

IMPROVING AND EXPANDING THE IPEDS ADMISSIONS SURVEY COMPONENT

Author

Abby Miller
ASA Research, LLC



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Jonathan Turk, American Council on Education

Content Contact: Tara Lawley at (202) 245-7081 or Tara.Lawley@ed.gov

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper sought to explore areas of potential improvement to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Admissions survey component (ADM) based on an environmental scan, data analyses, and interviews with stakeholders who use and report the ADM data. NPEC commissioned this paper due to an interest in better representing growing student populations who are not currently included in ADM data.

The environmental scan suggests a shift in recent years toward a more holistic admissions process with less emphasis on standardized test scores. IPEDS ADM data show that nearly all institutions (90 percent) require students' high school records for admission, while just over half (58 percent) require test scores. The largest difference in the test score requirement can be found by Carnegie classification, with 92 percent of Doctoral/Research universities, 80 percent of Master's institutions, and 67 percent of Baccalaureate colleges requiring test scores.

An external survey comparison between IPEDS ADM and three national admissions surveys was conducted to identify potential areas for updating or adding to the scope of the current IPEDS ADM survey questions. Two of the external surveys collect information about transfer students, while IPEDS ADM is limited to first-time students. The comparison found consistencies among questions related to academic considerations and requirements, with external surveys asking more detailed questions about exam requirements. In addition, The IPEDS ADM is the only survey not to include items reflecting non-academic considerations such as extracurricular activities, alumni, and work experience.

Interviewees—representing institutions, states, membership associations, and a college rankings publication—generally find the IPEDS admissions data useful. While more detailed admissions data are available through external surveys, data users rely on the IPEDS data because it reflects a large and diverse set of institutions. However, IPEDS ADM is currently limited to information about first-time students, and all interviewees indicated that they would like to see the collection expanded to include transfer students.

Following the addition of transfer students, the most frequently cited suggestion from interviewees is to expand considerations questions to non-academic areas to reflect a more holistic admission process. Additional suggestions include expanding the survey to include graduate students, open admission institutions, a 12-month data collection (as opposed to a Fall enrollment snapshot), and items reflecting test-optional admissions, GPA, and early admissions.

While recognizing the potential associated challenges, interviewees are also interested in the addition of items that would help assess equity in the admission process, such as financial need, financial aid offered, first-generation status, and alumni status. Finally, interviewees made suggestions for additional information to collect regarding test scores and test score use.

Based on information collected through the environmental scan, data analysis, and interviews, recommendations for further exploration include:

1. Include the means to collect data reflecting transfer students.
2. Add items to gather non-academic considerations.
3. Add a question about test-optional policies, or clarify current response options for test score considerations.

A future survey or TRP can investigate in further detail the other potential additions and changes suggested by interviewees. It is important to include a mix of stakeholders in future discussions about changes to ADM, such as college admissions staff and administrators, institutional researchers, and consumers.

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Admissions (ADM) survey component through a general overview of the current landscape of admissions data and provides recommendations to ensure that the ADM survey component provides helpful information to both prospective students and their families (consumers) and researchers interested in the college admissions process. The National Postsecondary Education Cooperative (NPEC) previously commissioned papers on the topics of transfer student data and graduate student data.¹ Both papers recommended expanding the ADM survey component to collect more information related to their respective student populations of interest. In response to those recommendations, NPEC commissioned this paper focused solely on how the ADM survey component could be expanded to more accurately reflect the current admissions landscape.

This paper seeks to address the following research questions:

- 1) What current higher education trends or populations are relevant to admissions data? Are they particular to a specific sector or all institutions?
- 2) What admissions data are currently available through IPEDS?
 - a. Are there other reliable sources collecting the data? If so, what are the limitations in those other sources?
 - b. How are the data used?
- 3) What are the limitations with the current IPEDS admissions data collection in answering questions from various stakeholders?
- 4) What data are needed to answer important questions related to admissions that IPEDS cannot currently answer?
 - a. Which data are needed in IPEDS Data Center or College Navigator?
 - b. What are the challenges to collecting these data (i.e., data availability or increased burden on reporting institutions)?
- 5) How can the current IPEDS admissions data collection be improved through definitions or instructions to better answer research questions and reflect the trends occurring in the postsecondary landscape?

METHODOLOGY

The research for this paper consisted of the following methods:

- A review of the most recent ADM survey questions and data elements currently collected by IPEDS; the origin and evolution of the ADM survey as profiled in *The History and Origins of Survey Items for the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System*

¹ Both papers are available at: <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/npec/national-postsecondary-cooperative-education-npec-products>.

report;² and a cross-comparison of IPEDS admissions questions and those included in the Common Data Set (CDS), National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) annual surveys, and the recent American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) survey.³

- A high-level environmental scan of recent research related to admissions to ascertain what specific topics within admissions are of interest to researchers and consumers.
- Nine informational interviews with institutional stakeholders and additional interviews with NCES staff (the number of non-NCES interviewees is limited to nine as seeking federal clearance from the Office of Management and Budget [OMB] to interview more than nine participants is beyond the scope of NPEC papers). Additionally, NPEC members provided supplementary feedback via meetings. The nine interviewees included:
 - Two community college representatives
 - Two public four-year institutions
 - One private four-year institution
 - One state university system (previously board of trustees)
 - One membership association of public four-year institutions
 - One membership association of college admissions counselors
 - College rankings publication

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The ADM component is a relatively new survey; until 2014-15, ADM questions were part of the Institutional Characteristics (IC) component. The admissions questions were originally added to the IC component in 2001-2002 (Aliyeva, Cody, & Low, 2018). The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA) required the addition of admissions data to College Navigator.

