ECHO DELTA
Higher Education Marketing & Consulting

ADV | MARKET RESEARCH & CONSULTING

Designing for Decisions

How Prospective Students Rank Academic, Admissions, and Financial Aid Information on University Websites

Table of Contents

Introduction

In launching this study, we set out to answer two deceptively simple questions. First, what do students actually want to see when they visit the academic, admissions, and cost and aid sections of college websites? Second, to what extent do prospective students differ in what they seek from a college website based on factors like student type, funnel stage, and more?

We undertook this research because institutions can't afford to guess what students need; internal assumptions no longer suffice. Students' expectations are evolving, and for many, the college website is not just a first impression—

> 55% of prospective students said they've abandoned a college website altogether out of frustration.

it's a decision-making tool. Yet most institutions are falling short. In our survey, only 17% of prospective students said they can always find what they're looking for on college websites. More than half—55%—said they've abandoned a college website altogether out of frustration.

The stakes are high. When students can't find what they need, they move on.

In the pages that follow, we'll answer the questions above, while also providing data and insights you can use to directly inform practical decisions around navigation, information architecture, and content design. Just as importantly, these findings provide empirical evidence that can help resolve the internal debates and personal preferences that so often complicate web strategy in higher education.

Ultimately, our hope is that these findings will give higher ed marketing professionals the clarity and confidence they need to design student-centric web experiences that are helpful to both prospective students and the institutions that hope to recruit them.

Our Methodology

Rather than attempting to analyze the full scope of a college or university website—which can be vast and highly variable—we made the intentional decision to focus this research on two core areas: Admissions and Aid and Academics. These sections are among the most frequently visited by prospective students, and they represent critical moments in the decision-making journey. They're also where institutions tend to diverge most in terms of content, structure, and strategy, making them ideal for exploring what students are truly seeking when they land on a university site.

To conduct this research, we surveyed 1,034 prospective students using a national market research panel. We applied screening criteria to ensure strong representation across key audience segments, including traditional-aged undergraduates, nontraditional undergraduates, and graduate/professional students. This allowed us to compare how different types of students approach college websites, and to uncover the commonalities and distinctions in what they prioritize when exploring admissions, cost, and academic offerings online.

At the heart of our research is a survey approach called Top Tasks. Originally pioneered by Gerry McGovern, Top Tasks has been used by numerous government entities and large enterprises to understand what actually matters to a website's visitors.

In short, it works like this:

1. Create a comprehensive list of "tasks" (typically 50-100 in all) that users might want to accomplish on your website, based on a combination of user research, web analytics, stakeholder interviews, and secondary research.

2. Field a survey that provides users with a randomized list of potential tasks and asks them to select the five tasks that matter most.

3. Rank the results based on the percentage of users who select each task. Typically, just 5-10 tasks receive a disproportionate number of votes. These are your "top tasks."

4. Use the rankings to inform decisions regarding what gets prioritized on your website.

This approach has a few features that make it especially useful for those involved in creating web and other digital experiences. First, Top Tasks is user-centered in that it focuses exclusively on what users want to do, not what the organization wants to say. Second, Top Tasks' unorthodox approach goes beyond simply rating the usefulness of content, and instead, it forces users to weigh real trade-offs as they decide on the small number of tasks that are truly important. Third, Top Tasks provides a clear set of priorities for those responsible for building effective digital experiences by revealing the relatively small handful of tasks that truly matter to the most users.

Ultimately, these findings can be used to help make substantive improvements to navigation, information architecture, and content design, as well as provide clear priorities for ongoing testing and improvement.

Respondent Profile

N=1,034

LOCATION:

Domestic:	71%
International:	29%

INTENDED MODALITY:

In-Person:	41%
Hybrid:	30%
Online:	29%

AGE:

16-18:	32%
19-25:	10%
26-35:	24%
36-45:	22%
46-55:	12%

GENDER:

Female:	59%
Male:	40%
Prefer not to answer:	0.5%
Prefer to self-describe:	0.4%

HOUSEHOLD INCOME (DOMESTIC ONLY):

Less than $50,000:	45%
$50,000 to $100,000:	37%
$100,001 to $200,000:	15%
More than $200,000:	3%

RACE/ETHNICITY (DOMESTIC ONLY):

White:	59%
Black/African American:	26%
Hispanic/Latino:	16%
Asian:	7%
American Indian/Alaska Native:	3%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander:	1%
Prefer not to answer:	1%

INTENDED ACADEMIC PROGRAM:

Art & Design:	10%
Business & Management:	21%
Communication & Media:	3%
Computer Science & IT:	15%
Education & Teaching:	5%
Engineering & Technology:	7%
Environmental & Sustainability Studies:	1%
Health & Medicine:	16%
Hospitality & Tourism:	1%
Humanities & Liberal Arts:	2%
Law & Public Policy:	4%
Natural Sciences & Mathematics:	3%
Social Sciences:	5%
Trades & Skilled Professions:	2%
Undecided:	4%

Overall Survey Responses by Task

The tables below show our complete task list for both the **Admissions and Financial Aid** and **Academic Programs** portions of our survey.

Tasks are ranked in four tiers:

Top tasks indicate the tasks that got the first 25% of the vote. They represent the handful of tasks that were the highest priority for respondents.

Medium tasks received the second 25% of the vote. Although lower in priority than top tasks, these tasks still received substantial attention from respondents.

Small and **Tiny** tasks are those that received 50-75% and 75-100% of the vote, respectively. They were significantly more numerous than top or medium tasks but also considerably lower in priority for respondents.

Admissions and Financial Aid Tasks

TASKS	RANK
Total cost of attendance (tuition, fees, room & board, and expenses)	● Top
Payment plan options	● Top
Types of financial aid (scholarships, grants, loans, work-study)	● Top
Acceptance rate	● Top
Financial aid eligibility requirements	● Top
Actual cost to attend after estimated financial aid	● Medium
Financial aid forms	● Medium
Application requirements (transcripts, recommendation letters)	● Medium
Application fee cost and waiver	● Medium
Admission criteria (GPA, test scores, etc.)	● Medium
Status of my application	● Medium
Class profile (GPA, test scores, student home states)	● Medium
Application deadlines	● Small
Loan repayment options and policies	● Small
Admissions application portal (begin, continue, submit)	● Small
Next steps for admitted students (deposit, orientation, registering for classes)	● Small
Average student debt after graduation	● Small
In-person campus visit options	● Small
Deadlines for financial aid (FAFSA, scholarships, grants)	● Small

TASKS	RANK
Overview of how to apply for financial aid	● Small
Financial aid staff contact information	● Small
Transfer process	● Small
Timeline for admissions decisions	● Tiny
Financial aid appeals process	● Tiny
Honors program application and scholarship	● Tiny
Who is my admissions counselor? (name, contact info)	● Tiny
On-campus events for potential students	● Tiny
Interviews offered/required for admission	● Tiny
Standardized testing policy	● Tiny
Timeline for financial aid award notifications	● Tiny
Virtual info sessions and campus tours	● Tiny
International student scholarships and financial aid	● Tiny
Automatic or direct admissions pathways	● Tiny
Financial documentation requirements for student visas	● Tiny
Events for admitted students	● Tiny
Admission requirements for international students	● Tiny
Visa and immigration requirements	● Tiny
English proficiency requirements	● Tiny
Appeal process for admission decisions	● Tiny
Contact current students or alumni	● Tiny
Deferral options once admitted	● Tiny

Academic Programs Tasks

TASKS	RANK
Tuition and fees for the major/program	● Top
Financial aid options for specific majors/programs	● Top
Online vs. in-person program options	● Top
Courses required for the program/major	● Top
List of all programs/major offered	● Top
Average time to complete degree program	● Top
Career paths and success stories from graduates of the program	● Top
Employment rates for graduates of the program	● Medium
Student satisfaction with program (% who would recommend it)	● Medium
Course descriptions and syllabi	● Medium
Times when classes are typically held	● Medium
General education requirements	● Medium
Internship opportunities available for a program	● Medium
Online student support services	● Medium
Employment projections for occupations related to the program	● Medium
Accreditation status of a program	● Medium
Which campus the program is offered on	● Medium
Technology requirements for online courses	● Small
Tutoring and academic support services	● Small
Fellowship and grant funding opportunities	● Small
Course format for online classes (live vs. recorded)	● Small
Credit transfer policies	● Small
Average weekly time commitment for the program	● Small
Graduate assistantship opportunities	● Small
Prerequisites or other unique admission requirements	● Small

