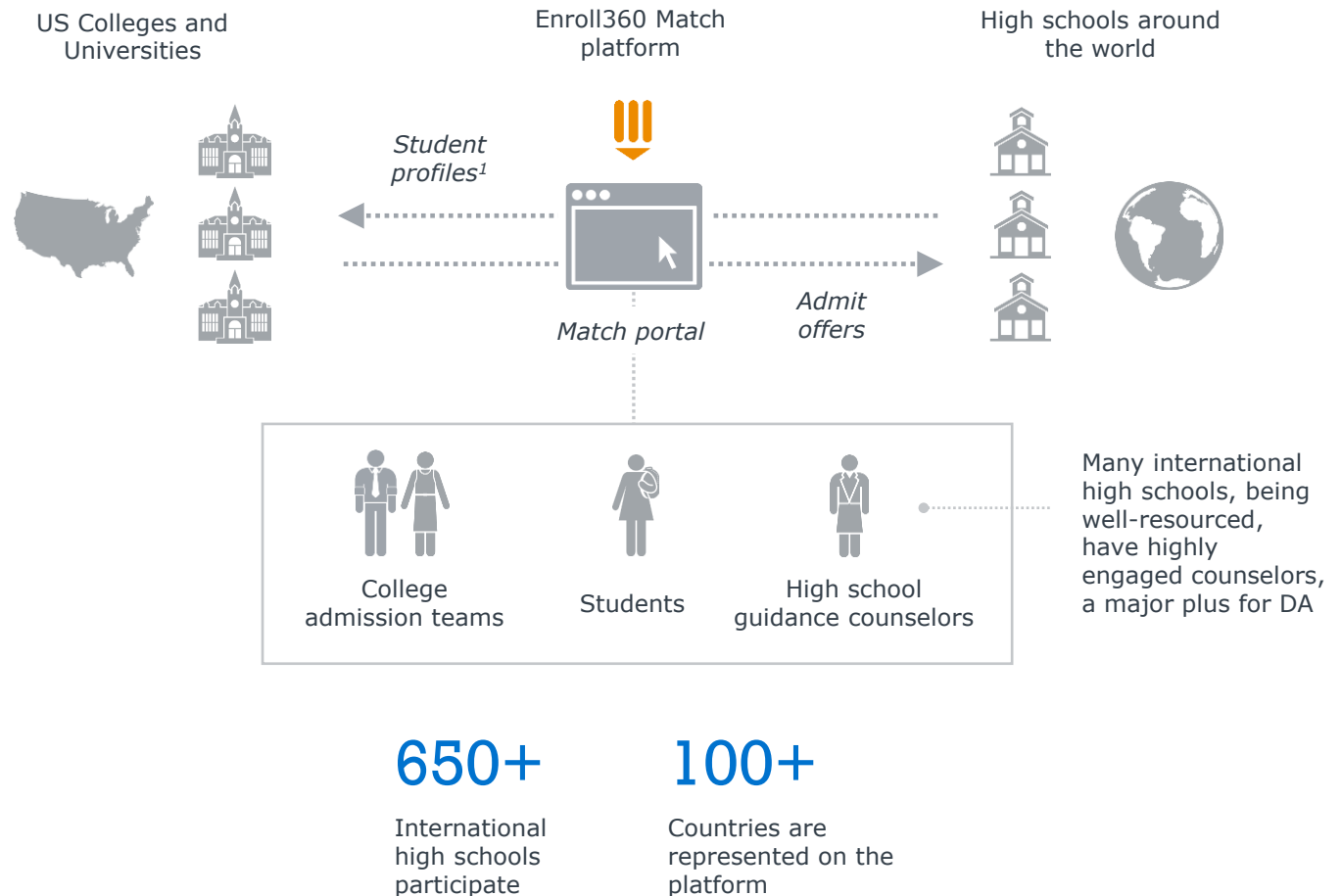
## The platform matters

The approach illustrated at right was pioneered by the Concourse company in 2018 (and has since been expanded to domestic populations, after the company's acquisition by EAB).

It also demonstrates a phenomenon sometimes seen with direct admission programs more generally—namely that it can be hard to separate out the impact of direct admission per se from features of its implementation (the size and degree of engagement of its existing user base, for example, including the high school counselors who use it).

## The First and Longest-Running Use Case for Non-State DA

*An Overview of the Enroll360 Match Platform, Which Began Doing Direct Admission with International Students in 2018 (under the name "Concourse")*



1) Information in student profiles includes how much they are willing to spend on their education—insight that helps ensure an optimal match between students and offers.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

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# Should You Adopt Direct Admission?

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SECTION

2

## Addressing Some Common Concerns

### Uncharted territory

Direct admission is, for many of the nation’s colleges and universities, a new and untested practice, which means there are open questions associated with it and room for doubts and concerns.

While some degree of caution is appropriate, it is also important not to let unfounded worries stand in the way of principled engagement with direct admission. Chances are it will spread quickly in the near future, and those who have given it careful thought, with an eye to implementation, will be ahead of the game when it does.

### Concern versus reality

The table on the right shows concerns admissions leaders sometimes voice about direct admission, together with reflections on the extent to which these worries may or may not be justified.

### Worries About Direct Admission, Many of them Unwarranted, Hold Some Enrollment Leaders Back

<b>Market optics</b>	
The concern	“Direct admission will lower our quality in the eyes of prospective students.”
The reality	While this can be a legitimate concern for highly selective schools whose brands depend on their exclusivity, it probably overestimates the weight most students give to such considerations; in reality, students are more likely to focus on the positive message a proactive admit offer sends about their desirability and on the relief they feel at being freed from the stress of the standard application process.
<b>An unfamiliar funnel</b>	
The concern	“Direct admission will reduce our ability to predict enrollment outcomes.”
The reality	While DA does complicate some of the standard reference points traditionally used to assess funnel health, a few admission cycles under DA will furnish us with new benchmarks to use. Enrollment teams can additionally lean on increasingly available predictive-analytics tools for this purpose. (Such tools should, in any case, be part of any team’s best-practice repertoire, whether they are doing DA or not).
<b>Yet more new processes to manage</b>	
The concern	“Direct admission will create more work for our team.”
The reality	While direct admission may require your team to perform new and unfamiliar tasks, it can also reduce the time commitment associated with other standard admissions-office work—effort invested in generating applications, for example, and time spent reviewing applicant files.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

# Direct Admission Need Not Be an All-or-Nothing Proposition

## Mixed models

One important thing to understand about direct admission is that it is not an either-or undertaking. Many schools that have embraced direct admission have done so in a selective fashion, reserving it for students who meet some minimum standard of academic ability. Students below that threshold may still be admitted but do not receive proactive offers and go through a more traditional kind of vetting.