A 2004 Technical Review Panel (TRP) made the following recommendations about admissions questions:

- Either eliminate admissions considerations from the IC component or distinguish “between entrance requirements and those that are part of the application process.”
- The TRP discussed, but did not address, the concern about admission requirements being program-specific.
- Specify that institutions report the number of students who applied, were admitted, and enrolled for the current year rather than allow institutions to select the time period.
- Allow institutions to report gender total if a breakout is not available (particularly for applicants).

² Aliyeva, A., Cody, C.A., & Low, K. (2018). *The History and Origins of Survey Items for the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (2016–17 Update)*. (NPEC 2018-023). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, D.C.: National Postsecondary Education Cooperative. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>

³ AACRAO recently released a report of findings from its first survey of admission practices, conducted jointly with NACAC. This survey “is meant to compliment both IPEDS and [NACAC State of College Admission survey] data.”

- Allow institutions to report test scores for any enrolled students who took the test (rather than limit reporting to institutions where a minimum of 60 percent of students provided test scores).

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

The college admissions field has seen a shift in recent years toward a more holistic approach with less emphasis on standardized test scores. A 2019 *Chronicle of Higher Education* report on trends in higher education predicts that an increasing number of institutions will shift from test required to test optional (“Other Changes on the Horizon,” 2019). Over 200 colleges have de-emphasized the ACT and SAT since 2005 including the University of Chicago, a highly-selective institution. As the *Chronicle* report notes, institutions are relying on more sophisticated predictive analytics which have shown that test scores may not be the best predictor of student success at an institution. In addition, some institutions and publications that produce rankings are focusing more on social mobility as an indicator of institutional success. An *Inside Higher Ed* 2018 Survey of College and University Admissions Directors also found that, in light of the University of Chicago decision, respondents expect other institutions to follow suit (Jaschik, 2018).

The NACAC 2018 annual *State of College Admission* (SOCA) reported on changes to admission patterns between Fall 2016 and Fall 2017 based on its annual survey. The report showed an increase in applications and a slight decrease in yield rate for first-time students. Transfer students have a lower acceptance rate than first-time students but a much higher yield rate (Clinedinst & Patel, 2018). Other year-over-year trends included a slight increase in early decision and early action applications and an increase in wait list acceptances. Institutions responding to NACAC’s annual survey indicate that grades, standardized test scores, and high school curriculum are the top factors for first-time students, while grades are the most important consideration for transfers.

Due to recent events and changes in how to identify college-readiness and academic ability, institutions are beginning to rethink the traditional admissions process. A recent scandal related to wealthy families “gaming” the admissions system through bribery and other means has garnered much national media attention. AACRAO developed a survey of admission practices jointly with NACAC in 2018, which includes a question about institutions’ admission decision rubrics, “in response to the recent and ongoing news about the various admission scandals” (AACRAO, 2019). The survey found that the majority (68 percent) of responding institutions consider at least one factor such as an academic index. Private, not-for-profit institutions are the most likely to consider other factors, including legacy applicants and applicants “who have completed a dual enrollment course, summer program or other immersive program at the institution prior to high school graduation” (43 percent each), veterans and applicants “who are related to a current employee of the institution” (38 percent each), athletes (37 percent), and applicants “who help the institution meet a particular diversity goal” (29 percent). Only roughly half of other types of institutions consider an academic index,

and approximately one-fourth or fewer of other institutions consider the other listed factors, such as student backgrounds.

Efforts are underway to address inequities in the college admissions process. Over 100 institutions have joined a coalition that provides a college application for underrepresented students designed to assess factors that were never considered before, such as students' character and "meaningful contribution" to "the common good" (Gewertz, 2019). Over 200 high schools use a new "Mastery Transcript" that replaces letter grades with measures of skill and character.

Survey Comparison

Table 1, below, compares survey elements collected for first-time students across IPEDS, CDS, NACAC, and AACRAO. The AACRAO survey only overlaps with the other surveys' considerations sections and thus is only used for comparison on those questions. All surveys except for AACRAO collect data on the number of students who applied, were admitted, and enrolled. Several academic considerations or requirements are consistent across the four surveys, however CDS and NACAC ask more detailed questions about exam requirements (AACRAO asks about whether institutions collect various test scores in a separate question). CDS, NACAC, and AACRAO ask whether essays are required, and both CDS and NACAC include a question about interviews, while IPEDS does not ask about these items. Both IPEDS and NACAC include portfolio/competencies in their respective considerations sections, while CDS and AACRAO do not. The IPEDS ADM survey does not include any non-academic consideration items, such as extracurricular activities, alumni, and work experience; CDS and NACAC each include 11 non-academic items, and AACRAO asks about three. The NACAC and AACRAO surveys are primarily intended to collect information about admission policies and do not collect data such as test scores. CDS, in addition to the test score data collected by IPEDS, collects high school rank and GPA data for first-time enrolled students.

In addition to the considerations items below, the AACRAO survey includes more nuanced questions about admission processes. For example, the survey found that most institutions (95 percent) make admission decisions through a central office; 38 percent use technology to automate some or all admission decisions; and the majority (62 percent) only accept online applications.

