

College Bound

ISSUES & TRENDS FOR THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS ADVISOR

Vol. 39, No. 1

September 2024

Financial Matters

It's All About the FAFSA

The Latest News: The Outlook for 2025-26.

U. S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona recently assured universities, colleges and parents that the new FAFSA form will be available on or before December 1. "We're going to continue fighting to make sure more students have access to higher education and that they're not paying debt for the rest of their lives, too," he said.

Secretary Cardona's assurances about the timely roll-out for the Class of 2029, though, have not calmed the nerves of campus officials nor national education organizations. "It's imperative that the department [of Education] meet the delivery date [of December 1] with a flawless rollout and fully functioning FAFSA," said Mark Becker president of the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities.

The Impact of the FAFSA Delays So Far on the Class of 2028. As of late August, education officials claimed they had processed 14.2 million FAFSA's, with no remaining backlogs. At this point, they said, completions are down only 2.8 percent from the previous year. (The National College Attainment Network claims that number is closer to 12 percent.)

Nearly three-quarters of the 384 private institutions that responded to a survey from the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities said the FAFSA problems had altered the makeup of their incoming first-year class. And 43 percent said that their first-year class is smaller than the prior one. Also, 18 percent of the respondents said the FAFSA problems had resulted in fewer new racial and ethnic students and 27 percent said that they received fewer financial aid requests.

"The fact that we are still, to this day, dealing with the aftershocks of this year's FAFSA rollout shows just how imperative it

is that the process is thoroughly tested..." said Beth Maglione, interim president of the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators.

"Ideally, we would have a fully functional, well-tested FAFSA opening on October 1. But given where we are in the process, and the challenges that have plagued this year's roll-out, we would rather wait until December 1 to allow time for the necessary testing to ensure a functional system when ED (Education Department) launches the 2025-26 FAFSA."

FAFSA Fallout. A recent report from The Century Foundation, "FAFSA Fallout: Application Dropout Threatening to Widen College Gaps," noted that nearly 300,000 fewer high school students completed the FAFSA by late May 2024 compared to late May 2023, and that "lower-income regions of the country are experiencing much larger declines... (roughly 20 percent)." The median student who submitted their FAFSA did so an estimated 75 days later than last year.

As of June 21, 2024, only 45 percent of new high school graduates had completed the FAFSA, according to the National College Attainment Network. A year ago that number was 52 percent.

The Good News: According to The Century Foundation report, "Mandatory FAFSA states have helped shrink demographic gaps through a surge in April and May, although late-spring filers will need extra support to enroll in college."

The report also concluded, "a significant drop-off in FAFSA completions will translate to a decline in college enrollment in the fall, and reduced enrollment in the years ahead as the smaller class of students progresses through their programs."

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A Class of 2028 Sampler

Auburn Admits 46 Percent. Auburn U. in Alabama attracted 55,111 applications for its Class of 2028, 14 percent more than last year. About 12,500 of those applicants came from Alabama residents, representing every county in the state.

Auburn admitted 25,219 students, for an acceptance rate of 46 percent. About 30 percent of admitted students came from Alabama and a quarter came from underrepresented groups. The average high school GPA of admitted students was 4.2, the average ACT was 28.7.

BC Admits 14 Percent. Boston C. received a total of 35,475 applications for its Class of 2028 and admitted 14.7 percent of them. It plans to enroll slightly more than the 2,350 students in its Class of 2028. The admit rate for its Class of 2021 was 32 percent. The average SAT score of admitted students was 1511, the average ACT was 34. More than 14 percent of admitted students will be the first in their family to attend college. Admitted students also hail from 91 countries.

"As the level of selectivity in the pool increases, so does the academic excellence of each incoming class," said Grant Gosselin, dean of undergraduate admissions and financial aid.

Guildford's Lush Trees and Red-Brick Buildings Leave Indelible Impressions.

Guildford C. in Greensboro, North Carolina, enrolled 364 new first-year students and 40

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2028 SAMPLER

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transfers from 21 states and eight countries. North Carolinians make up 77 percent of the new class. Business Administration tops the list of their academic interests, followed by Exercise & Sports Sciences, Psychology, Biology, Health Sciences and Computer Technology & Information Systems.