TASKS	RANK
Resources or courses for students who are undecided	● Small
Accelerated program options	● Small
Graduate school acceptance rates for program alumni	● Small
Exam pass rates for licensure programs	● Small
Program concentrations and specializations	● Tiny
What makes a strong applicant to the program	● Tiny
What makes the program different from options at other schools	● Tiny
Research opportunities available within the program	● Tiny
Program rankings and national recognition	● Tiny
Special facilities or equipment included in the program	● Tiny
Study abroad options associated with the program	● Tiny
Employer tuition reimbursement policies	● Tiny
Licensure or certification requirements after graduation	● Tiny
Information request to learn more about a program	● Tiny
Program's industry connections and employer partners	● Tiny
Median salaries of program graduates	● Tiny
Median salaries in occupations related to the program	● Tiny
Faculty credentials and backgrounds	● Tiny
Contact information for faculty and advisors	● Tiny
Clubs/organizations related to the major/program	● Tiny
Faculty accessibility for online students	● Tiny
Clinical or practicum requirements	● Tiny
Faculty research areas and publications	● Tiny
Capstone projects or thesis options	● Tiny

The Big Picture: Priorities That Span Student Segments

In this section, we'll explore the aggregate results of our survey and findings that are relevant across all student segments.

How Different Are Segments, Really?

The notion that marketing needs to be thoroughly personalized to reach its full potential has become conventional wisdom among many of today's marketers.

But our research paints a more nuanced picture. While it's true that different groups of prospective students vary in important ways, our data reveals students of all types share a remarkably consistent set of priorities, and that the substantive differences that do exist, while important, are often few in number.

This is encouraging news for those in charge of designing web or other digital experiences that need to serve a broad range of prospective students at once. It suggests that what matters isn't unrelentingly granular personalization; rather, what matters is designing for the tremendous amount of common ground students share and finding ways to personalize when and where it makes the most impact.
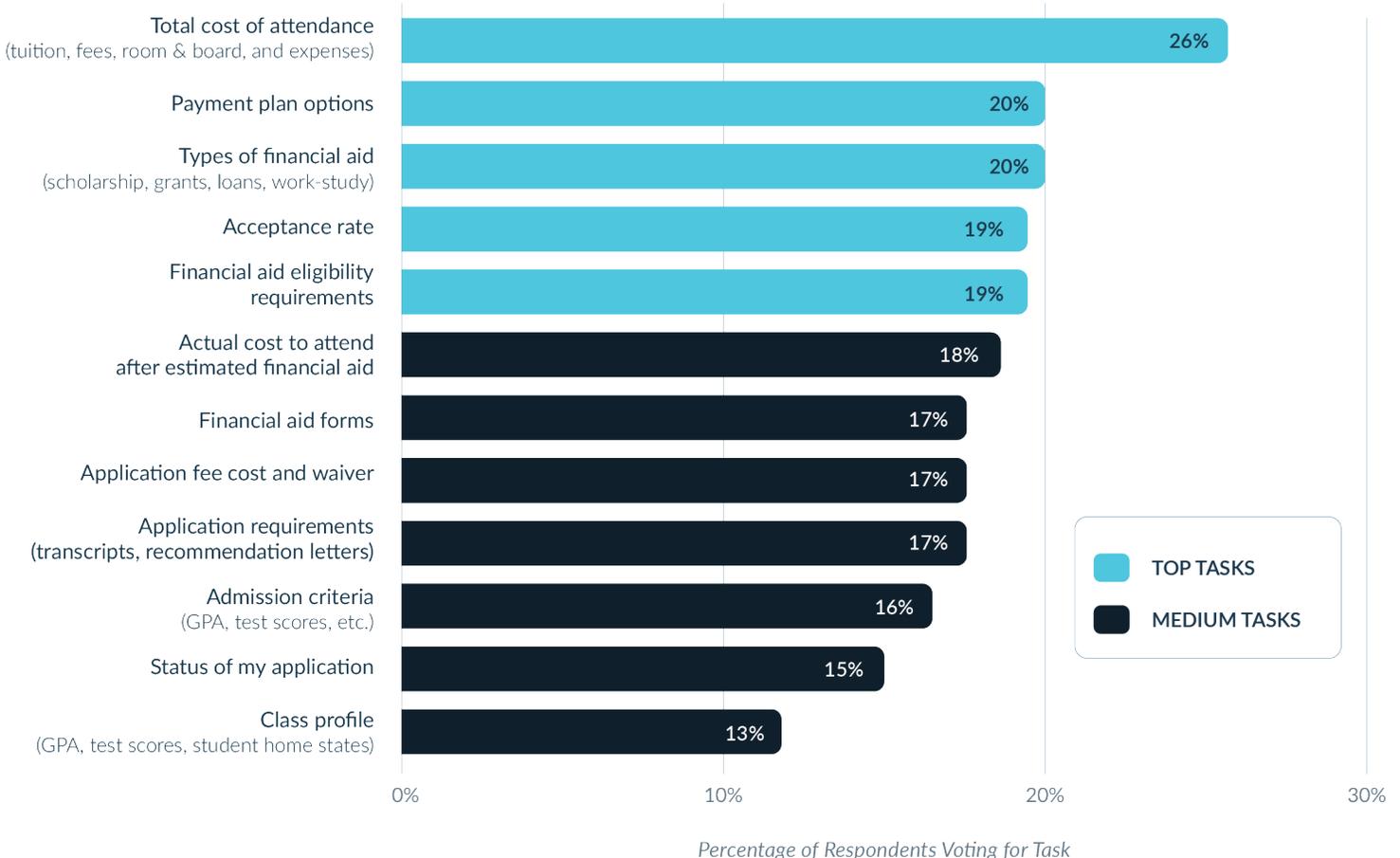
Universal Admissions and Aid Priorities

When it comes to admissions and financial aid, our research reveals clear and widely shared priorities among today's students. Of the 41 admissions and aid-related tasks we presented to users, just five tasks accounted for one-quarter of all votes, and just 12 tasks accounted for nearly 50% of all votes.

> Just five tasks accounted for one-quarter of all votes.

Top and Medium Admissions and Aid Tasks

N=1,034

Task	Percentage
Total cost of attendance (tuition, fees, room & board, and expenses)	26%
Payment plan options	20%
Types of financial aid (scholarship, grants, loans, work-study)	20%
Acceptance rate	19%
Financial aid eligibility requirements	19%
Actual cost to attend after estimated financial aid	18%
Financial aid forms	17%
Application fee cost and waiver	17%
Application requirements (transcripts, recommendation letters)	17%
Admission criteria (GPA, test scores, etc.)	16%
Status of my application	15%
Class profile (GPA, test scores, student home states)	13%

TOP TASKS
MEDIUM TASKS

Percentage of Respondents Voting for Task

Super Task #1: What Will This Actually Cost Me?

One task emerged as the single most important admissions aid task, regardless of student type, admissions stage, or virtually any other factor: *Total cost of attendance (tuition, fees, room & board, and expenses).* In other words, what will this actually cost me?

> Students prioritize *Total cost of attendance* above all other tasks.

This finding won't surprise anyone who interfaces with prospective students on a regular basis, but it does serve to underscore the extent to which cost dominates nearly every student's decision-making process. Importantly, in our survey, *Total cost of attendance* was presented alongside two other closely related tasks: *Tuition and fees, and Actual cost to attend after estimated financial aid.* Again and again, students prioritized the most comprehensive description of cost we provided, clearly signaling that more than anything, students want to understand the total cost of their degree.

Cost First, Everything Else Later

When prospective students visit a college website, they come with questions. More often than not, those questions are about money. Of the 12 top and medium tasks, seven were directly related to cost or financial aid. That includes foundational topics like tuition and fees, as well as deeper concerns about scholarships, financial aid eligibility, and comparing offers across institutions.

This overwhelming concentration of cost-related tasks reflects a larger truth about today's enrollment landscape: Students—whether undergraduate or graduate, domestic or international—are approaching the college search with a cost-conscious, value-driven mindset. They're not just looking for admissions requirements or deadlines. They're trying to understand whether they can afford this investment, what kind of support might be available, and whether the value of the degree justifies the cost. When students land on a college website, they're not casually browsing. They're calculating.

Payment Plans: A Missed Opportunity?