Table 1. Comparison of IPEDS, CDS, NACAC, and AACRAO Admissions Survey Elements

Survey item	IPEDS	CDS	NACAC	AACRAO
FIRST-TIME STUDENTS				
Number Applied/Admitted/Enrolled	x	x	x	
Considerations/Requirements – Academic				
High school completion type (Diploma/GED)		x		x
College preparatory program	x	x	x	
College preparatory curriculum (AP/IB/Dual)			x	
High school record/transcript	x	x		x
Academic rigor		x	x	
High school rank	x	x	x	x
High school GPA	x	x	x	x
Test scores (ACT/SAT)	x	x	x	x
SAT Subject Tests		x		
ACT/SAT Essay/writing component		x		
SAT II			x	
Other subject test (AP/IB)		x	x	
TOEFL	x		x	
Other test (ABT, Wonderlic, WISC-III)	x			
Placement exams		x		x
Essay/personal statement		x	x	x
Writing sample				x
Recommendation	x	x	x	x
Interview		x	x	
State exam			x	
Portfolio/competencies	x		x	
Considerations/Requirements – Non-Academic				
Extracurricular activities		x	x	x
Talent/ability		x		
Character/personal qualities		x		
First generation		x	x	
Alumni relation		x	x	x
Residence (Geographical/state)		x	x	
Religious affiliation		x		
Gender			x	
Race/ethnicity		x	x	x
Volunteer experience		x		
Work experience		x	x	x
Level of interest		x	x	x

Survey item	IPEDS	CDS	NACAC	AACRAO
High school			X	
Income/ability to pay			X	
Community involvement				X
Enrolled Student Data				
Test scores (ACT/SAT)				
#/% submitting	X	X		
25th/75th percentiles	X	X		
Distribution by 100-point bands		X		
SAT reading/writing	X	X		
SAT math	X	X		
ACT composite	X	X		
ACT math	X	X		
ACT writing		X		
ACT English	X	X		
High school rank distribution		X		
GPA		X		
Average/% distribution		X		
% submitted		X		

SOURCE: Author's analysis of survey materials for the: IPEDS ADM Survey (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2018); Common Data Set 2018-19 (Common Data Set Initiative, n.d.);⁴ NACAC Admission Trends Survey: Fall 2017 Cycle (NACAC, 2017);⁵ and ACCRAO admissions practice survey (AACRAO, 2019).⁶

The response options for the considerations questions above are as follows on IPEDS ADM:

- Required
- Considered but not required
- Recommended
- Neither required nor recommended

AACRAO intentionally added nuance to the IPEDS categories:

- Required
- Supplemental and highly encouraged
- Supplemental, accepted, and used in decision process if received but not encouraged
- Neither required nor supplemental

⁴ Retrieved from: http://www.commondataset.org/docs/2018-2019/CDS_2018-2019.pdf

⁵ Retrieved from: <https://www.nacacnet.org/globalassets/documents/publications/research/admission-trends-survey-fall-2017-cycle.pdf>

⁶ Retrieved from: <https://www.aacrao.org/docs/default-source/research-docs/applicant-to-admit-freshman-admission-operations-report-2019.pdf>

NACAC asks respondents to rate the above consideration items on a scale:

- Considerable Importance
- Moderate Importance
- Limited Importance
- No Importance

CDS is a hybrid between the NACAC scale and IPEDS/AACRAO categories:

- Very Important
- Important
- Considered
- Not considered

In addition to the above items, which AACRAO phrases as “requirements” rather than “considerations,” AACRAO asks about institutions’ admission decision rubrics. This question asks whether “any of the following factors are taken into consideration when evaluating whether or not to admit an applicant.” The response options are:

- Athletics
- Legacy applicants
- Veterans
- Applicants who have completed a dual enrollment course, summer program or other immersive program at the institution prior to high school graduation
- Applicants who have a particular set of academic qualifications (HS GPA, HS rank, test score)
- Applicants who are related to a current employee of the institution
- Applicants who help the institution meet a particular diversity goal
- Other(s) not listed here
- None of the above

AACRAO also asks a separate question about whether institutions consider applicants’ levels of interest and uses several factors to indicate how institutions determine level of interest:

- Participation in campus tour
- Number of meetings/contacts with admissions counselor
- Point and time of first contact with institution (e.g., Junior or Senior year)
- Email open rate
- Response time to call for action
- Click-through rate on emails sent by the institution
- Website browsing
- Time spent reading an email
- Other

While the IPEDS ADM and AACRAO survey questions are limited to first-time students, the CDS and NACAC surveys also collect information about transfer students. In addition, NACAC collects admission information about international students. CDS has a separate section for transfer students, following the survey questions about first-time students. Below are screen shots of the CDS transfer admission section.

Figure 1. CDS Admission Survey – Transfer Questions

Common Data Set 2018-2019

D. TRANSFER ADMISSION

Fall Applicants

- D1.** Does your institution enroll transfer students? Yes No
 (If no, please skip to Section E)
 If yes, may transfer students earn advanced standing credit by transferring credits earned from course work completed at other colleges/universities? Yes No

- D2.** Provide the number of students who applied, were admitted, and enrolled as degree-seeking transfer students in Fall 2018.

	Applicants	Admitted Applicants	Enrolled Applicants
Men			
Women			
Total			

Application for Admission

- D3.** Indicate terms for which transfers may enroll:
 Fall Winter Spring Summer
- D4.** Must a transfer applicant have a minimum number of credits completed or else must apply as an entering freshman?
 Yes No
 If yes, what is the minimum number of credits and the unit of measure? _____
- D5.** Indicate all items required of transfer students to apply for admission:

	Required of All	Recommended of All	Recommended of Some	Required of Some	Not required
High school transcript					
College transcript(s)					
Essay or personal statement					
Interview					
Standardized test scores					
Statement of good standing from prior institution(s)					

- D6.** If a minimum high school grade point average is required of transfer applicants, specify (on a 4.0 scale): _____
- D7.** If a minimum college grade point average is required of transfer applicants, specify (on a 4.0 scale): _____
- D8.** List any other application requirements specific to transfer applicants:

D9. List application priority, closing, notification, and candidate reply dates for transfer students. If applications are reviewed on a continuous or rolling basis, place a check mark in the "Rolling admission" column.