"Absolutely, this is the place I need to be," said new student Courtney Bradford. "I thrive in smaller environments and Guilford seemed so small and everyone seemed so close I'm not going to get lost."

Gonzaga's Most Diverse Class. Gonzaga U. in Washington has adopted Early Action admission for the 2025-26 admission cycle. The EA deadline is November 15, 2024, with decisions released in late December. Gonzaga's Regular Decision deadline remains February 1, 2025. Nursing program applications must be submitted by the EA deadline. "I would encourage all applicants who know they want to include Gonzaga among their college options to apply Early Action," said Stephen Keller, senior director of undergraduate admissions.

Keller added, "Almost every incoming first-year student was impacted by the FAFSA delays." The delays added "significant uncertainty and confusion to a process that can already be difficult to navigate, especially for first-generation students."

As of early July, 1,295 first-year students had committed to Gonzaga U.'s Class of 2028. According to the *Gonzaga Bulletin*, 35 percent of the students are "people of color," up from 33 percent, making this the most racially diverse class in school history.

Keuka C.'s Largest First-Year Class "in Memory." Keuka C., located in Upstate New York on a hill above one of the scenic Finger Lakes, welcomed more than 350 first-year and transfer students, the school largest entering class "in memory."

"Because we're not a huge university, we're able to devote personalized attention to every individual student," said vice president for enrollment management and marketing Pete Bekisz. "When delays in releasing the new Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) forms created complications, our admissions team worked one-on-one with applicants, extended deadlines and provided needed support."

Keuka provides up to \$27,000 a year in assistance for all accepted students, according to Finger Lakes News Radio 96.3 FM.

Oklahoma State Breaks Enrollment Record. For the third straight year, Oklahoma State U. set a new freshman enrollment

Welcome Mats

Carolina on Their Minds. Chancellor Lee H. Roberts urged students in North Carolina's Class of 2028, to, in their first month, "Get a meal or a cup of coffee with someone from a different city or state than you. In your first semester, attend a lecture or event outside of class. Third, in your first year, take a course that deepens your understanding of the world."

LSU Welcomes New Tigers. More than 6,700 students moved into Louisiana State U.'s Baton Rouge campus in mid-August, including members of the new Class. "2028, can you believe it?" said Catherine David, associate director of communications and residential life. "We've been planning for quite some time to welcome them and get our Tigers here on campus, start their welcome week experience." One student gushed, "I'm so happy, I'm ready, I'm not really home sick or anything."

Mercer 191st Academic Year. Mercer U. in Macon, Georgia, welcomed 1,000 new students to its Class of 2028, a class that "brings with them tremendous success in the classroom and their communities," said Kelly Holloway, assistant vice president for enrollment management. They kicked off

record. OSU, with campuses in Stillwater, also in Oklahoma City is the state's largest university with nearly 36,000 students.

"Challenge yourself to do something that you've never done before, to learn something new, things that test you as a person," said President Kayse Shrum. "I promise you that when you become comfortable being uncomfortable, you will find success."

Richmond Strongest New Class. The U. of Richmond in Virginia received a record high 16,000-plus applications for its Class of 2028, the strongest academic and most diverse pool in school history, according to Stephanie Dupaul, vice president for enrollment management.

The 840 new students who enrolled this fall hail from 44 states and 35 countries. International students account for 11 percent of the new class and 11 percent are first-generation college students. "We have beekeepers, students who have run marathons or taken a polar plunge, artists, a puppeteer, bakers, gardeners, woodworkers, tutors and mentors, authors, entrepreneurs and more," Dupaul bragged.

Some have been attracted by Richmond's new cognitive science interdisciplinary program.

U.S. Air Force Academy. June 26 was Day 1 for 1,100 members of the U.S. Air Force

their new year with a POP-a-Palooza, where students and their families enjoyed their favorite "pops," popcorn, popsicles and soda pop.

Tulane's "Hullabaloo Hello." Nearly 1,900 members of Tulane U.'s Class of 2028 were welcomed at its "Hullabaloo Hello" orientation. "The adventurous," said Mollye Demosthenidy, dean of Newcomb-Tulane C. "Tulane is a place of opportunity and we want to make sure you're making the most of your time here."

Introductory activities included a swamp tour, a music walking tour and the two are devoted to the city's Creole and African American history, as well as the southern Jewish experience.