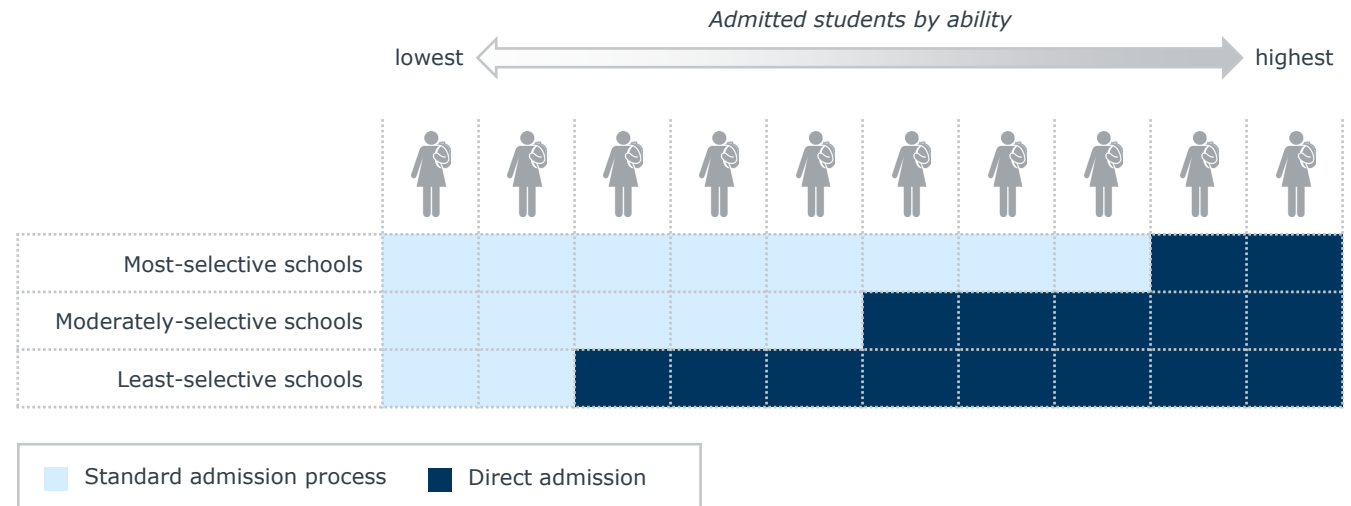
## Targeted deployment

Looked at this way, the question becomes one of how big a portion of a school's prospect pool might be admitted via direct admission.

The most selective of institutions, for example, might reserve it for students in the highest tiers of academic ability and/or those who have other rare and highly desirable characteristics—e.g., a particular talent or demographic background. (Recruitment of athletes constitutes a longstanding and well-established example of this approach.)

## Speculation Regarding the Potential Range of Application for DA

*By School Selectivity*



## Some Additional Considerations

### Close vetting (or not)

It is difficult to make proactive admit offers if you need a lot of information to assess student eligibility. For this reason, it will not be as easy for more-selective schools to implement direct admission across the bulk of their admit pools as it is for their less-selective counterparts.

### Targeted DA

More-selective schools may choose to reserve direct admit for highly desirable but difficult-to-recruit students (e.g., low-income, high-ability individuals)—students they are so determined to capture that they are OK not putting them through the more extensive vetting they use for other candidates.

### Preoccupation with prestige

While some enrollment leaders worry that direct admission will reduce the perceived quality of their institution, they will increasingly need to weigh this concern against possibly losing enrollment to competitors with more streamlined admissions processes.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

# Is Direct Admission a Good Match for Your Situation?

Page 1 of 3

The degree to which schools stand to benefit from adoption of direct admission varies. Since the relevant factors to consider are many and complex, we've created a checklist to help you think through how they apply to your particular circumstances. Review the questions below and check off all that apply. The more you check, the more likely it is that you would benefit from implementing direct admission across a broad swath of your prospect pool. Schools that check fewer boxes may still get good results from direct admission applied more selectively (e.g., targeting students with high academic ability, rare talents, important demographic features, and other characteristics that make them both highly desirable and difficult to recruit).

## Complete the Following Self-Test to See if Direct Admission Is Right for Your Institution

*Check All Items that Apply*

Market context	
1	<input type="checkbox"/> We struggle to fill our classes and/or are having trouble enrolling enough students of the right kind
2	<input type="checkbox"/> Our state has a direct-admission program
3	<input type="checkbox"/> Schools we compete with offer direct admission
4	<input type="checkbox"/> We are trying to enter new markets

This factor may prove decisive for schools that are otherwise on the fence with respect to adopting DA.

Items marked with arrows should be given extra weight in your assessment

## Institution characteristics

- 5  Exclusivity is not an important aspect of our institution's brand
- 6  Many students we serve (or would like to serve) are first-generation and/or come from lower-income households
- 7  We can afford to enroll more students from lower-income households
- 8  We have not faced major resistance from internal stakeholders to past efforts at removing barriers to admission (e.g., going test-optional)

While direct admission has been shown to have a disproportionate positive impact on application rates for underrepresented students, research suggests that the corresponding bump in enrollment may not be as high. The discrepancy is widely believed to be due to problems with affordability.