	Priority Date	Closing Date	Notification Date	Reply Date	Rolling Admission
Fall					
Winter					
Spring					
Summer					

D10. Does an open admission policy, if reported, apply to transfer students? Yes No

D11. Describe additional requirements for transfer admission, if applicable:

Transfer Credit Policies

D12. Report the lowest grade earned for any course that may be transferred for credit: _____

D13. Maximum number of credits or courses that may be transferred from a two-year institution:
 Number _____ Unit type _____

D14. Maximum number of credits or courses that may be transferred from a four-year institution:
 Number _____ Unit type _____

D15. Minimum number of credits that transfers must complete at your institution to earn an associate degree: _____

D16. Minimum number of credits that transfers must complete at your institution to earn a bachelor's degree: _____

D17. Describe other transfer credit policies:

The NACAC survey includes transfer students and international students as response options in the same questions about first-year students, as shown in figure 2:

Figure 2. NACAC Admission Survey – Transfer and International Applicant Questions

Admission Trends Survey: Fall 2017 Cycle			
Factors in the Admission Decision			
21. How much importance is given to each of the following criteria in admission decisions made at your institution?			
	First-Time, First-Year Students (Not Including International)	Transfer Students (Not Including International)	First-Time, First-Year International Students
Total High school GPA (all courses)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
High school GPA (college prep courses)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Strength of high school curriculum	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
High school class rank	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Admission test scores (SAT, ACT)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
SAT II scores	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Other subject test scores (AP, IB)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Essay or writing sample	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Interview	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Portfolio	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Work	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Extracurricular activities	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
State graduation exam scores	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Counselor recommendation	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Teacher/professor recommendation	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Student's interest in attending	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Articulation with prior postsecondary institution(s)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Quality of prior postsecondary institution(s)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

	First-Time, First-Year Students (Not Including International)	Transfer Students (Not Including International)	First-Time, First-Year International Students
Overall GPA at prior postsecondary institution(s)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Average of grades in transferable courses	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
English proficiency exam scores	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
National school-leaving certificate (non U.S.)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

22. To what extent do the following student characteristics influence how the above factors in the admission decision are evaluated?

	First-Time, First-Year Students (Not Including International)	Transfer Students (Not Including International)	First-time, First-Year International Students
Race/ethnicity	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Gender	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
First-generation status	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
State or county of residence (Country of residence for international students)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
High school attended	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Alumni relations	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Ability to pay	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

Data Analysis

Table 2, below, displays each item from the Considerations section of the IPEDS ADM survey and the total number and percentage of institutions that require, consider, recommend, or do not require/recommend each item. Nearly all institutions (90 percent) require students' high school records, and the majority (75 percent) require high school GPA, followed by test scores as the next most common requirement (58 percent).

Table 2. IPEDS ADM Survey Component – Considerations Data, All Institutions: Fall 2017

All Institutions	Required		Considered but not required		Recommended		Neither required nor recommended	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
High school GPA	1,557	75.0%	59	2.8%	193	9.3%	266	12.8%
High school rank	206	9.9%	201	9.7%	798	38.5%	870	41.9%
High school record	1,857	89.5%	25	1.2%	105	5.1%	88	4.2%
College-preparatory program	622	30.0%	73	3.5%	821	39.6%	559	26.9%
Recommendations	818	39.4%	118	5.7%	400	19.3%	739	35.6%
Competencies	223	10.7%	70	3.4%	259	12.5%	1,523	73.4%
Test Scores	1,212	58.4%	143	6.9%	279	13.4%	441	21.3%
TOEFL	1,355	65.3%	53	2.6%	235	11.3%	432	20.8%
Other test	261	12.6%	22	1.1%	64	3.1%	1,728	83.3%

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Admissions component, Fall 2017.

Tables 3 and 4 display the same data for four-year public institutions and four-year private, non-profit institutions. Two-year and for-profit institutions are not included because the majority are open admission institutions exempt from responding, resulting in a low number of responses.

Table 3. IPEDS ADM Survey Component – Considerations Data, 4-year Public Institutions: Fall 2017

4-year Public	Required		Considered but not required		Recommended		Neither required nor recommended	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
GPA	493	88.4%	53	9.5%	8	1.4%	4	0.7%
Rank	109	19.5%	227	40.7%	181	32.4%	41	7.3%
Record	536	96.1%	13	2.3%	8	1.4%	1	0.2%
College-preparatory program	299	53.6%	203	36.4%	46	8.2%	10	1.8%
Recommendations	69	12.4%	118	21.1%	347	62.2%	24	4.3%
Competencies	26	4.7%	69	12.4%	455	81.5%	8	1.4%
Test Scores	491	88.0%	31	5.6%	16	2.9%	20	3.6%
TOEFL	459	82.3%	30	5.4%	59	10.6%	10	1.8%
Other test	13	2.3%	14	2.5%	525	94.1%	6	1.1%

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Admissions component, Fall 2017.

Table 4. IPEDS ADM Survey Component – Considerations Data, 4-Year Private Institutions: Fall 2017

4-Year Private, non-profit	Required		Considered but not required		Recommended		Neither required nor recommended	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
GPA	925	81.1%	97	8.5%	87	7.6%	32	2.8%
Rank	88	7.7%	525	46.0%	384	33.7%	144	12.6%
Record	1,024	89.7%	75	6.6%	29	2.5%	13	1.1%
College-preparatory program	311	27.3%	566	49.6%	217	19.0%	47	4.1%
Recommendations	616	54.0%	238	20.9%	206	18.1%	81	7.1%
Competencies	104	9.1%	172	15.1%	817	71.6%	48	4.2%
Test Scores	697	61.1%	156	13.7%	171	15.0%	117	10.3%
TOEFL	826	72.4%	146	12.8%	139	12.2%	30	2.6%
Other test	37	3.2%	22	1.9%	1,070	93.8%	12	1.1%

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Admissions component, Fall 2017.

When analyzed by Carnegie classification, the largest difference appears to be among test scores. Ninety-two percent of Doctoral/Research universities require test scores, while 80 percent of masters institutions and 67 percent of baccalaureate colleges require test scores for admission (table 5).