Western Kentucky Advice. "To the Class of 2028: you've got this. Everything will be okay," Western Kentucky's *College Heights Herald's* Editorial Board advised new students. "Going into college, everything feels incredibly overwhelming and intimidating," one editor said. "...I made sure to find a like-minded community of friends and classmates, as well as settle into a routine that eased my mind and provided me with a sense of security." ■

Academy's Class of 2028. The day was filled with assorted activities including instruction from upperclassman about the challenges ahead.

U.S. Military Academy at West Point. More than 1,230 U.S. citizens and 16 international students, including 280 women and 445 minorities, reported to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point on July 1. They were selected from a pool of 12,300 highly qualified national and international applicants seeking membership in its Class of 2028.

"In these times of uncertainty in the world, this patriotic group of young men and women left the comfort and safety of civilian life to devote themselves to becoming guardians of Duty, Honor, Country and our United States Constitution," said Lieutenant Colonel Rance Lee.

Wabash Rings In Class of 2028. Wabash C. (Crawfordsville, Indiana) President Scott Feller "rang in" 267 students into the Class of 2028 with the same bell the college's first professor used to welcome his students 191 years ago.

"Allow yourself to let joy and curiosity be part of what drives your Wabash experience. The payoff will be huge," Feller said. Wabash, one of the few remaining all-male colleges, drew new students from 18 states and 14 countries. ■

Other Financial Matters

Sibling Deduction Cut Could Affect Many Families. About 34 percent of enrolled students have siblings in college, according to a Brookings recent report on the impact of the new FAFSA system, passed into law in 2020 and just going into effect this year. However, the new law eliminates the discount families used to get for additional children in college. Families that are eligible for Pell Grants are not affected.

"It's a big change," Elizabeth Keuffel, assistant vice president for enrollment and director of financial aid at Saint Anselm C. in New Hampshire, told the *Concord Monitor*. "I would say probably 20-25 percent of our returning student population will get their bill and say, 'Oh, my gosh, why is it so expensive?'"

"The instantaneous change from one system to another means the families weren't necessarily prepared for the fact that their prices would be going up," Phillip Levine, economics professor at Wellesley C. and one of the report's authors told the paper.

The change also has left financial aid offices across the country scrambling "to find other forms of funding, such as institutional scholarships, to offset the increase in expected contribution from affected families," the paper observed.

Meanwhile, Students More Dependent on Aid. Students are more dependent upon financial aid than ever. "This year, we are just seeing such deep concern around college cost, more than in the past couple of years," Robert Franek, editor-in-chief of the *Princeton Review*, told CNBC. "There is a stress level that is palpable."

According to the College Board, tuition and fees, plus room and board for a four-year private college averaged \$56,190 in the 2023-2024 school year. At the four-year in-state public colleges, the cost was \$24,030.

With Sufficient Aid Half Would Attend A Different School. Half of the 1,500 college students in a survey conducted by Ellucian, a higher education technology solutions company, and EMI Research Solutions said a \$5,000 difference in scholarship aid would change their top school choice. Also, 61 percent reported financial stress negatively impacted their education.

Nearly 20 percent of these students actually dropped out, with financial uncertainty a leading cause, and 59 percent are considering dropping out for that reason. Some 57 percent had to choose between college expenses and basic needs.

Some 22 percent of these students said they would enroll elsewhere after waiting only two weeks for financial aid processing. After a month that number rose to 73 percent, after two months the number hit 92 percent.

How America Paid for College in 2024. Families reported spending \$28,409 on college for the academic year of 2023-24, according to the

annual study from Sallie Mae and Ipsos, a global market research and polling company. And about 74 percent of families reported completing the FAFSA. But only 29 percent "found it easier to complete."

The study also found that 59 percent of families had a plan to pay for college before their student enrolled, matching an all-time high for this annual survey.

Additionally, 49 percent of families reported borrowing for college, up from 41 percent last year. Borrowing covered 23 percent of college costs, up from 19 percent the previous year. About half of students who borrowed expect their federal loans to be forgiven.

Court Puts Biden Repayment Plan on Hold. In mid-July, the Eighth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis blocked the Biden administration's student debt relief plan that lowers monthly payments for millions.