## Current admissions practice

- 9  Our admit rate is 50% or higher
- 10  There is a high school GPA and/or test-score threshold above which we always or almost always admit students
- 11  We consider standardized test scores when evaluating students for admission
- 12  There is other readily available student information on the basis of which we would make proactive admit offers (e.g., an official sports ranking)

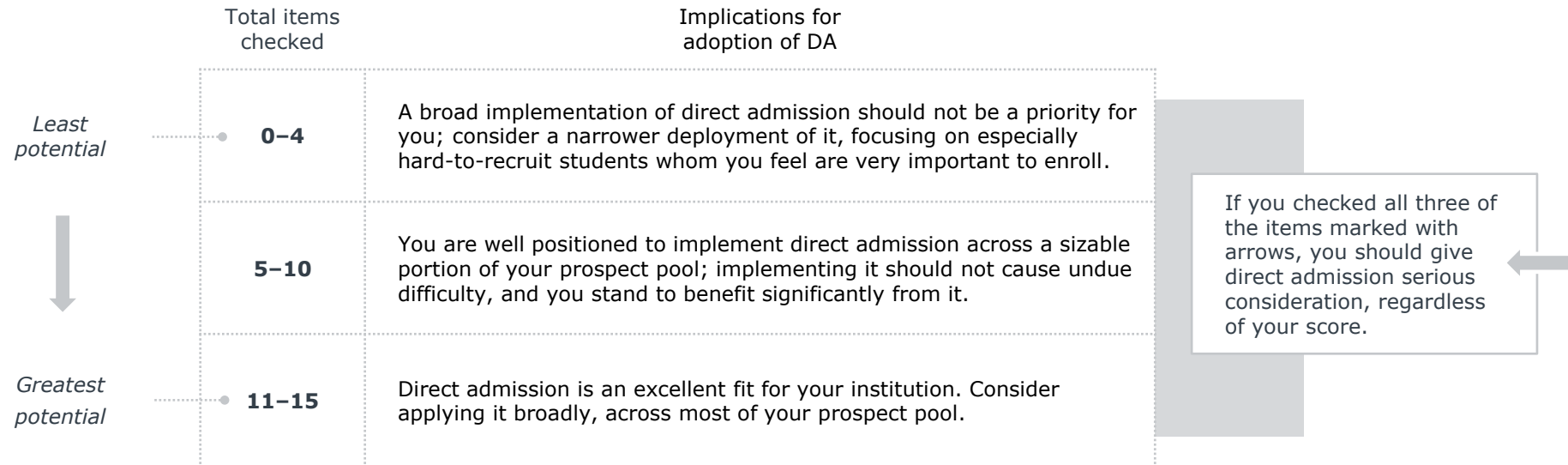
Test scores can prove helpful when used as an extra basis for qualifying students for direct admission (as opposed to serving as a basis for rejection), particularly in situations when other reliable data on students is hard to come by.

### Current admissions practice (continued)

- 13  We have well-developed lead-generation capabilities (including expertise in buying names from list sources such as College Board and Encoura)
- 14  Our application includes components that students find difficult (e.g., essays) and that rarely change the outcome of our admit decisions.
- 15  We have well-developed yield-management capabilities, including predictive analytics for projecting enrollment outcomes and tracking progress toward goal

Direct-admitted students tend to yield at lower rates than students admitted via traditional processes. Furthermore, the distinction between the two groups is lost when students who previously would have gone the traditional route start to be direct-admitted. Therefore, tools for gauging individual students' likelihood to yield become more important than ever.

### Interpreting Your Score





# Which DA Approach and/or Partner Should You Use?

Page 1 of 3

Most institutions pursuing direct admission will choose to do so via programs sponsored by third parties. Others will prefer a DIY approach. Whichever camp you fall in, there is a set of key questions you'll want to think through before you settle on any particular option. The tables below and on the next two pages are meant to help you assess prospective approaches and partners. Check all boxes that apply for the approach/partner you're considering. The more boxes you can check, the more confident you should feel about the approach in question. Note that you may ultimately choose to embrace more than one option, pursuing them simultaneously.

## Use the Following Evaluation Tool to Assess Potential Approaches/Partners

*Check All Items That Apply*

### Streamlined student processes

- 1  Students do not need to be aware of your institution in order to receive an admission offer from you
- 2  Students do not need to complete a traditional application at any point, before or after admission, in order to matriculate
- 3  Information students must provide to receive an offer is kept to an absolute minimum and is very easy for them to obtain or generate
- 4  The approach enables students to be admitted to multiple colleges based on a profile they need complete only once

In the context of direct admission, the term "application" can be ambiguous. All students, regardless of direct-admission approach, need to provide information about themselves at some point in the process in order to be officially admitted. The instrument used to collect that information may be called an application or may go by some other name.

While this point does not apply to college-managed DIY programs, it is relevant for third-party approaches; students will likely favor platforms that are efficient in this respect.

Items marked with arrows should be given extra weight in your assessment

## Effective communications

- 5  The approach ensures that students actually see and engage with offers, e.g., via the use of advanced recruitment-marketing communications best practices and technologies
- 6  The offers state, with a high degree of specificity, the amount of merit-aid award the student will receive
- 7  The approach makes it easy to personalize admit-offer communications to reflect factors such as students' academic interests and alternate programs they are eligible for
- 8  The approach provides a dedicated digital space that facilitates interaction between high school counselors, students, and college admission counselors

Some students base their perception of a school's affordability on its sticker price, and concern over cost remains a major reason students reject particular schools or opt out of higher ed entirely.

This will become increasingly important as direct-admission becomes more widespread—i.e., as the need for you to differentiate your offer from that of competing schools increases.

## Insight into prospective students

- 9  The approach provides you with all the information you need to make confident admit decisions for a sizable portion of your prospect pool
- 10  The approach provides information on students that is detailed enough to support customization of follow-up communications with them
- 11  The approach gives you the option to review students' transcripts prior to making direct-admit offers
- 12  The approach provides detailed academic information on prospective students, at scale (e.g., via Naviance and/or partnerships with school districts)

Extensive reach	
13	<input type="checkbox"/> The approach enables admissions teams to get admit offers in front of a sizable portion of students in their institution's total potential pool of prospects
14	<input type="checkbox"/> Channels used by the approach have a high level of penetration in geographical markets that matter most
15	<input type="checkbox"/> The approach is set up to work with students of all demographic groups a school wishes to recruit, not being limited by socioeconomic status, ethnicity, etc. of prospects
16	<input type="checkbox"/> The approach seamlessly integrates direct-admit recruitment of international students and has a large existing footprint with relevant populations, including counselors at international high schools

Schools that wish to focus their direct-admission efforts on a particular student group (e.g., underrepresented students) may choose to partner with a platform that specializes in such students.

### Interpreting the Score

	Total items checked	Assessment
<i>Least promising</i>	<b>0-5</b>	Program impact likely minimal; consider another approach.
	<b>6-11</b>	Could be worth pursuing; consider alternate approaches but do not rule this one out.
<i>Most promising</i>	<b>12-16</b>	High likelihood of positive impact; move forward with confidence.