Table 5. IPEDS ADM Survey Component – Considerations Data, Test Scores, by Carnegie Classification: Fall 2017

Test scores	Required		Considered but not required		Recommended		Neither required nor recommended	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Doctoral/Research Universities	223	91.8%	9	3.7%	4	1.6%	7	2.9%
Masters Colleges and Universities I	439	80.4%	43	7.9%	43	7.9%	21	3.8%
Baccalaureate Colleges	337	66.6%	61	12.1%	63	12.5%	45	8.9%

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Admissions component, Fall 2017.

Table 6 reports the number of Applied/Admitted/Enrolled (AAE) students in 2008-09 and 2017-18, along with the 10-year percentage change. The number of applicants increased by 45 percent to nearly 11 million in 2017-18, and the number admitted increased by 43 percent to over 6 million. The number enrolled, however, increased by just one percent to 1.64 million.

Table 6. IPEDS ADM Survey Component – A/A/E Data

	2008-09	2017-18	Percentage change
Applications	7,447,339	10,787,211	44.8%
Admissions	4,252,781	6,068,255	42.7%
Enrolled	1,613,807	1,635,871	1.4%

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Admissions component, Fall 2017.

The average institutional admittance rate remained steady over a ten-year period at 67 percent in both 2008-09 and 2017-18. The yield rate dropped from 53 percent in 2008-09 to 35 percent in 2017-18, an 18 percentage point decline (table 7).

Table 7. IPEDS ADM Survey Component – A/A/E Data, Average Admit and Yield Rates

	2008-09	2017-18	Percentage point change
Admit rate	67.4%	67.3%	-0.1
Yield rate	53.4%	34.9%	-18.5

NOTE: Institutions reporting less than 30 were not included in this analysis.

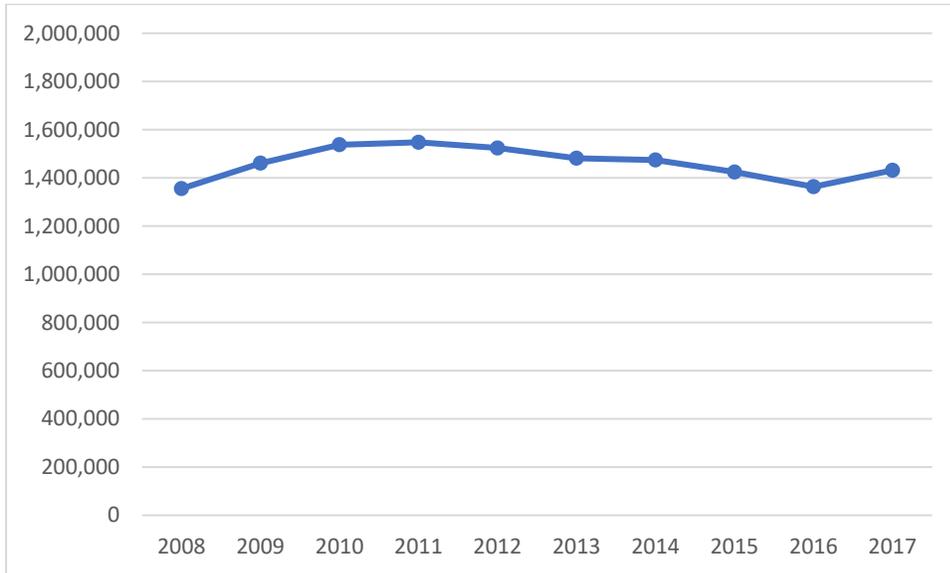
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Admissions component, Fall 2017.

Related Enrollment Data

Given NPEC’s interest in exploring the possibility of adding transfer and/or graduate students to the ADM survey, data related to enrollment trends of these students follow.

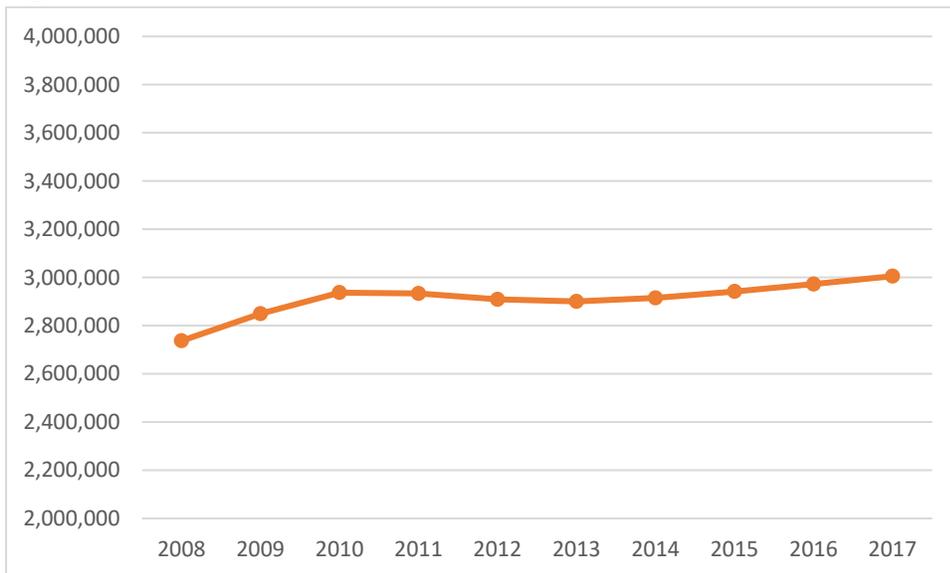
Figure 3 shows the number of transfer-in students increased from 1.35 million in 2008-09 to 1.43 million in 2017-18, a 6 percent increase. Transfer-in students represent approximately 7 percent of fall enrollments at degree-granting institutions. The number of graduate students has increased from 2.7 million in 2008-09 to 3 million in 2017-18, a 10 percent increase (figure 4).