We believe good research should tell you something unexpected, and our survey delivered. Students gave high priority to a task we almost didn't include in the survey: *Payment plan options*. Although payment plans aren't typically listed within cost and aid sections on university websites, we included it in our survey because some institutions do, in fact, list the ability to spread out tuition payments via payment plans as a way to make pursuing a degree more affordable. To our surprise, students consistently voted *Payment plan option***s** as a high priority, with no substantive differences based on factors like student type (e.g., graduate, traditional undergraduate, nontraditional), admissions stage, or first-gen status.

We think this is a significant finding for a few reasons. First, it suggests that when students are considering cost, they're not simply thinking about the total cost they will ultimately pay, but also how they can make those costs fit within their current and anticipated financial situation. Second, we believe this finding points to an area of opportunity for many institutions to either proactively introduce their existing payment plan offerings during cost and aid conversations or consider new ways they can offer payment plans as a way to help students make a degree more attainable.

Sizing Up the Odds

Before diving into programs, campus life, or even cost, many students begin with a more fundamental question: Do I have a shot? Among the 12 most-selected tasks in the Admissions & Financial Aid focus area in our research, three centered on this practical concern—acceptance rate, admissions criteria, and the class profile. These aren't abstract indicators of institutional prestige. They're tools students use to assess fit, gauge competitiveness, and decide whether a school feels within reach.
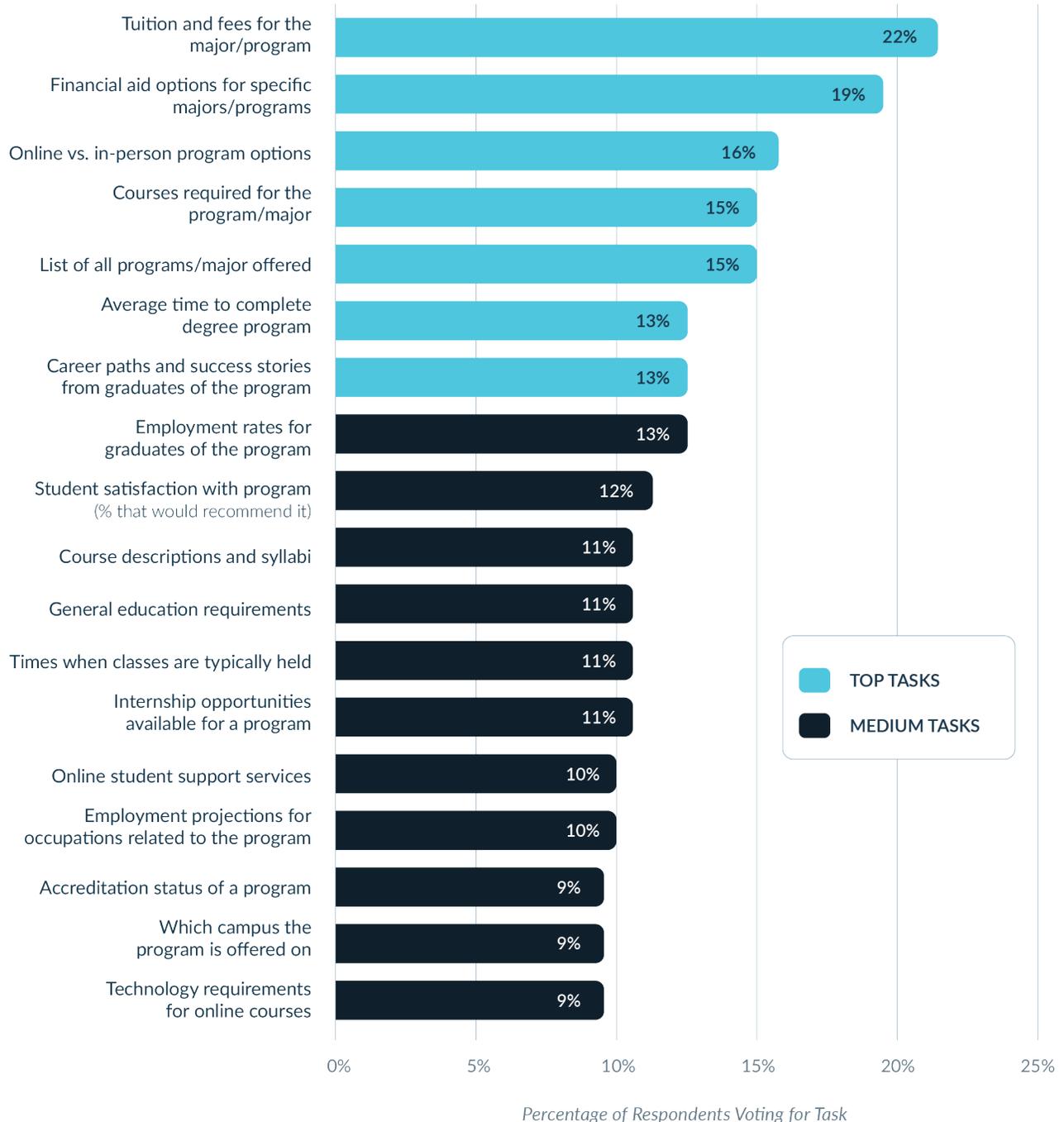
This focus on viability suggests that rather than building a long list of potential schools and narrowing later, some students may be making quick assessments based on perceived accessibility. As a result, if key signals like average GPAs, test score ranges, or how selective the institution is aren't easy to find, students may move on. In a competitive enrollment environment, it's not just about attracting interest, it's about reducing doubt. The clearer the path in, the more likely students are to keep exploring.

Academic Program Priorities

Similar to the admissions and aid portion of our survey, the academic program-related section of our survey revealed distinct priorities among prospective students. Of the 49 tasks we included in our survey, seven tasks accounted for a full 26% of votes, and 17 accounted for 50% of votes.

Top and Medium Academic Program Tasks

N=1,034

Task	Percentage
Tuition and fees for the major/program	22%
Financial aid options for specific majors/programs	19%
Online vs. in-person program options	16%
Courses required for the program/major	15%
List of all programs/major offered	15%
Average time to complete degree program	13%
Career paths and success stories from graduates of the program	13%
Employment rates for graduates of the program	13%
Student satisfaction with program (% that would recommend it)	12%
Course descriptions and syllabi	11%
General education requirements	11%
Times when classes are typically held	11%
Internship opportunities available for a program	11%
Online student support services	10%
Employment projections for occupations related to the program	10%
Accreditation status of a program	9%
Which campus the program is offered on	9%
Technology requirements for online courses	9%

TOP TASKS

MEDIUM TASKS

Percentage of Respondents Voting for Task

Super Task #2: What Will This Program Actually Cost Me?

Consistent with our admissions and aid findings, students' academic priorities include a substantial focus on cost and aid. Across student segments, *Tuition and fees for the major/program* emerged as the number one priority for most students, along with *Financial aid options for specific majors/programs*, which consistently landed among students' top three priorities.

> *Program-specific tuition and aid* emerged as a top concern for all student segments.

In our view, this finding points to another significant area of opportunity. Many institutions, particularly large, comprehensive universities, have different tuition rates and fee structures for programs. Yet, this information can be exceedingly difficult to find on their websites. Given the primacy of cost in general, and program-related cost specifically, to prospective students, we believe institutions should ensure they're making every effort to make program-specific tuition and fees straightforward to find and understand.

Program Finders and Course Catalogs

Beyond cost and aid, our survey revealed other priorities that span student segments. Students—even thoose in the final stages of the admissions funnel—consistently voted *List of all academic programs/majors* as a high-priority task along with *Courses required for the program/major* and *Course descriptions and syllabi.*

These findings support the increasingly common practice of including e-commerce-style program finders on university websites and links to the academic catalog in main navigation as well as on program pages.

Student Satisfaction and ROI Confidence Builders

Of the 17 tasks that received the top 50% of votes, six tasks fall into a category we call "ROI confidence builders." These include items like *Accreditation status*, *Career paths and success stories from graduates of the program,* and *Employment rates for graduates of the program.* Although these items are commonplace on program pages, students consistently voted for one item that is rarely discussed: *Student satisfaction with the program (% that would recommend the program).*

Like *Payment plan options*, we believe featuring student satisfaction metrics on program pages represents a significant area of opportunity for institutions as they look to instill confidence in prospective students that their programs represent a worthwhile investment. While this may seem unorthodox, it's not without precedent. Each year, dozens of law schools voluntarily participate in the Law Schools Survey of Student Engagement (LSSSE), which, among other things, measures student satisfaction with their law school experience. Participating schools frequently publish LSSSE results on their websites.