If any of the items marked with arrows are not checked, think twice before pursuing this approach

Source: EAB research and analysis.

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# What Is It Like to Work Under Direct Admission?

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SECTION

3

# Recruitment Marketing Remains Crucial

## Lasting relevance

One thing that does not change under direct admission is the central role played by recruitment marketing. The graphic on the right lists eight specific aspects of recruitment marketing that remain at least as relevant under DA.

## Familiar imperatives

Consider, for example, building affinity with students. Your direct-admit offer will not be enough, on its own, to win students over, especially if your competitors are also direct-admitting. Furthermore, direct-admitted students tend to yield at lower rates than traditional admits. For both of these reasons, you'll need to work as hard as ever to build relationships with them, before and after they're admitted.

Consider also that you'll still have to get students to submit information you need from them. Many direct-admit approaches require students to provide additional information, after the offer is made, in order for them to be officially admitted. Effective comm flows can make the difference between your getting that extra information and not getting it.

## Eight Core Activities You Still Need to Execute to an A+ Standard

- 1 Identifying students to recruit
- 2 Building affinity with students
- 3 Ensuring that students see your offers
- 4 Framing your offers in terms that appeal to students
- 5 Differentiating your offers from other schools'
- 6 Getting competitive aid awards into your offers
- 7 Getting students to submit required information
- 8 Yielding admitted students

DA students tend to yield at lower rates. You can counteract this tendency by cultivating your relationship with them before and after making your admit offer.

Work you used to put into generating applications now goes toward getting students to take the additional steps you need them to in order to officially admit them.

Yield analytics become more important than ever.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

# New Funnel Entities

## Redefining the admit

Direct admission creates a need for new terminology to describe students in your recruitment funnel.

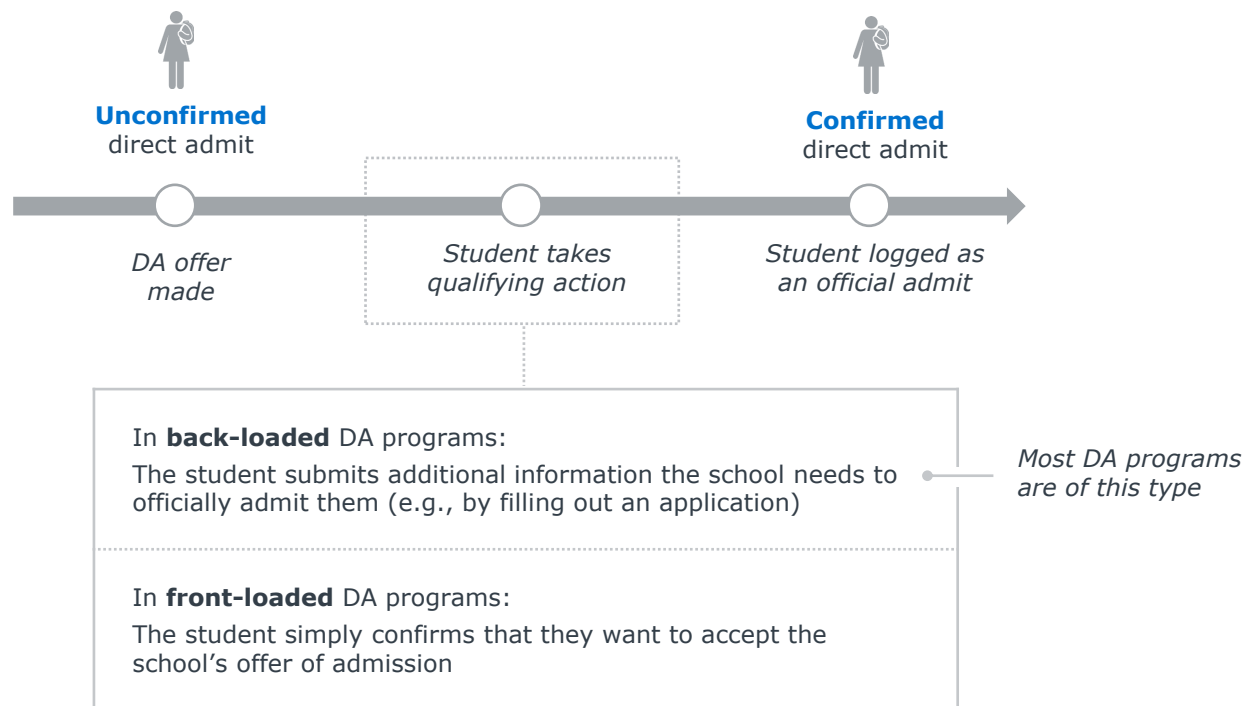
The term “admitted student” is, on its own, ambiguous in the context of direct admission. Does it refer to a student who has been deemed eligible for direct admission and has been notified of the fact? Or does it refer to students who have submitted all the information you need in order to officially admit them?

To distinguish between the two, you may find it helpful to refer to the former as “unconfirmed direct admits” and the latter as “confirmed direct admits.”

## Terminology matters

Apart from clearing up the kind of potential confusion just described, One additional reason it’s important to get your DA terminology straight is that some of your enrollment processes may depend on it; some CRMs, for example, require your funnel to have an “admit” stage. The material on the right should help you map your direct admits to the corresponding fields in your system.

## What Should We Call Direct Admits at Different Funnel Stages?



See pages 22 and 23 for more on front- and back-loaded DA approaches

# A Broader Look at Recruitment Under Direct Admission

## Continuity in the face of change

While direct admission does represent a major departure from traditional admissions practice, it is perhaps surprising the extent to which the fundamentals of student-recruitment best practice are the same under both scenarios.

The graphic on the right explains this point in greater detail, with reference to specific funnel stages.

## An imperative for engagement

Perhaps the most conspicuous constant is the importance of building affinity with prospective students and starting that work as early as you can in students' high school years—which is important groundwork for your later yield-management efforts.

An important related consideration in this context is that you will probably not be able to rely for long on direct-admission offers standing out—their power to grab student attention will lessen when the practice becomes more widespread.

## Admissions-Team Activity by Funnel Stage



### Lead-generation and inquiry-generation phase

You'll still want to engage students with recruitment-marketing communications as early as you can in their high school years. This builds affinity, which will help boost your offer-acceptance and yield rates later on.