Figure 3. Number of Transfer Students Enrolled in Title IV Institutions: 2008-09 to 2017-18



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall Enrollment component final data (2006-2016) and provisional data (2017).

Figure 4. Number of Graduate Students Enrolled in Title IV Institutions: 2008-09 to 2017-18



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall Enrollment component final data (2006 - 2016) and provisional data (2017).

INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Interviewees generally find the IPEDS admissions data useful, both for themselves and for the general public. The admissions data as displayed in College Navigator are an “unbiased source for families.” The admissions survey is “straightforward” and “lines up with” the Common Data Set. However, respondents conveyed that the survey is currently limited by only collecting information about first-time students, and they would like to see the collection expanded, primarily to include transfer students. While more detailed admissions data are available through NACAC and CDS, data users rely on the IPEDS data as it reflects a large and diverse set of institutions.

ADM Data Use

The majority of interviewees use IPEDS ADM data on a regular basis. Other data sources used include the NACAC admissions survey of a sample of its member institutions, the Common Data Set (CDS), and college admission guides such as Peterson’s. The four-year private, selective institution relies on data from the Consortium on Financing Higher Education, a database of similar institutions, for benchmarking against peers due to their unique nature. Some interviewees noted the IPEDS “time lag...keeps it from being useful” and instead reported they use other sources to look at more recent data. One of the community colleges interviewed does not use IPEDS ADM data (it is not required to respond to the ADM survey) and noted the majority of ADM data, such as considerations and test scores, are not applicable to that sector.

Four-year institutions use the IPEDS ADM data to “benchmark industry trends, research institutions considered competitors or peers,” and provide “context to other people at the university.” IPEDS ADM provides the “big picture...macro trends by type, region, and control,” while CDS is used to look more closely at individual institutions. Among the uses of the ADM data, institutions review peer institutions’ test scores, considerations, selectivity, acceptance, and yield rate data, both over time and by institution type. Institutions and systems also use the admissions data for market and competitive analyses presented to admissions staff, system-level administrators, and boards of trustees. Credit rating agencies use admissions data as a demand indicator.

Transfers

All nine interviewees would like to see ADM collect information about transfer applicants. This is particularly useful benchmarking information for four-year public institutions and community colleges. (While most community colleges are open admission institutions that do not report the ADM survey component, some interviewees advocate for expanding the collection to all institutions; see “Open Institutions,” below.) Even though these data may not be of interest at a particular institution, for example the selective institution interviewed does not have a significant transfer population, all interviewees conveyed that the data are needed for broader policy conversations. One of the community college interviewees noted their college already has transfer admissions data, and it would not be a burden to add this information to the survey. Another respondent noted that while CDS has transfer data, that survey is “clunky.”

Collecting data reflecting transfer students requires the following considerations:

- Including transfers may require expanding the survey to year-round admissions rather than fall admissions due to the continual enrollment of transfer students throughout the year. (This may be a consideration for all students; see “12-month Collection” below).
- Institutions are interested in the number of credits transfer students bring to the institution (although this may be more suitable for the enrollment survey, if it can be added to IPEDS at all). One interviewee suggested collecting an average number of credits transfer students bring to the institution.
- Institutions are also interested in what types of institutions students transfer from, how many transfer via articulation agreements, and how many are college-ready.
- Including transfer students raises issues of how transfer students are defined.⁷ For example, some institutions or states use a minimum number of credits to define transfers and some count dual enrollment credit while others do not.

Open Institutions

Three of the nine interviewees would like to see the ADM survey expanded to open admission institutions. In particular, two of these three believe the yield rates for open institutions would be useful information, and the third interviewee believes there is interest in potential students’ test scores for these institutions. One community college interviewee noted that their institution can access the yield rate from the National Community College Benchmarking Project.

Collecting admissions data from open admission institutions would require expanding to a year-round collection since most open institutions have rolling, year-round enrollments. A for-profit representative stated that they would not find the admissions data useful for their institution or sector because some students do not enroll until a year after they apply, which could result in misleading data.

One interviewee suggested looking into the definition of open admissions, as some institutions may have requirements for admissions but still have an acceptance rate of 99 percent or not quite 100 percent. One community college interviewee, however, suggested that the requirement of high school graduation or equivalent is standard across the sector.

It should be noted that while two-year and less-than-two-year, public institutions typically have open admissions policies and, therefore, are exempt from completing ADM, a handful of institutions in these sectors complete the survey. The 23 two-year, public and 59 less-than-two-year, public institutions that responded to the survey in 2017-18 appear to be extensions of four-year, public institutions or technical, nursing, or other specialized colleges that likely have specific requirements for admission.

⁷ For a detailed discussion, see the 2018 NPEC paper *Assessing the Capacity of IPEDS to Collect Transfer Student Data*: https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/pdf/NPEC/data/NPEC_Paper_IPEDS_Transfer_Students_Data_2018.pdf

One community college interviewee expressed concern that, while he is interested in comparing yield rates with peer institutions, doing so is not “in line with their mission” of serving the local population. The other community college representative, however, expressed that collecting community college yield rates demonstrates how these institutions are “fulfilling their mission in the community,” for example for students “who did not think college was a possibility...how many of those students ended up enrolling.” Given these different views, it may be worth additional investigation via a survey of community colleges. It may be that community colleges already collect this information, and that may be sufficient for their purposes.

An NPEC member expressed a related concern that mixed-mission institutions may have some programs that are open admissions, while other programs at the same institution are competitive and have admission requirements. It can be difficult for data reporters at these institutions to know whether and how to respond to the ADM survey to accurately reflect their institutions. It may be helpful to review the current survey instructions, which state that “ADM will be collected only from institutions that do not have an open admissions policy for entering first-time students.” Additional clarification could help guide these mixed-mission institutions.