Our survey suggests that institutions looking for a way to stand out should begin collecting and publishing student satisfaction metrics.

Comparing Priorities: Student Type

In this section, we'll explore how students prioritize tasks based on their student type. Specifically, we considered three student types:

Traditional Undergraduates: This segment consists of current high school students who intend to enroll at a two-year or four-year institution following graduation.

Nontraditional Undergraduates: This segment consists of adults ages 25-55 who plan to enroll in an undergraduate degree program (associate or bachelor's) in the next three years.

Graduate and Professional: This segment consists of students who have obtained an undergraduate degree and intend to enroll in a graduate or professional degree program in the next three years.

Top Admission and Financial Aid Tasks

Traditional Undergrad	Nontraditional Undergrad	Graduate and Professional
1. Total cost of attendance	1. Total cost of attendance	1. Total cost of attendance
2. Acceptance rate ◆	2. Financial aid eligibility requirements	2. Types of financial aid
3. Admission criteria	3. Financial aid forms ◆	3. Application fee cost and waiver
4. Types of financial aid	4. Payment plan options	4. Payment plan options
5. Actual cost to attend after estimated financial aid	5. Types of financial aid	5. Admission criteria
6. Payment plan options	6. Actual cost to attend after estimated financial aid	6. Financial aid eligibility requirements
7. Status of my application ◆	7. Application requirements ◆	7. Application requirements
8. Average student debt after graduation ◆	8. Application fee cost and waiver ◆	8. Application deadlines ◆
9. Class profile (GPA, test scores, student home states) ◆	9. Admissions application portal (begin, continue, submit) ◆	9. Financial aid forms
10. In-person campus visit options ◆	10. Loan repayment options and policies ◆	10. Actual cost to attend after estimated financial aid

◆ Indicates a top task that is unique to the segment.

Where Students Align, and Where They Don't

Across all student types, cost and affordability dominate the conversation. Tasks like understanding the total cost of attendance, payment plan options, and available types of financial aid consistently rank among the most selected tasks for traditional undergraduates, nontraditional undergraduates, and graduate students alike. This signals a shared, cross-segment urgency to make sense of not just what college will cost but how to manage and finance it.

But while there is alignment on cost, our research also reveals meaningful differences in what each group needs most from a university website.

- **Traditional undergraduates** are significantly more likely to prioritize admissions competitiveness, including the *Acceptance rate*, *Class profile*, and *Admission criteria*. These tasks suggest a focus on gauging whether a school is within reach and how it stack up against peers.

- **Nontraditional undergraduates** place greater emphasis on navigating the process itself. They were more likely to select tasks such as the *Application portal*, *Financial aid eligibility*, and *Financial aid forms*, indicating a need for clarity and simplicity in application steps and funding pathways.

- **Graduate students,** while still highly cost-conscious, show slightly different priorities. They rank *Types of financial aid* and *Total cost* highly, but also show elevated interest in *Admissions criteria* and *Application fee costs and waivers*, possibly reflecting both competitiveness and the financial implications of applying to multiple programs.

These variations matter. They suggest that while core information—like tuition, aid, and deadlines—should be universally accessible, institutions also need to tailor key messages and pathways to fit the mindset and circumstances of the student types they're trying to recruit. A traditional high school senior, an adult learner returning to school, and a working professional exploring graduate programs are often asking different versions of the same questions—and need answers that are clear, relevant, and specific to their journey.

Differences That Matter

Can I get in? Did I get in? Our research shows distinct differences in how students relate to selectivity. Traditional students are uniquely focused on *Acceptance rate*, and rated the task as highly as they did *Total cost of attendance* in our survey. As a segment, they also prioritized other acceptance-related tasks like *Class profile* and *Status of my application* higher than other student types.

In contrast, nontraditional undergraduates rated acceptance-related tasks lower than any other segment, which likely reflects the fact that nontraditional students gravitate toward less selective institutions. Graduate and professional students occupy a unique middle ground between their traditional and nontraditional peers. While they placed a lower priority on acceptance rate than traditional undergrads, they placed the highest priority on *Admission criteria* and the second-highest priority on *Class profile*, although the task did not rate high enough to make it into their top 10 tasks.

How Students Prioritize Selectivity-Related Tasks

n=723

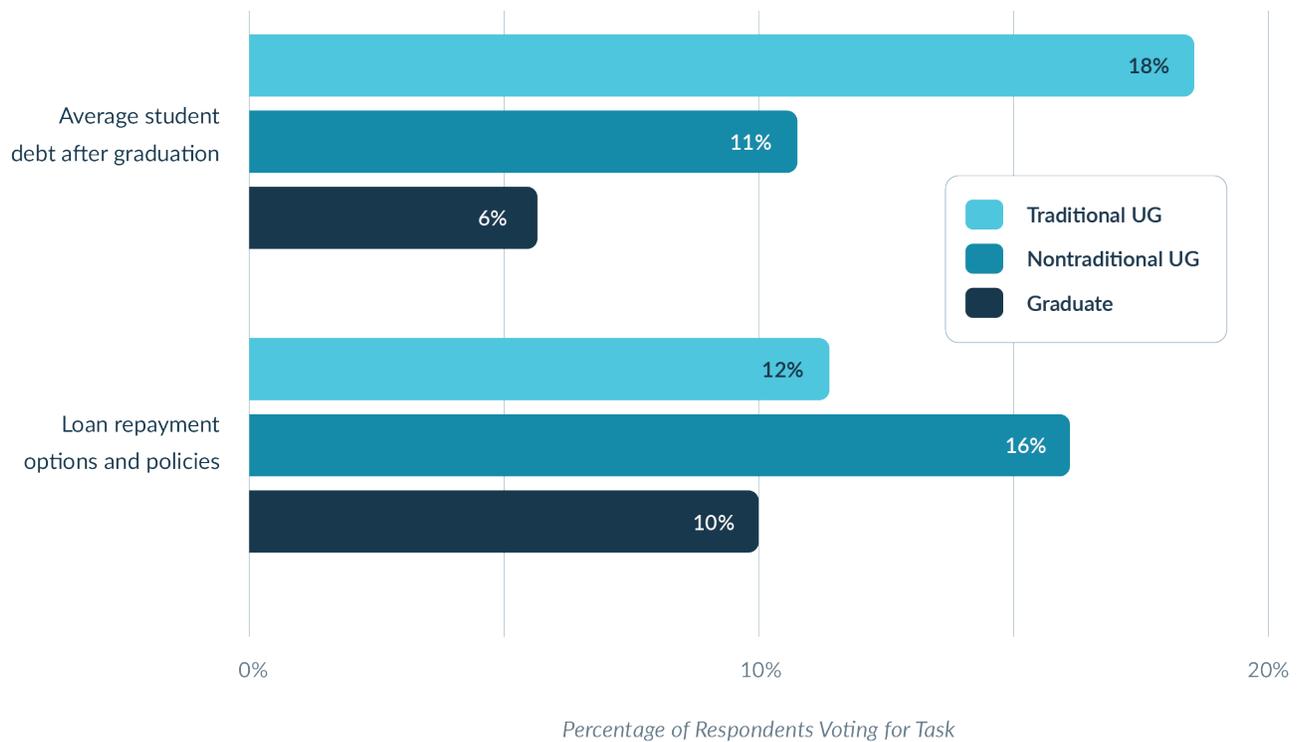*Percentage of Respondents Voting for Task*
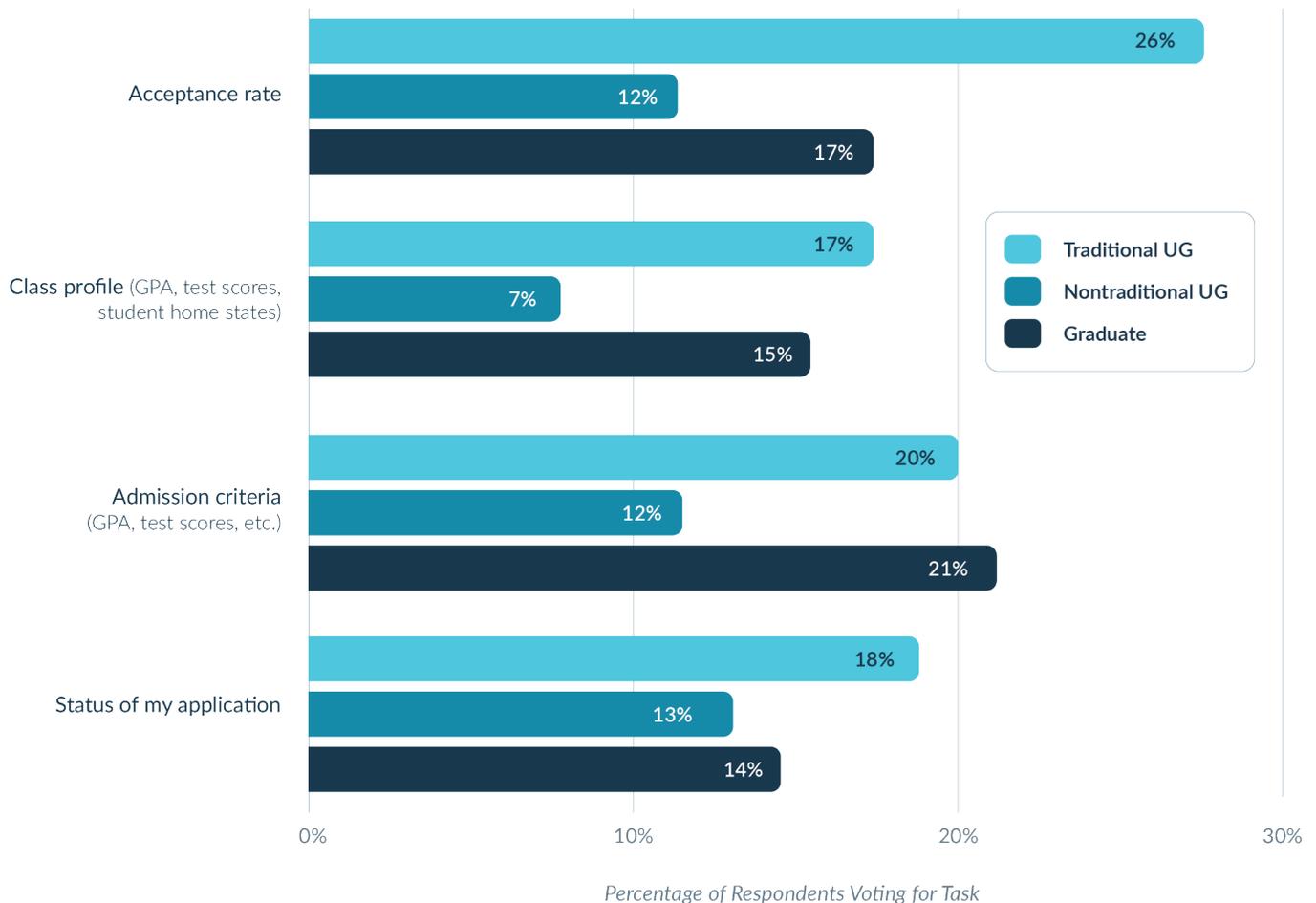
Let's talk about debt. Our survey reveals distinct differences in how student types relate to debt. While *Average student debt after graduation* was a top 10 task for traditional undergraduates, it was a significantly lower priority for nontraditional undergraduate and graduate students, who both prioritized *Loan repayment options and policies* notably higher. Of the three student types, nontraditional undergrads place the highest priority on loan repayment. Given that many nontraditional and graduate students will self-fund their education, our research suggests that students in these segments have some level of acceptance that earning their degree will likely require taking on debt.