### Application-generation phase

Under DA, the need to generate applications is obviated by proactive admit offers. That said, direct admission schools that still require students to complete an application before being officially admitted will face a familiar burden of getting students to do so.



### Admit phase

DA can enable you to admit students earlier in the season insofar as the ability to extend admit offers depends less on actions students must take (and is therefore less impeded by related delays on their end).



### Yield-management phase

DA can increase the size of admit pools and can make it difficult to distinguish between students who would have applied via traditional means and those who would not—groups that yield at different rates. For these reasons, tools that help predict the likelihood of any given admitted student enrolling and that thereby help triage follow-up become especially useful under DA.



### Melt-management phase

Lower-income and first-gen students, who benefit most from direct admission, struggle more than other students do with pre-matriculation tasks (just as they are disproportionately impeded by traditional application processes, and for similar reasons). Prepare to offer them extra support in the weeks before they are due to enroll.



Source: EAB research and analysis.



# Partial Direct Admission

## Independent benefit

Schools that do not wish to or cannot embrace both of the key elements of fully realized direct admission described elsewhere in this report—proactively notifying students of their eligibility for admission and radically simplifying the application—can still benefit from implementing one or the other of these components singly. (Some programs commonly referred to as “direct admission” do just that).

## Demonstrated impact

The study referenced on the upper portion of this page illustrates the significant positive impact that proactive notification combined with information on grant aid can have on downstream funnel metrics.

The data beneath that shows the impact that reducing application requirements has, even when not necessarily paired with proactive notification. As indicated, colleges that reduced application requirements in the year studied grew applications, admits, and enrollments far more than those that did not.

## Impact of Proactive Notification of Eligibility

Results from a Randomized Control Trial

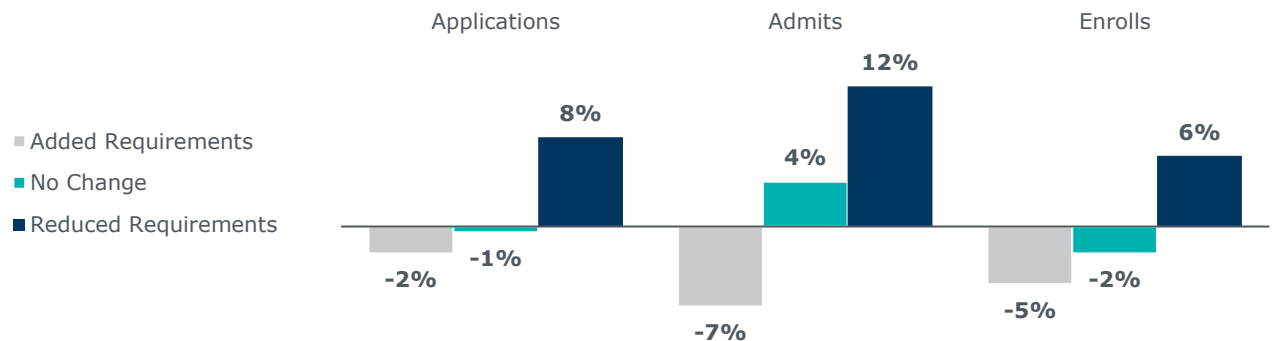


- Promise of free tuition (aid for which students already qualified)
- Reassurance that student is likely to succeed after enrolling
- Notification that student need not fill out financial aid forms to get scholarship

Increase in likelihood of students...	
...applying	+67%
...being admitted	+32%
...enrolling	+27%

## Reducing Application Requirements Boosts Applications, Admits, and Enrollment

Average Change in Key Funnel Metrics at Moderately Selective US Colleges and Universities, by Change in Number of Application Requirements, 2018-2019



Source: Hallie Busta, "How U of Michigan used targeted outreach to recruit more low-income students," Higher Ed Dive, December 12, 2018; EAB analysis of IPEDS data.

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# Case Studies

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SECTION

4

# Case Study 1: Augsburg University

## A prominent early adopter

Augsburg University currently admits more than 90% of its students via DA, which it defines broadly to include those admitted via its greatly simplified application who do not receive proactive notification of eligibility.

While the third-party direct admission programs that Augsburg participates in do proactively notify students who qualify, these sources account for a small portion of Augsburg’s direct admits. Most come through the school’s self-managed program or the conventional Common App and, while Augsburg does sometimes send proactive notifications to students using these platforms, it does not do so as a matter of course.

Their partial adoption of proactive notifications, described elsewhere in this report as an essential feature of fully realized DA, is less a design feature of Augsburg’s approach and more a matter of expediency and emphasis—their practice is mostly about making the process of being admitted as simple as possible for students and about transitioning admissions away from a gatekeeping mentality.

## Augsburg University in Brief



Region: Midwest	Admit rate (pre-DA): >70%
Control: Private	% Pell eligible: >60%
Total undergraduates: 2,000–3,000	% nonwhite: >70%

## Direct-Admission Programs Augsburg Participates In



State of Minnesota program



Common Application program



Chicago Public Schools program



Augsburg’s self-managed program

### Key features of Augsburg’s DA approach:

- Eligibility based entirely on student’s GPA<sup>1</sup>
- Proactive notification used selectively
- A radically streamlined application
- Teaching the market about the program’s student-centered aims and rationale
- A focus on success-coaching admitted students

EAB thanks **Robert Gould**, Augsburg’s Vice President for Strategic Enrollment Management, and **Stephanie Ruckel**, the institution’s Director of Strategic Enrollment Management, for sharing the information contained in this case study.

<sup>1</sup> For all of Augsburg’s direct-admission approaches, the determination of student eligibility for a direct-admission offer is based entirely on their HS GPA, as verified via a copy of their unofficial transcript (or, in the case of the State of Minnesota, by academic records shared with its state Office of Higher Education by high schools)

# Augsburg's Stripped-Down Application

## Keeping it very simple

Students applying to Augsburg, whether they are coming through one of its direct-admission partner programs or applying directly, all complete some version of the same radically stripped down application form described on the right.

## A flexible format

As can be seen, the form does away with application requirements that students find most difficult and off-putting, such as essays and letters of recommendation. At the same time, it gives students the option to briefly tell the admissions team about their motivations and concerns, so it does not needlessly constrain students who feel they have more to say about themselves.