12-Month Collection

Related to transfer and open admissions, three interviewees would like to see ADM move from fall to full-year collection. Institutions are interested in “off-term admission statistics...especially liberal arts deferred to winter or spring semester” or large transfer enrollments in “off-terms” and delayed admittance. One interviewee noted that while he is interested in year-round data from an admissions perspective, his institutional research (IR) staff on campus prefer Fall data to keep consistent with past reporting.

Considerations

Seven of the nine interviewees suggested expanding the Considerations section of the ADM survey to represent a shift over the years towards a more holistic admissions process.

Interviewees suggested that IPEDS consider the following:

- Adding non-academic or co-curricular factors such as extracurricular activities, volunteer experience, and work experience.
- Breaking-out extracurricular activities into more specific activities such as arts and athletics.
- Using a scale rather than the current options of required or recommended, such as not important to very important.
- Adding interviews and application essays/written responses.
- Adding whether the institution considers first generation status or family income or gives preference for alumni, to address equity in admissions. (Race/ethnicity was also suggested, but due to affirmative action policies, it cannot be added). One interviewee

noted that all institutions may say they do not give preference to alumni, so that question may not be helpful.

- Adding items about students' family contexts, such as socioeconomic status (SES), experiences/challenges at home, and/or students' schools or neighborhoods, also related to equity. The common application and many institution applications ask students to report their parents' occupations and degrees.

In addition to specific items, interviewees suggested collecting information about how the above data points are used by the institution:

- How holistic is the selection process?
- What method is used to consider these factors (e.g., are the considerations scored or weighted, is an algorithm used)? Consider developing a handful of categories, such as purely index based, purely holistic, or in combination.
- Are factors such as GPA contextualized within a larger committee discussion?

In addition, interviewees made the following suggestions for clarification of current Considerations section items:

- More clearly define college preparatory program completion.
- Clarify that TOEFL response options are for international students only, not all students.

Applicants/Admits/Enrollments (A/A/E)

Interviewees suggested adding the following items to the A/A/E section:

- Public institutions are interested in data such as yield rates for in-state and out-of-state students who can have different admission requirements.
- NACAC collects admission data for International students, which may be something to consider.
- "More granular" admissions data by student characteristics, such as ethnicity and financial need, and for other factors, such as athletics, were suggested by one interviewee who also recognized the need to consider burden.

Interviewees made the following suggestions for clarifying items in the A/A/E section:

- Clarify whether or not students in special admission situations (provisional admits, deferrals, and bridge) are included in the number admitted/enrolled.
- Add gender unreported/unknown.

Graduate Students

Three interviewees suggested adding graduate students to the admissions survey, but two of the three advised caution given the different meaning of these data for different programs. (A business program can have a much different acceptance rate than engineering at the same institution, for example.) Doing so would require collecting these data for different colleges and

programs within the institution. One interviewee suggested breaking out graduate students by degree level, such as masters, Ph.D., and professional.

Early Options

Two interviewees would like to see information about early decision and waitlist options, noting there has been increased public interest in this topic. This information may shed light into equity-related admission issues. While only a “minority of colleges use early decision,” adding both early decision and waitlist questions is “not a lot of burden for most colleges.” However, it should be kept in mind that early admit rates are typically higher, and early admission applicants may not represent typical applicants for regular admission. The college admission organization representative shared that students who apply early are more aware of early options because they have access to college application guidance or social capital, whereas lower-SES students “shy away from early decision” because they “want to compare financial aid offers.”

Test Scores

Several suggestions were made for improving the collection of test score data. Interviewees are interested in the following additions:

- SAT essay and ACT writing, reading, and science reasoning. These tests are not currently included in IPEDS but can be considered during the admissions process. It should be noted that NCES removed ACT writing from ADM in 2014-15, due to “limited utility for students and researchers. A majority of institutions do not require these test scores and, as a result, do not report them. However, they do feel the need to explain why they are not reporting scores, leading to additional burden. The institutions that do report the scores often do so incorrectly.”⁸
- SAT composite (ADM currently collects ACT composite but not SAT composite).
- Test score distributions by bands (for example, the percentage scoring between 600 and 700 are currently found on CDS and could be useful).
- Graduate test (LSAT, GMAT, GRE) scores should be collected if graduate student admissions questions are added.

Interviewees made the following comments about test score data:

- The “public has a hard time wrapping their heads around” the 25th and 75th percentile scores. An average or median would be easier for consumers to understand. However, institutions “want to deemphasize the weight on test scores,” so it is “important to have that range.”

⁸ For more information, see “Changes to IPEDS Data Collections, 2017-17,” available at: <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/report-your-data/archived-changes?year=2016-17>

Interviewees are also interested in the following questions about *how* institutions use test scores:

- Do institutions “superscore” the tests? Superscoring is the practice of adding the two best scores when students take an exam multiple times (for example, SAT Reading/Writing and Math).
- Do institutions use test scores for admissions, scholarships, or both?
- Do institutions use weighted or unweighted scores? (It was noted that large state schools typically do not have the time to recalculate scores.)

Two interviewees are interested in test scores of *admitted* students in addition to those of *enrolled* students. The selective institution representative noted that admit rates are not applicable to selective institutions because the “applicant pool can be self-selective.” It is likely that a large percentage of these institutions’ applicant pool is well qualified; collecting SAT scores of applicants would be beneficial to institutions that are interested in this information.

Test Optional

Three interviewees suggested adding questions about the increasingly common test optional or test flexible designation. This is particularly important for consumers to know as the test scores from test optional institutions “can misrepresent the true population of SAT scores” or “inflate” the reported scores because students who choose to submit their test scores likely have higher scores than those who do not.