This is in addition to a ruling in June that blocked the administration's SAVE plan (Saving on a Valuable Education). The SAVE plan was scheduled to fully take effect on July 1, although as many as eight million student debt holders had already enrolled, including 4.5 million whose monthly payments have been reduced to zero dollars. The Dept. of Education said it had already granted \$5.5 billion in relief to 414,000 borrowers through the SAVE Plan. The administration will appeal these rulings.

Top Colleges for Financial Aid. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, nearly 90 percent of first-time, full-time undergraduate students at four-year colleges receive some type of financial aid for the 2020-2021 school-year. Students at private non-profit colleges were more likely to receive aid than public school students, the organization reported. The average grant amount at private schools was \$25,400. At public colleges and universities it was \$6,600.

The top colleges for financial aid this year are: Washington U. in St. Louis, with 2024-25 tuition of \$64,500 and average institutional aid of \$55,559; Thomas Aquinas C. in Santa Paula, California, with 2024-25 tuition of \$30,200 and average institutional aid of \$12,366; Skidmore C. in Saratoga Springs, New York, with 2024-25 tuition of \$67,140 and financial aid averaging \$43,558; C. of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine, with 2024-25 tuition of \$47,448 and average institutional aid of \$31,093.

Also, Wabash C. in Crawfordsville, Indiana, with a 2024-25 tuition of \$49,800 and average institutional aid of \$34,885; Emory U. in Atlanta, Georgia, with 2024-25 tuition of \$63,400 and average aid of \$46,482; St. Olaf C. in Northfield, Minnesota, with 2024-25 tuition of \$59,760 and average institutional aid of \$37,940; Reed C. in Portland, Oregon, with a 2024-25 tuition of \$69,040 and average institutional aid of \$46,774; Williams C. in Williamstown, Massachusetts, with 2024-25 tuition of \$68,240 and average institutional aid of \$55,371. ■

COUNSELOR'S BOOKSHELF

Virginia No. 1 Public for Financial Aid. Meanwhile, the *Princeton Review* named the U. of Virginia the top public school for providing financial assistance to students. UVA provides 100 percent of demonstrated financial need to all in-state and out-of-state students through a combination of scholarships, grants, work-study and need-based loans. Last year, UVA awarded approximately

\$193 million in need-based financial aid through its AccessUVA program. See, <https://princetonreview.com>.

Most Affordable? According to the 2025 edition of the *Fiske Guide to Colleges*, the 10 most affordable public four-year universities are: U. of Georgia; U. of Maryland Baltimore County; U. of New Mexico; U. of North

Carolina Asheville; State U. of New York C. at Geneseo; SUNY Stony Brook U.; U. of Texas at Austin; Truman State U.; U. of Utah and U. of Washington.

The 10 most affordable private four-year institutions: Alfred U.; Beloit C.; Centre C.; The Cooper Union; Emerson C.; U. of Miami; Olin College of Engineering; Rice U.; Warren Wilson C. and Xavier U. of Louisiana. See, *Fiske Guide to Colleges, 2025*, by Edward B. Fiske; Sourcebooks; SKU: 9781728295558; \$29.99. ■

NEWS YOU CAN USE

Rowan U. Adds \$10 million for Scholarships. The Board of Trustees for Rowan U. in New Jersey approved a budget for Fiscal Year 2024-25 that includes a \$10 million increase in scholarships and waivers. Of that, \$3 million will be distributed to its Emergency Assistance Fund for students with unique circumstances and who have the greatest need to help them graduate.

Warren Wilson C. and Xavier U. Work on STEM Diversity. Warren Wilson C. and Xavier U. are collaborating on a new program to address “the lack of diversity and basic research skills in biomedical and other STEM fields.” The program called ACCELERATE (Augmenting Community College Education to Leverage Experiential Research and Advanced Training Equity) is funded by a \$1.8 million grant over five years from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. The program will enroll approximately 70-100 students per year.

“The Future of Good Jobs: Projections through 2031.” A new report from Georgetown U. Center on Education and the Workforce finds that “economic opportunity will increasingly favor workers with higher levels of education and training (85 percent).”

About 66 percent will be available to workers on the bachelor’s degree pathway. “Managerial and professional office occupations will be the largest source of good jobs in 2031...” To view the entire report visit, cew.georgetown.edu/goodjobsprojections2031.