How Students Prioritize Debt-Related Tasks

n=723

Average student debt after graduation: Traditional UG 18%, Nontraditional UG 11%, Graduate 6%

Loan repayment options and policies: Traditional UG 12%, Nontraditional UG 16%, Graduate 10%

Legend:
- Traditional UG
- Nontraditional UG
- Graduate

0%   10%   20%

Percentage of Respondents Voting for Task

In-person visits win, but evolve. Despite the ubiquity of virtual visit tools on college websites and tell-all user-generated social media content from current students, traditional undergrads voted for in-person campus visits by a 3:1 margin over virtual visits. While that may be comforting to those of us who pine for the days of analog recruitment, our survey shows the visit is changing. We'll explore that in more detail in the following chapter, when we examine student priorities by admissions stage.

Just point me in the right direction.
All student types prioritize tasks related to financial aid; however, compared to traditional undergrads, graduate and nontraditional undergrads are notably more focused on action-oriented financial aid tasks like *Financial aid forms* and *Financial aid eligibility requirements*, suggesting these students are more ready to dig into the details of accessing financial aid.

How Students Prioritize On-Campus and Virtual Visits

n=723

Percentage of Respondents Voting for Task
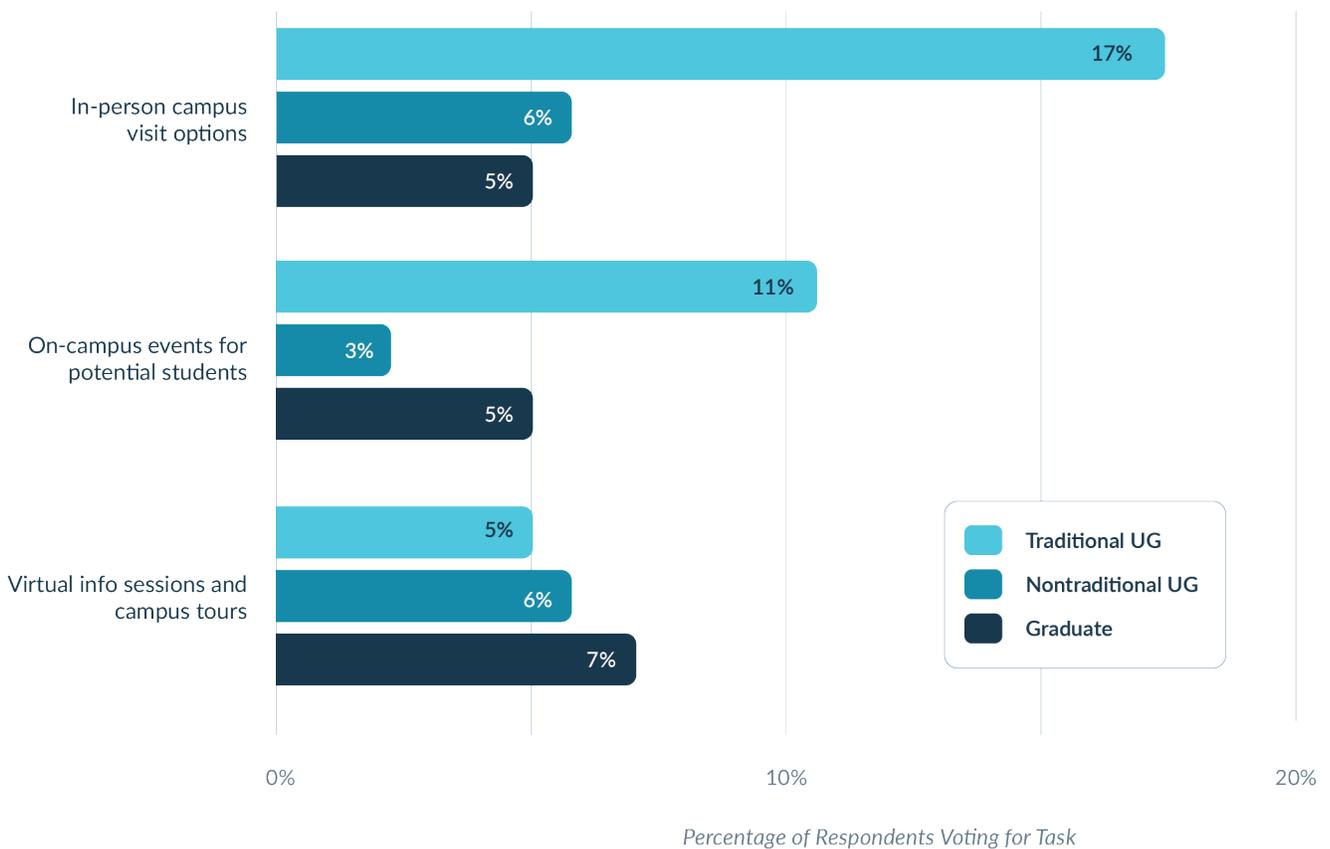
Top Academic Programs Tasks

