

## Grades, Courses Most Important in College Admissions, Survey Finds

By [Catherine Gewertz](#) on [September 8, 2016 9:56 AM](#) | [No comments](#)



As college application season ramps up once again, an annual survey of college admissions officers reiterates an important message for high school students who are worried sick about their SAT or ACT scores: The classes you take and the grades you earn are far more important to us than your test scores.

That's a key finding of the **13th annual "State of College Admission" survey, released Thursday by the National Association for College Admission Counseling**, or NACAC. You'd never know it by the amount of cold sweat high school seniors generate nationally about admissions test scores, but that finding has stayed pretty consistent for 20 years, according to NACAC.

The survey found that in the fall 2014 admissions cycle, 79.2 percent of responding colleges and universities gave "considerable importance" to grades in students' college-prep classes, while 55.7 percent assigned the same importance to admission test scores for entering freshmen.

Here's how the factors break down, in order of importance, in the college-application packet, according to the NACAC survey:



TABLE 7: PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACTORS IN ADMISSION DECISIONS: FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN

Factor	N	Considerable Importance	Moderate Importance	Limited Importance	No Importance
Grades in College Prep Courses	231	79.2%	13.0%	6.9%	0.9%
Grades in All Courses	229	60.3	31.0	8.7	—
Strength of Curriculum	231	60.2	26.8	10.0	3.0
Admission Test Scores (SAT, ACT)	228	55.7	32.5	7.9	3.9
Essay or Writing Sample	231	22.1	39.0	21.6	17.3
Counselor Recommendation	231	17.3	42.4	27.3	13.0
Student's Demonstrated Interest	231	16.9	33.3	26.8	22.9
Teacher Recommendation	230	15.2	43.5	27.8	13.5
Class Rank	228	14.0	37.7	32.0	16.2
Subject Test Scores (AP, IB)	227	7.0	35.2	32.6	25.1
Portfolio	229	6.6	10.0	30.6	52.8
Extracurricular Activities	231	5.6	43.3	34.6	16.5
SAT II Scores	226	5.3	8.4	23.0	63.3
Interview	229	3.5	23.1	28.4	45.0
State Graduation Exam Scores	228	3.5	11.0	25.4	60.1
Work	230	0.9	21.3	44.8	33.0

Those of you who love the wonky details of admissions trends will find more interesting tidbits in the report. A few examples:

- **Application volume:** The number of applications from first-time freshmen increased 6 percent between fall 2014 and fall 2015, and the number of applications from international students increased by 23 percent.
- **Online applications:** It's putting it mildly to say they're the norm now. In the fall of 2014, four-year colleges and universities got 94 percent of their applications online, compared with 68 percent in 2007 and 49 percent in 2005.
- **Acceptance rate:** Colleges accepted 65.8 percent of first-time freshman applicants in the fall of 2014, up slightly from 64.7 percent in 2013. The 2014 number represents a stabilization after a decline: The acceptance rate was at a low of 63.9 percent in the fall of 2012.
- **Yield rate:** That's the percentage of accepted students who actually enroll. That number, too, had been declining. But it flattened out in the fall of 2014, with an average yield rate of 36.2 percent. It was 35.7 percent in 2013 and 48.7 percent in 2002.
- **Too few counselors** is a situation that hinders college advising. Counselors in public schools spend 22 percent of their time on college advising, NACAC said, compared to 55 percent for counselors in private schools. Federal data from 2013-14 shows the average school counselor's caseload (across all grade levels, elementary through high school) is 476 students.