Students who complete the uppermost set of application fields shown on the right and who have a 3.0 GPA or higher are automatically admitted. Students whose GPA is below 3.0 may still be admitted but are asked to answer the additional questions shown below.

## Information Students Are Asked to Submit on Augsburg's Application

- Address
- Email address
- Telephone number
- Birthdate
- Legal sex
- Preferred gender identity (optional)
- Sexual orientation (optional)
- Citizenship status
- Race/ethnicity
- Disciplinary history
- Parent/guardian information
- Copy of transcript (unofficial copy is OK)
- Academic interests
- Housing plans/intentions
- College-readiness-program participation
- Name of high school
- Interest in studying creative arts
- Foster-care history
- Interest in substance abuse recovery program
- Military affiliation
- What excites you most about attending college? (optional)
- What worries you most about attending college? (optional)



(for students with GPA < 3.0)

- Are you currently working?
- Share a bit about your academic journey. Where have you recognized you may have needed/did need additional support?
- Would you like to submit a letter of recommendation?
- Please provide any additional information you would like us to know as we consider your application.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

# Helping Students Understand What DA Is and Why Augsburg Does It

## A communications challenge

As noted elsewhere in this report, direct admission comes associated with a number of communication challenges.

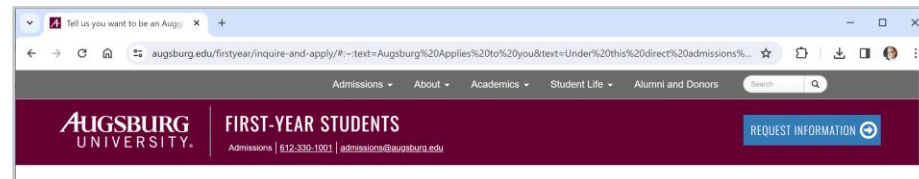
Because the concept is unfamiliar to many students, they may not understand what a direct-admission offer means. Or, given that they have been trained to think of applying to college as a necessarily arduous process, they may be suspicious of an approach that makes being admitted so easy.

## Educating the market on DA

Partly to preempt such negative reactions, Augsburg has been painstaking in its efforts to educate the market about direct admission. This includes having a compelling story to tell about how direct admission benefits students, as well as simpler tactics—e.g., avoiding the use of the word “apply” in student-facing communications.

Expert recruitment marketing has also helped; Augsburg partners with EAB, whose college-search platform Apply and Enroll360 programs the institution participates in.

## Augsburg’s Admissions Page Explains the Deeply Student-Centered Aims of its Direct-Admission Approach



### AUGSBURG APPLIES TO YOU

Augsburg is making a major **shift from a “gatekeeper” model** of admissions to an enrollment experience focused on student belonging. This new program, called Augsburg Applies To You, includes a totally new way to be admitted and a new approach to student engagement that is connected to first-year student success. Under this direct admissions approach, students who meet a certain GPA threshold will be immediately offered admission—in some cases, before they even apply.

**The traditional roles in the admissions process will be intentionally reversed** to better cultivate student belonging. Focusing on the prospective student’s many attributes, we intend to replace the transactional with the relational and recruiting with personal coaching. Our admissions professionals will continue their connection with students well after starting classes. This equity-minded shift will better align the admissions process with Augsburg’s values and **give us the needed time to support students in navigating the college selection process.**

#### Admission Requirements

Submitting our online Augsburg Application form—a very short version of a traditional application—is easy and fast. It can usually be **completed in 10 minutes or less**, and the only additional thing we need in order to give you an admission decision is an unofficial high school transcript. Students can apply through the Common Application or through the Augsburg Application form.

A pithy and memorable slogan that gets at the heart of Augsburg’s DA philosophy

A compelling explanation of how direct admission helps students, which also differentiates Augsburg’s approach

Source: [Augsburg.edu](https://augsburg.edu); EAB research and analysis.

# A Changing Role for Augsburg's Counselors

## Redeployed capacity

Augsburg's direct admission approach freed up a lot of admissions-counselor time previously devoted to application review. It also provided a vision for how that capacity might be redeployed in service of the program's aims—namely, counseling admitted students, as described on the right.

## An adjustment

For institutions hoping to emulate Augsburg's example, it is important to know that the pivot shown here can be an adjustment for admissions counselors, as it entails an extensive rethinking of their aims, requires them to develop new skills, and depends on them acquiring new subject-matter knowledge. Augsburg itself acknowledges that the transition has not been easy.

Given that fact, it is also helpful to understand that the profound rethinking of counselor work shown here is not a necessary consequence of adopting direct admission. For some institutions that have gone the DA route, counselors' day-to-day work has not changed that much.

## Admission Counselor Role

*Before and After Adoption of DA*

	Before DA	After DA
Primary focus	Driving funnel conversions—getting prospective students to inquire, apply, and deposit at Augsburg.	Helping to ensure students end up in the higher education option (at Augsburg or elsewhere) that best suits their needs and that they are as prepared as possible for whatever that option is.
Characteristic activities	Application-completion outreach, reading applicant files, rendering admit decisions.	Talking to students about their higher-education options, evaluating their support needs and connecting them with related resources, helping remove barriers to matriculation.



Around **1,300 hours** of counselor time were freed up by the switch to DA—time that was repurposed for success-coaching direct-admitted students, as described above

## Transformed Counselor Role Grounded in a Larger Sense of Purpose

*Excerpts from Augsburg's SEM Plan*



The SEM division's vision is to be a belonging organization that builds deeper relationships, changes systems, and **dismantles the tenets of white supremacy and oppression in higher education enrollment management.**

Our mission is to **meet every student where they are** with authentic presence, outreach, and engagement.

We value integrity and passion. We lead with grace and kindness. We see our entire team succeed through **positive impact on society.** We use these three statements to remember why we are here.



Source: EAB research and analysis.