Traditional Undergrad	Nontraditional Undergrad	Graduate and Professional
1. Tuition and fees for the major/program	1. Financial aid options for specific majors/programs	1. Tuition and fees for the major/program
2. Student satisfaction with program ◆	2. Tuition and fees for the major/program	2. Average time to complete degree program
3. Career paths and success stories from graduates of the program ◆	3. Online vs. in-person program options	3. Online vs. in-person program options
4. Financial aid options for specific majors/programs	4. List of all programs/majors offered	4. Financial aid options for specific majors/programs
5. Courses required for the program/major	5. Average time to complete degree program	5. List of all programs/majors offered
6. Employment rates for graduates of the program ◆	6. Courses required for the program/major	6. Course descriptions and syllabi ◆
7. List of all programs/majors offered	7. Online student support services ◆	7. Accreditation status of a program ◆
8. Internship opportunities available for a program ◆	8. Times when classes are typically held ◆	8. Courses required for the program/major
9. General education requirements ◆	9. Employment projections for occupations related to the program ◆	9. Prerequisites or other unique admission requirements ◆
10. What makes the program different from options at other schools ◆	10. Course format for online classes (live vs. recorded)	10. Course format for online classes (live vs. recorded)

◆   Indicates a top task that is unique to the segment.

How Students Explore Academic Programs

As with admissions and aid, cost dominates when students explore academic offerings. But beyond cost, each student type approaches academic program research in distinctly different ways, revealing how motivations and circumstances shape what information they seek.

- **Nontraditional undergraduates** gravitate toward logistical and format-related information. They over-indexed on topics like *Online vs. in-person options*, *Course format*, *Online support services*, and *Technology requirements*—all signals that flexibility and access are critical decision points for adult learners juggling other responsibilities.

- **Graduate students** prioritized both cost and completion, selecting *Average time to complete the degree*, *Program-specific tuition*, and *Prerequisites or unique admission requirements* at the highest rates. They also showed elevated interest in *Accreditation*, suggesting that professional outcomes and program credibility are key factors in their search.

- **Traditional undergraduates,** by contrast, often sought a broader, experience-based understanding of programs. They showed above-average interest in *Career outcomes*, *Student satisfaction*, and *Internship opportunities*. Tasks like *Employment rates* and *General education requirements* also performed strongly, suggesting they are navigating both the "big picture" and the fine print of their undergraduate journey.

These patterns underscore a central takeaway: While some tasks—like cost and program listings—should be easy for all audiences to access, the deeper needs differ widely. Nontraditional and graduate students are evaluating feasibility and fit; traditional undergraduates are envisioning an experience. The more universities can tailor pathways, content, and language to speak directly to these varying priorities, the more effectively they'll connect with the students they aim to serve.
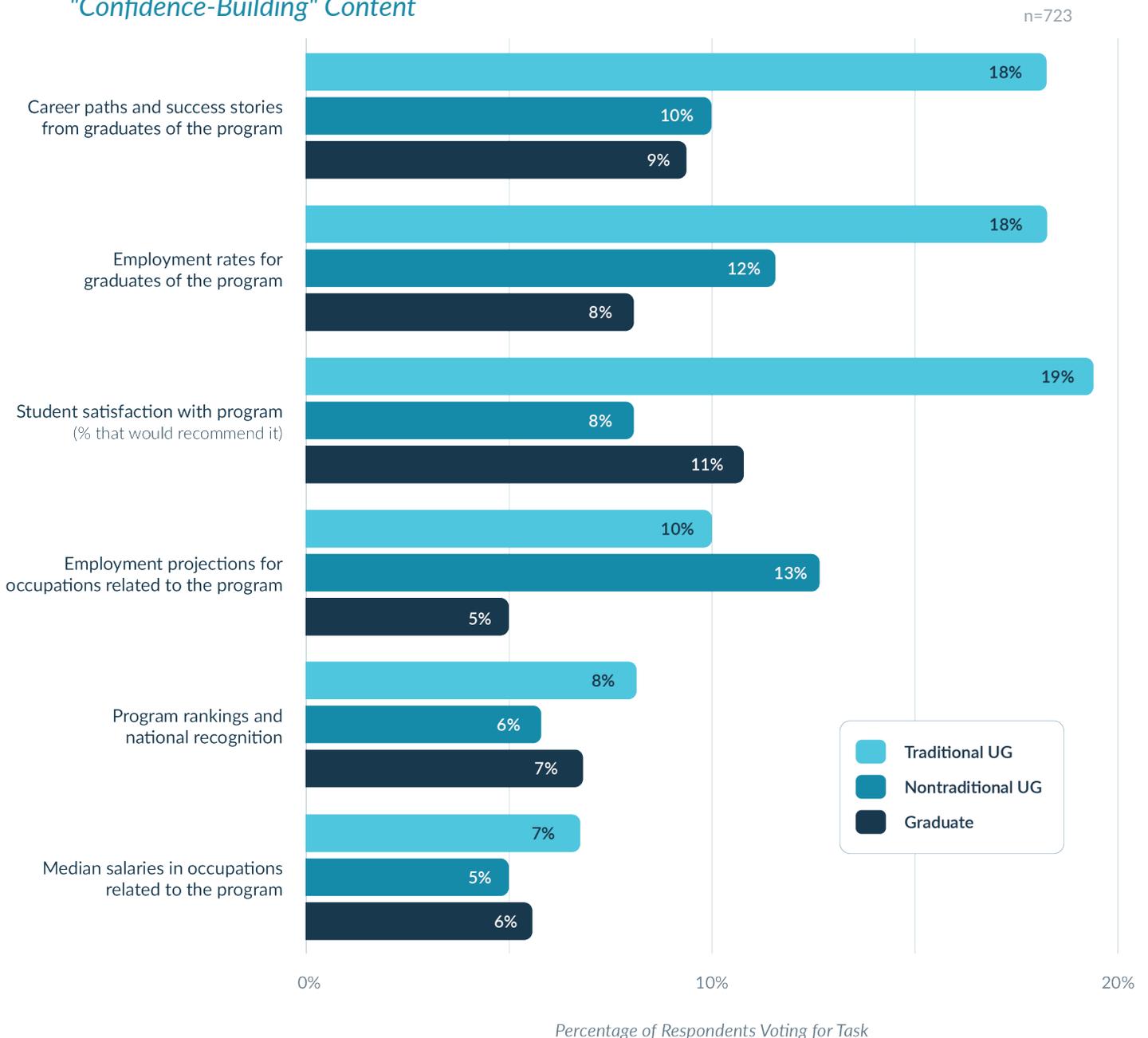
> Adult learners emphasize feasibility and fit, while traditional undergrads focus on experience and return on investment.

Differences That Matter

ROI confidence builders. Our survey reveals striking differences in how traditional undergraduates prioritize outcomes and other "confidence-building" content compared to graduate and nontraditional students. Traditional undergraduate students place a significantly higher priority on student satisfaction metrics, success stories of program graduates, and employment rates for program graduates and other content that helps answer the question "Will this be worth it?" Our research also shows that widely featured content like generic occupational salary data and program rankings and recognitions are among the lowest priorities for prospective students.

How Students Prioritize Outcomes and Other "Confidence-Building" Content

n=723

Category	Traditional UG	Nontraditional UG	Graduate
Career paths and success stories from graduates of the program	18%	10%	9%
Employment rates for graduates of the program	18%	12%	8%
Student satisfaction with program (% that would recommend it)	19%	8%	11%
Employment projections for occupations related to the program	10%	13%	5%
Program rankings and national recognition	8%	6%	7%
Median salaries in occupations related to the program	7%	5%	6%

*Percentage of Respondents Voting for Task*

Fit-with-life considerations. While traditional undergrads focus on reassurance that their degree will be worth it, nontraditional undergrads and graduate students place a substantially higher priority on practical considerations like the timing of classes, whether online classes are asynchronous or synchronous, and how long it will take to complete their degree.

Curricular particulars. All student types place a high priority on course requirements; however, graduate students are the only student type to rate *Course descriptions and syllabi* as a top 10 task.