GPA

Two interviewees suggested adding high school GPA, as well as information about how it is calculated, since GPA weighting varies by institution. Test scores are “not the most important [factor] anymore.”

Calendar

Respondents would like to see preliminary admissions data available sooner, but they understand that processes are needed to ensure data quality. NACAC uses its own data for selectivity and yield rates because the public and media are interested in current rates and the IPEDS data have a one-year lag.

Equity Items

As a “wish list” item, two interviewees would like to see measures of income or socioeconomic status that have implications for equity. One interviewee suggested financial aid offered to admitted students as a data point of interest. Another suggested collecting the number of legacy admits enrolled at private institutions, which already track those data.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) **Add transfer students.** The most common recommendation from interviewees is to add transfer students to the ADM collection. This addition can help better represent the population of approximately 1.4 million transfer-in students each year. NCES can look to the examples provided above from CDS and NACAC for two different approaches to collecting transfer data—either as a separate section or as an additional response option to existing questions. At the very least, interviewees would like to see the numbers of transfer students who applied, were admitted, and enrolled. Additional items could be added to collect information about number of credits and articulation agreements or about considerations or requirements for transfer applicants. A future Technical Review Panel (TRP) can address this topic and make decisions about which data points to include and how best to word and format these additional questions.
- 2) **Add non-academic considerations.** The second most common interviewee suggestion is to add non-academic items to the Considerations section to reflect the current shift toward a more holistic admissions process. Some interviewees suggested breaking extracurricular activities into more specific activities. Others suggested items such as work experience, first-generation status, and alumni status, as currently seen on CDS and NACAC.

As with transfer items, additional consideration items should be discussed in a TRP. Figures 5 and 6 are screenshots of non-academic consideration items on the CDS and NACAC surveys, which can serve as discussion points:

Figure 5. CDS Admissions Survey, Non-academic Considerations

C7. Relative importance of each of the following academic and nonacademic factors in your first-time, first-year, degree-seeking (freshman) admission decisions.

	Very Important	Important	Considered	Not Considered
<i>Nonacademic</i>				
Interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Extracurricular activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Talent/ability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Character/personal qualities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
First generation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Alumni/ae relation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Geographical residence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
State residency	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religious affiliation/commitment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Racial/ethnic status	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Volunteer work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Work experience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Level of applicant's interest	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 6. NACAC Admissions Survey, Non-academic Considerations

21. How much importance is given to each of the following criteria in admission decisions made at your institution?

	First-Time, First-Year Students (Not Including International)	Transfer Students (Not Including International)	First-Time, First-Year International Students
Essay or writing sample	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Interview	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Portfolio	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Work	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Extracurricular activities	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
State graduation exam scores	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Counselor recommendation	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Teacher/professor recommendation	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Student's interest in attending	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Articulation with prior postsecondary institution(s)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Quality of prior postsecondary institution(s)	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

3) Add a question about test-optional policies. As both the literature and interviews demonstrated, an increasing number of institutions are shifting to test optional. A simple yes/no question about this policy would produce useful information for both consumers and researchers. Currently, the Considerations section response options are worded in a way that could imply test optional based on the institution's response (figure 7):

Figure 7. IPEDS Admissions Component, Considerations

Admissions Considerations

1. Please select the option that best describes how your institution uses any of the following data in its undergraduate selection process.

Admission Considerations	Required	Considered but not required	Recommended	Neither Required nor Recommended
Secondary school GPA	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Secondary school rank	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Secondary school record	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Completion of college-preparatory program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recommendations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Formal demonstration of competencies (e.g., portfolios, certificates of mastery, assessment instruments)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<u>Admission test scores</u>				
<u>SAT / ACT</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Test (ABT, Wonderlic, WISC-III, etc.) Note: If this is the only requirement other than a diploma or equivalent, and few students are not admitted due to this test, your institution is open enrollment. Please contact the Help Desk to correct your response to this question.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<u>TOEFL</u> (Test of English as a Foreign Language)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
 You may use the space below to provide context for the data you've reported above. These context notes will be posted on the College Navigator website, and should be written so they can be understood by students and parents.				
<div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; height: 50px; width: 100%;"></div>				

Either the “Considered but not required” or “Neither Required nor Recommended” responses could be interpreted as test optional. However, interviewees recommended a more direct question so that institutions can definitively report their official policy.

The additional question about test optional policies could go in the ADM Test Scores section, below (figure 8).

Figure 8. IPEDS Admissions Component, Test Scores

Selection Process - Test Scores

3. Provide data for Fall 2019. Include new students admitted the summer prior to Fall 2019.

SAT scores for 2019-20 must be reported using the new (2016) SAT score scale. Please see instructions for more information.

Number of enrolled students that submitted <u>SAT</u> scores	<input type="text"/>
Percent of enrolled students that submitted SAT scores	<input type="text"/>
Number of enrolled students that submitted <u>ACT</u> scores	<input type="text"/>
Percent of enrolled students that submitted ACT scores	<input type="text"/>

	<u>25th Percentile</u>	<u>75th Percentile</u>
SAT Evidence-Based Reading and Writing	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
SAT Math	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
ACT Composite	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
ACT English	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
ACT Math	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

 You may use the space below to provide context for the data you've reported above. These context notes will be posted on the College Navigator website, and should be written to be understood by students and parents.

CONCLUSIONS

In addition to the three recommendations for changes above, which are well supported in both the literature and interview responses, a future survey or TRP can investigate in further detail the other potential additions and changes suggested by interviewees, including expanding the survey to include graduate students, open admission institutions, a 12-month reporting period, early admissions options, and items that might potentially address equity concerns in college admissions. Those items all merit further discussion, but the recommendation to make those changes should not move forward without further investigation. It is important to include a mix of stakeholders in these discussions: college admissions staff and administrators, institutional researchers, and consumers.

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