# State of Minnesota Direct-Admission Program

## How the Process Looks from the Perspective of Students and Augsburg's Admissions Team



A hypothetical student named Kamilo



- 1 The State's high school students are divided into tiers of academic ability, with six being the highest. Colleges participating in the program indicate which tier they are willing to direct-admit. Augsburg chooses tier five.
- 2 The Minnesota Office of Higher Education (OHE) sends Kamilo a list of schools whose DA eligibility criteria he meets, including Augsburg. The communication provides a link to Augsburg's direct-admission page.
- 3 Kamilo logs in to his high school's online platform to indicate the schools he is interested in, including Augsburg. He is given the option to include additional contact information (e.g., different email, parent info, address).
- 4 OHE sends Augsburg and the other colleges Kamilo is interested in information on him, including his academic tier and contact information. Augsburg's admissions team codes Kamilo in their system as an inquiry.
- 5 Augsburg sends Kamilo a note congratulating him on his admission and asking him to submit additional information in order to accept the admission offer, including an unofficial copy of his transcript.
- 6 Augsburg sends Kamilo a link for an online form where he can provide the information requested of him. The form he completes is far shorter and simpler than a traditional application and does not require a login.
- 7 Augsburg's admissions staff check the information Kamilo has entered. If it is complete and error-free, they code him as an admit; if not, they follow up with him to rectify any problems.
- 8 After he is officially admitted, Kamilo receives his full admit package, including scholarship information. He receives follow-up from Augsburg's team throughout yield season, aimed at removing any remaining barriers to matriculation.

Source: EAB research and analysis.



# Common App Direct-Admission Program

## How the Process Looks from the Perspective of Students and Augsburg's Admissions Team



A hypothetical student named Kamilo



- 1 Augsburg shares its direct-admit criteria with the Common App—namely, that students must have an unweighted cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher. Common App gives Augsburg the option of limiting the number of direct admission offers that are made, but Augsburg chooses not to do so.
- 2 Kamilo, begins creating a Common App profile. He enters his self-reported GPA but leaves some portions of the application, including the essay, incomplete. Being a first-gen student, Kamilo meets the Common App's criteria for participation in its direct-admit program. His GPA qualifies him for Augsburg's direct-admission program.
- 3 The Common App selects Kamilo for participation in its direct-admit program and, since he is a Minnesota resident, sends him a list of schools in the state from which he has received direct-admission offers, including Augsburg. Kamilo is interested in Augsburg and adds it to the list of institutions he is interested in on the Common App platform.
- 4 The Common App platform prompts Kamilo to answer a few additional Augsburg-specific questions on the platform.
- 5 Common App sends Kamilo an email, co-branded with Augsburg, informing him of his direct-admission offer and outlining next steps. If Kamilo has provided Common App with contact information for his parent(s) and/or guidance counselor, they are also receive a copy of the email.
- 6 The Common App lets Augsburg know that there's a completed application from Kamilo and flags him as a direct admit. Augsburg's admissions staff check the information Kamilo has entered. If it is complete and error-free, they code him as an admit; if not, they follow up with him to rectify any problems.
- 7 After he is admitted, Kamilo receives follow-up from Augsburg's admission team throughout yield season, aimed at removing any remaining barriers to his matriculation.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

# Augsburg's DIY Direct-Admission Program

## How the Process Looks from the Perspective of Students and Augsburg's Admissions Team



A hypothetical student named Kamilo



- 1 Kamilo receives an email from Augsburg telling him that he qualifies for admission and inviting him to confirm his offer by filling out a brief application form, noting that it should only take around ten minutes to complete.<sup>1</sup> Among the information that the form requests is a copy of his unofficial transcript.
- 2 Kamilo completes the form and uploads his transcript.
- 3 Augsburg's admissions staff check the information Kamilo has entered. If it is complete and error-free, they code him as an admit; if not, they follow up with him to rectify any problems.
- 4 After he is officially admitted, Kamilo receives follow-up from Augsburg's admissions team throughout yield season, aimed at removing any remaining barriers to his matriculation.

<sup>1</sup> Augsburg sends proactive notifications of eligibility to students for whom it has GPA and contact information, such as those whom it acquires via name buys from list sources. Students who do not receive such notifications may still be admitted based on information entered using the same form that direct-admitted students use, provided their GPA is equal to or greater than Augsburg's direct-admission threshold; students following this path actually account for the largest share of Augsburg's admits.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

# A Look at Augsburg's Enrollment Outcomes Under Direct Admission

## A quantitative lens

It is always tricky to assess the impact of any given admissions practice on downstream outcomes, since so many contextual factors can influence those outcomes and it is difficult to isolate the impact that each has had.

That said, a look at Augsburg's numbers does illustrate the beginning of potential trends that are likely attributable to its direct-admission efforts.

## Positive outcomes

The most conspicuous change that Augsburg saw was in total admits, which grew significantly. Their enrollment increased by a smaller but still meaningful increment.

The institution also saw impressive gains in the enrollment of underrepresented students.

As seems to generally be the case with the direct-admission approach, Augsburg's yield rate decreased (by two percentage points—a proportional drop of 9%).

## Fall Enrollment Metrics

*Augsburg University, Entering Class 2022 Versus 2023*

	First year of direct admission		
	2022	2023	Change
Total confirmed admits	2,657	3,322	+25%
Total enrolled <sup>1</sup>	610	683	+12%
Yield rate	23%	21%	-2% <sup>2</sup>
% non-white (enrolled)	68%	78%	+10% <sup>2</sup>
% Pell-eligible (enrolled)	57%	69%	+12% <sup>2</sup>
% male (enrolled)	42%	46%	+4% <sup>2</sup>
Discount rate	65%	66%	+1% <sup>2</sup>
Average NTR per student	\$14,818	\$14,975	+\$157
Total NTR	\$9 MM	\$10.2 MM	+1.2 MM

1) Counts full-time students only.

2) Value shown here is the percentage-point change (as opposed to proportional change)

Source: Applied Policy Research APR data provided by Augsburg University

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# Case Study 2: Houston Christian University

## Contrasting approaches

Houston Christian University’s approach to direct admission differs from Augsburg’s in several respects.

One is that HCU partners extensively with non-state direct-admission programs, in the spirit of broad experimentation and piloting. A large portion of HCU’s direct-admitted students come via such channels.

A second is that it foregrounds proactive notification of student eligibility for admission more so than does Augsburg’s approach.

A third is that some (but not all) of the direct-admission approaches it uses base assessment of students’ eligibility solely on students’ self-reported GPA—i.e., without the benefit of a transcript or other corroborating information.

A fourth is that HCU’s adoption of direct admission was not accompanied by a large corresponding change in admissions counselors’ roles and aims; the team’s work continues in much the same vein as prior to HCU’s embrace of direct admission.