How Students Prioritize "Fit-With-Life" Considerations

n=723

Percentage of Respondents Voting for Task
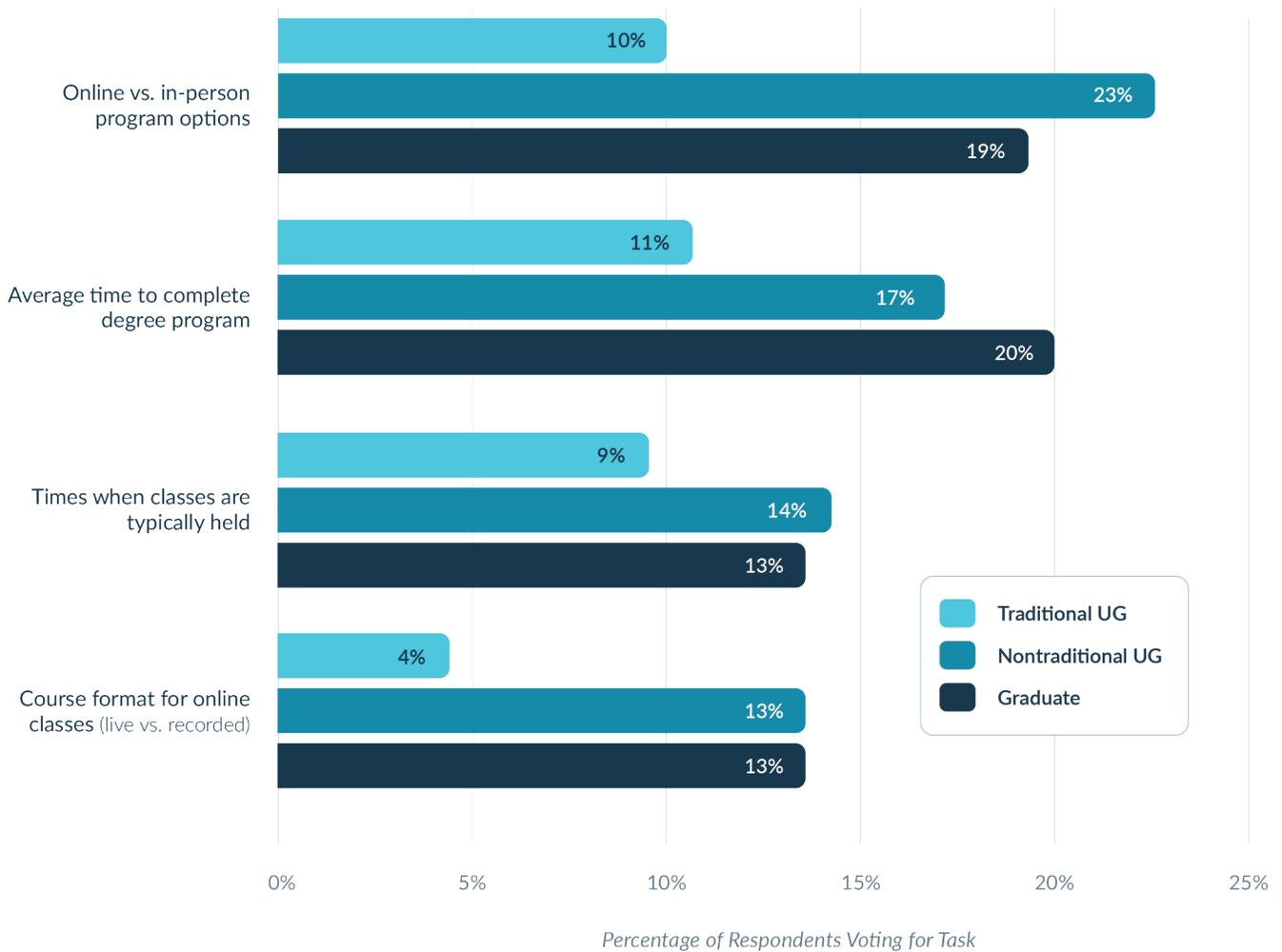
Comparing Priorities: Admissions Stage

In this section, we'll explore how students prioritize information at various stages of their college search. Specifically, we look at three stages:

Gathering Information: Students in this stage are actively exploring institutions to understand their options and decide where they may want to apply.

Applying: Students in this stage have applied for admission to one or more institutions.

Enrolling: Students in this stage have gained admission to one or more institutions and are actively engaged in deciding where to enroll.

Top Admission and Financial Aid Tasks

Gathering Info	Applying	Enrolling
1. Total cost of attendance	1. Total cost of attendance	1. Total cost of attendance
2. Payment plan options	2. Acceptance rate	2. Types of financial aid
3. Types of financial aid	3. Types of financial aid	3. Acceptance rate
4. Financial aid eligibility requirements	4. Admission criteria	4. Status of my application
5. Actual cost to attend after estimated financial aid	5. Payment plan options	5. Financial aid forms
6. Application fee cost and waiver ♦	6. Status of my application	6. Admission criteria (GPA, test scores, etc.)
7. Acceptance rate	7. Financial aid eligibility requirements	7. Payment plan options
8. Financial aid forms	8. Class profile (GPA, test scores, student home states) ♦	8. In-person campus visit options ♦
9. Application requirements	9. Application requirements	9. Actual cost to attend after estimated financial aid
10. Loan repayment options and policies ♦	10. Financial aid forms	10. Application fee cost and waiver

◆   Indicates a top task that is unique to the segment.

When looking across the enrollment journey—from initial information-gathering through applying and enrolling—what stands out most is the consistency in student priorities. The same core set of concerns, especially those related to cost and affordability, remains dominant throughout every stage of the funnel.

Tasks like total *Cost of attendance*, *Types of financial aid*, and *Acceptance rate* show remarkably stable importance across all three groups.

Whether they're just starting their search or about to enroll, students are focused on understanding what they'll pay and if they can get in.

But beneath this overall alignment, there are meaningful shifts in emphasis that reveal how students' needs evolve as they progress through the decision process.

Differences That Matter

Total cost is the star, but there's a big supporting cast. Our research shows *Total cost of attendance* remains front and center at every stage, as students continually revisit the question of "can I really afford this?" *Types of financial aid* also remains a top three priority, and *Payment plan options* remains a top seven priority throughout the admissions journey.

Selectivity comes into focus mid-funnel.

While cost and aid considerations are students' dominant interest in the early stages of the admissions process, interest in acceptance rate, admissions criteria, and class profiles and other information directly related to gain acceptance spike for Applying students and soften slightly for the Enrolling stage.
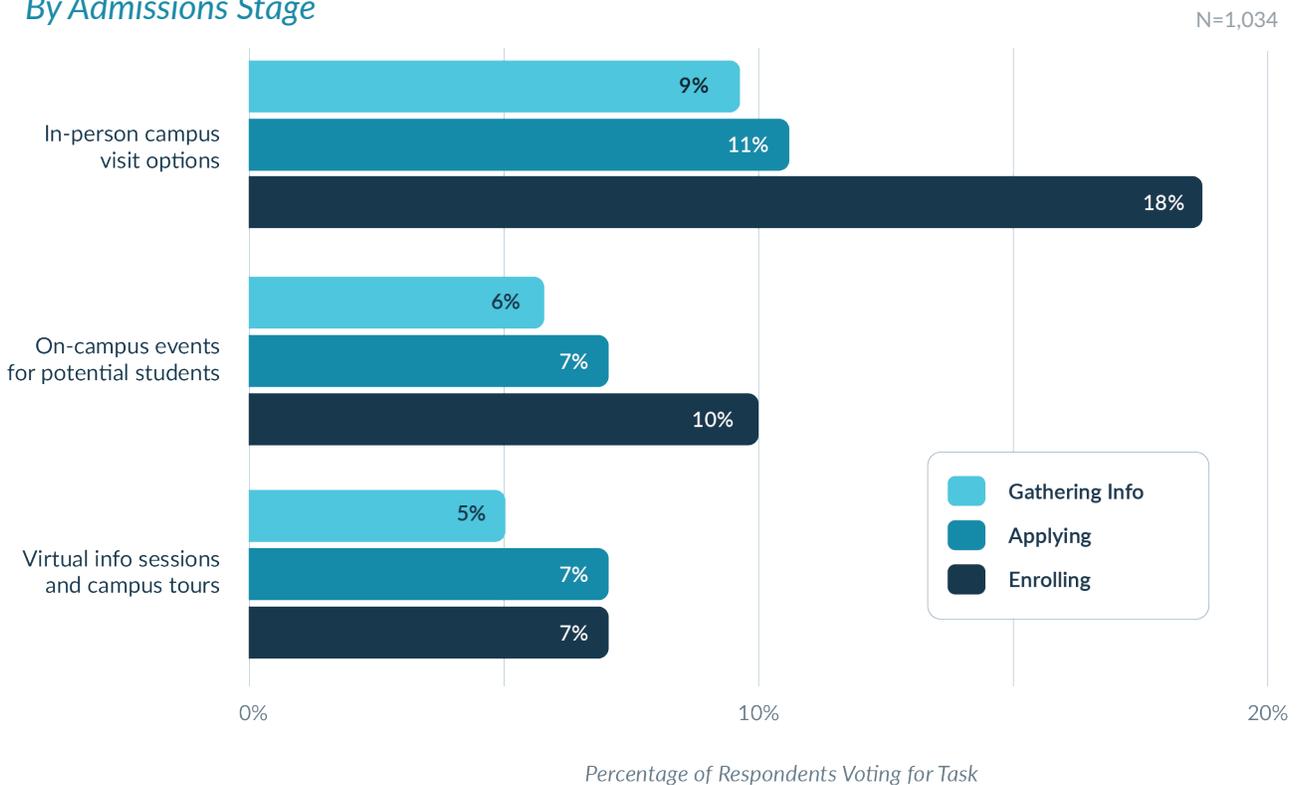
Campus visits move down the funnel.