How Will Student Aid Borrowers Vote in November? About 29 percent of student aid borrowers say student loan debt will have a major influence on their vote, according to a survey conducted by bankrate.com. And 18 percent of adults say the same thing, according to Bankrates’ “Student Loans and the Presidential Election Survey.” About 17 percent of adults carry federal debt, according to the Census Bureau and Federal Student Aid data. About 46 percent of Americans call student debt a “national crisis.”

President Trump instituted a coronavirus program that suspended both payments and interest for three years. President Biden created the new income-driven repayment plan that has reduced cost for millions of borrowers and has canceled more than \$167 billion in loans, plans that candidate Kamala Harris endorsed.

Penn Scholarship Grads Post Highest Ivy League Median Income. According to *The*

Daily Pennsylvanian, which used aggregate data from the U.S. Department of Education’s College Scoreboards, financial aid recipients who graduated from Penn had the highest median income of any Ivy League School, \$111,371. Princeton placed second with a median income of \$110,066. Brown placed last with the median income of \$93,487 for students who receive financial aid and graduated.

The data also showed that an average cost of attendance at Penn for federal aid recipients was \$26,000 per year, more than \$6,000 over the national average for four-year colleges. This academic year, Penn increased tuition by 3.9 percent, bringing cost of attendance before aid to \$87,860.

Penn ranked fourth among Ivy League schools with a graduation rate of 97 percent, behind Yale, Harvard and Princeton. The acceptance rate for Penn’s Class of 2028 is 5.4 percent.

DePaul Designated AANAPISI Institution. The U.S. Dept. of Education has designated DePaul U. in Chicago as an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution. That’s because DePaul enrolls more than 12 percent AANAPISI students.

Postsecondary Student Success Recognition Program. The U.S. Department of Education is planning a Postsecondary Student Success Recognition Program that will “uplift institutions of higher education that support all students to complete affordable credentials of value that prepare them for success.”

DOE provided more information at its “Raise the Bar” summit. “Imagine a world where schools with the most Pell Grant recipients are ranked highest in the *U.S. News and World Report*, where prestige is defined by preparing graduates well to enter the workforce and lead fulfilling lives and careers...” said Education Secretary Miguel Cardona. ■

New Transfer Agreements

Augustana C. and Rivermont Collegiate Agree on Guaranteed Admission. Augustana C. in Western Illinois will guarantee admission to qualified students who graduate from Rivermont Collegiate, a private college prep school in Bettendorf, Iowa, across the Mississippi, which enrolls many international students from Vietnam, Morocco, Jamaica, South Korea, China, Serbia and other nations.

“This collaboration represents not only a strengthening of our local education community, but also our shared commitment to serving students from across the globe,” Liz Nino, Augustana’s executive director of international enrollment, told WVIK.

Maine Transfer Guarantee. Six of Maine’s independent colleges, the U. of New England, C. of the Atlantic, Husson U., Thomas C., Saint Joseph C. of Maine, and Unity Environmental U., will guarantee admission to qualified Maine community college graduates. Similar programs exist in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Vermont, which have been negotiated by the New England Board of

Education.

“The Maine Transfer Guarantee is a big step forward in simplifying transfer with the goal of helping students stay on track to earn the bachelor’s degree they seek by removing barriers that previously slowed them down, such as credits lost in the transfer process that add both cost and time to degree,” said UNE president James Herbert, who is also president of the Maine Independent College Association.

Manhattan C. and Nassau C.C. Articulation Agreement. Manhattan C. in New York City and Nassau C.C. on Long Island signed a plan that lets NCC graduates “seamlessly” transfer credits to the four-year Manhattan C. NCC students with a 2.5 average can transfer, those with a 3.0 are eligible for a merit scholarship. Manhattan President Milo Riverso called it a “win-win for both institutions.”

Transfer Honor Roll. To see the 40 metrics related to successful transfers and degree completion, go to www.ptk.org/2024/06/17/phi-theta-kappa-recognizes-228-colleges-for-exemplary-transfer-pathways/ based on. ■

FAFSA

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Further FAFSA Complication. On July 30, the DOE announced another misstep. It said that the ability for schools to submit batch corrections for student FAFSA records would not be available this year. According to the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, “In a normal year, a large school may process hundreds if not thousands of corrections, which need to be completed before final aid offers can be issued and distributions can be made.” ■

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