## Houston Christian University (HCU) in Brief



Total undergraduates	<5,000	Average cost after aid	<\$20K
% Pell eligible	>30%	Admit rate (pre-DA)	>80%
% non-white	>75%		

## Direct-Admission Programs HCU Participates In



EAB Enroll360 Match<sup>1</sup>



Niche DA



RaiseMe DA



HCU’s self-managed DA program

### Key features of HCU’s DA approach:

- Eligibility based entirely on student’s GPA
- A radically streamlined application
- Conventional admission run in parallel w/DA
- Piloting of multiple DA platforms
- Ongoing experiments with DIY self-admit

EAB thanks **James Steen**, HCU’s Vice President for Enrollment Management and Marketing, for sharing the information contained in this case study.

1) A merger and rebranding of EAB’s College Greenlight program and Concourse.

# HCU's Stripped-Down Application Form

## A light lift

Shown on the right is all the information students must submit in order to receive an admit offer from HCU.

## Using self-reported GPAs

Note that HCU makes direct-admission offers based on students' self-reported HS GPA. This further streamlines the process for students, as they are not required to submit a transcript up front; it also, however, introduces some uncertainty into the process.

HCU has found that, in some cases, normalizing student GPAs (a step that occurs later in the process once transcripts have been received) can cause them to drop below the direct-admission threshold.

That said, research on self-reporting has consistently shown that students very rarely misstate their academic credentials and many schools have found basing admit decisions on these credentials to be an excellent way of streamlining the application process.

## Information Students Must Submit to Receive an Admit Offer

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Name</li><li>• Birthdate</li><li>• Email address</li><li>• Mobile phone number</li><li>• Mailing address</li><li>• Desired entry term</li><li>• Anticipated major</li><li>• <b>GPA</b></li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Citizenship</li><li>• Gender</li><li>• Name of high school</li><li>• Anticipated graduation date</li><li>• Have you attended any colleges or universities in the past?</li><li>• Have you ever been the subject of a disciplinary action?</li><li>• Have you ever been convicted of a crime?</li><li>• <b>High school transcript</b></li></ul> |
|--|--|

Students are given the option of uploading their transcript at a later date. Students need not submit a transcript prior to receiving a DA offer but must do so in order to be officially admitted.

## Optional Information Students Are Prompted to Provide

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• SSN</li><li>• Ethnicity</li><li>• Religious preference</li><li>• HCU legacy status</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Interest in HCU's honors college</li><li>• Anticipated housing arrangements</li><li>• Parent contact information</li><li>• Parents' highest level of educational attainment</li></ul> |
|--|---|

Source: EAB research and analysis.

# A Look at HCU's Direct-Admission Numbers

## DA versus non-DA

This page presents a quantitative look at HCU's direct admission experience.

While HCU used several different channels and platforms in both its conventional recruitment and in its direct-admission work, the analysis at right reports aggregate figures corresponding to the two categories, the better to compare them.

## Significant variation

Understanding the degree of variability across the different sources used within each of those categories is also helpful, as a complement to the aggregate perspective just mentioned.

For the DA channels, yield rate ranged from 0% to 7% and was generally lower for ones that focused on lower-income and first-generation students.

HCU's conventional admission channels also varied considerably in terms of yield, which ranged from a low of 0% to a high of 63%. The highest rate was for the institution's self-hosted application, which closely resembles the stripped-down form used in HCU's DA approaches (see preceding page).

## Funnel Metrics for Entering Class 2023

*HCU's First Year of Doing Direct Admission*

	Confirmed admits		Enrollments		Average yield rate <sup>1</sup>
	Number	% of total	Number	% of total	
Conventional admission <sup>2</sup>	5860	88%	633	92%	10.8%
Direct admission <sup>3</sup>	805	12%	53	8%	6.6%

## A Large Increase in DA Activity for Entering-Class 2024 Recruitment

*Point-in-Time Comparison, Mid-February 2023 versus 2024*

	# of Confirmed admits			As % of total confirmed admits		
	2023	2024	Change	2023	2024	Change
Conventional admission <sup>4</sup>	4568	3280	-28%	89%	66%	-25%
Direct admission <sup>5</sup>	560	1661	+197%	11%	34%	+208%

% of admits coming via DA more than tripled

- 1) This is a weighted average in which the yield rate for each DA program is weighted according to the total number of confirmed admits associated with it
- 2) Channels used included application-aggregator services, such as Apply Texas, third-party application-generation recruitment marketing services, and an HCU-hosted application
- 3) Channels used included Niche Direct Admit, EAB's Enroll360 Match, RaiseMe, and HCU's own DIY approach.
- 4) Channels used included application-aggregator services, such as Apply Texas, third-party application-generation recruitment marketing services, and an HCU-hosted application
- 5) Channels used included Niche Direct Admit, EAB's Enroll360 Match, and Common App direct admit.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

# A Look at HCU’s Enrollment Outcomes Under Direct Admission

## A complex context

As mentioned earlier, isolating out the impact of any one admissions practice from other contextual factors can be difficult or impossible.

Furthermore, data from HCU’s first year of direct-admission work must be understood in the context of direct-admit students accounting for a small portion (11%) of its total admits in that year.

This case study will not, therefore, draw any definite conclusions regarding how DA impacted HCU’s overall enrollment performance (beyond what was said on the preceding page).

## Some broad conclusions

That said, a look at the numbers is instructive.

The table on the right shows various funnel metrics and enrollment outcomes for HCU’s 2022 and 2023 entering classes, the latter being the first in which it used direct admission.

Variation for many of the metrics is within a typical year-to-year range for HCU, which echoes the fact, mentioned earlier, that HCU’s work under DA resembled “business as usual.”

## Key Funnel Metrics, Entering Class 2022 versus 2023

First year of direct admission  
↓

	Entering Class 2022	Entering Class 2023	Proportional change
<b>Total confirmed admits</b>	7,885	6,757	-14%
% non-white	81%	75%	-7%
% Pell eligible	32%	32%	0%
% first-gen	34%	30%	-13%
<b>Total freshman enrollment</b>	690	686	-1%
% non-white	78%	78%	0%
% Pell eligible	57%	60%	+5%
% first-gen	34%	34%	0%
Yield rate	8.8%	10.1%	+16%
Average NTR <sup>1</sup> per student	\$13,242	\$13,412	+1%
Total NTR <sup>1</sup>	\$9,137,116	\$9,200,456	+1%

1) Net tuition revenue.

Source: EAB research and analysis.



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