In-person campus visit options received moderate attention during Gathering Info and Applying stages, but spiked substantially during the Enrolling stage. This substantiates what we've been hearing from Echo Delta's campus visit clients for years now: Many students delay their campus visits until after they've been accepted.

These shifts don't indicate entirely new priorities at each stage—but they do suggest that tone, timing, and emphasis should evolve along with the student. Institutions that tailor web content and messaging to reflect where a student is in their journey can reduce friction and increase the likelihood of deeper engagement.

> *Total cost of attendance* remains front and center at every stage.

How Students Prioritize On-Campus and Virtual Visit Options By Admissions Stage

N=1,034

In-person campus visit options	Gathering Info	9%
	Applying	11%
	Enrolling	18%
On-campus events for potential students	Gathering Info	6%
	Applying	7%
	Enrolling	10%
Virtual info sessions and campus tours	Gathering Info	5%
	Applying	7%
	Enrolling	7%

Legend:
- Gathering Info
- Applying
- Enrolling

0%   10%   20%

Percentage of Respondents Voting for Task

Top Academic Program Tasks

Gathering Info	Applying	Enrolling
1. Tuition and fees for the major/program	1. Tuition and fees for the major/program	1. FA options for specific majors/programs
2. Online vs. in-person program options	2. FA options for specific majors/programs	2. Career paths and success stories from graduates of the program
3. FA options for specific majors/programs	3. Courses required for the program/major	3. List of all programs/majors offered
4. Courses required for the program/major	4. List of all programs/majors offered	4. Courses required for the program/major
5. List of all programs/majors offered	5. Employment rates for graduates of the program	5. Tuition and fees for the major/program
6. Average time to complete degree program	6. Online vs. in-person program options	6. Internship opportunities available for a program ◆
7. Student satisfaction with program	7. Average time to complete degree program	7. Employment rates for graduates of the program
8. Times when classes are typically held ◆	8. Career paths and success stories from graduates of the program ◆	8. Student satisfaction with program
9. Employment projections for occupations related to the program	9. Course descriptions and syllabi ◆	9. General education requirements ◆
10. Online student support services ◆	10. Online student support services ◆	10. Online vs. in-person program options

◆ Indicates a top task that is unique to the segment.

While prospective students generally share consistent academic concerns—particularly about cost, program structure, and outcomes—the importance they place on specific tasks shifts subtly but significantly depending on where they are in the admissions process.

What Stays Consistent

At all stages, students are focused on financial and structural clarity:

- *Tuition and fees for the program* remains a top task, especially for those gathering information and applying.
- *Financial aid options by major/program* also ranks consistently high, and actually increases in importance as students move closer to enrolling.
- Tasks like *Courses required*, List of programs offered, and *Course descriptions* hold steady across the funnel—core building blocks students need, regardless of stage.

Differences That Matter

Fit-with-life is an early filter. Practical considerations around pursuing a degree get particular focus in the earliest stages of the admissions journey. These include attention to modality options, overall length of the program, and the timing of classes, among others. Our data suggests that collectively, these considerations matter the most early on as students are exploring degree options, remain somewhat relevant when students begin actively applying, and drop significantly in priority as students choose where to enroll.

How Students Prioritize Academic "Fit-With-Life" Considerations

N=1,034

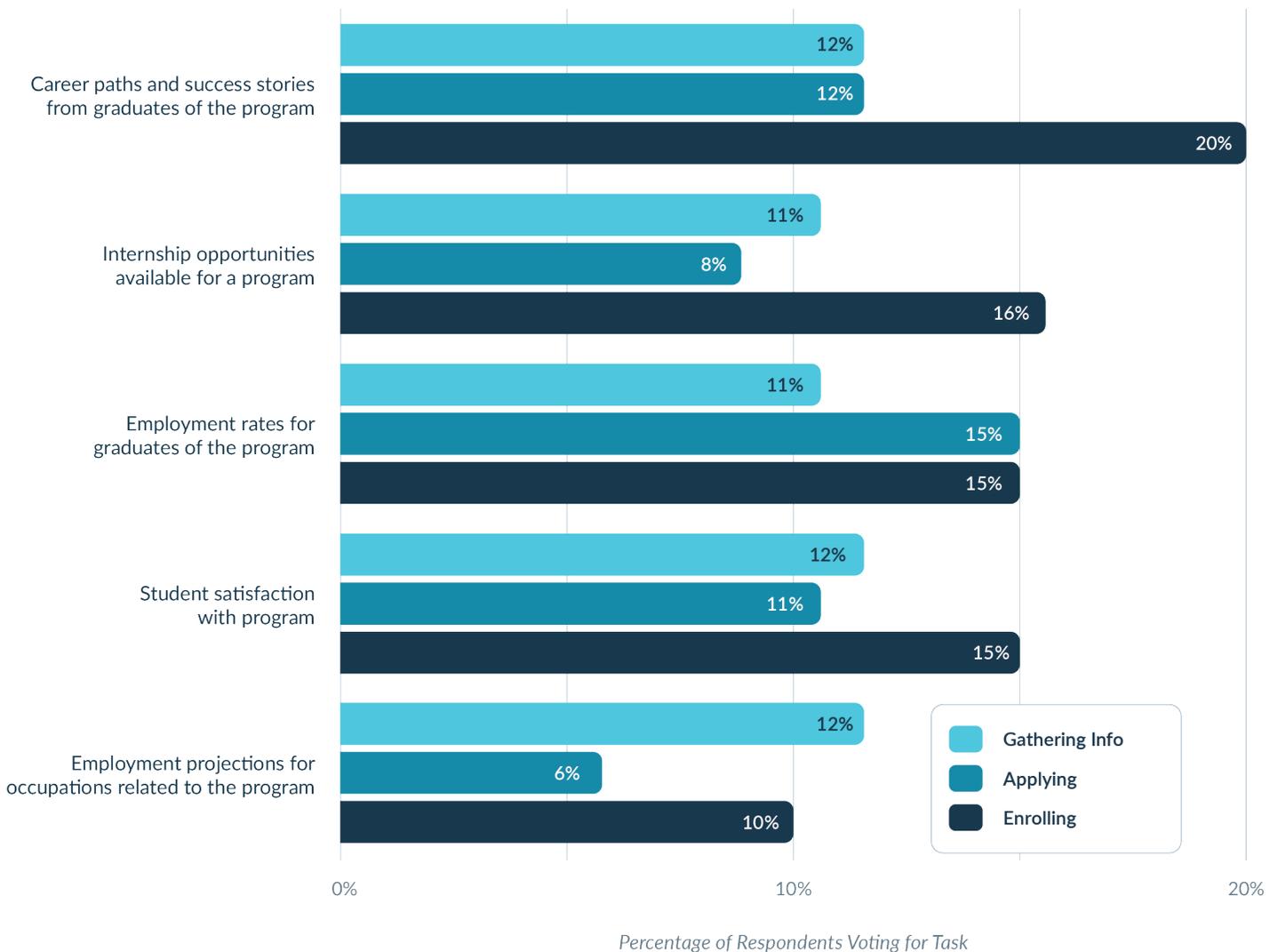Percentage of Respondents Voting for Task
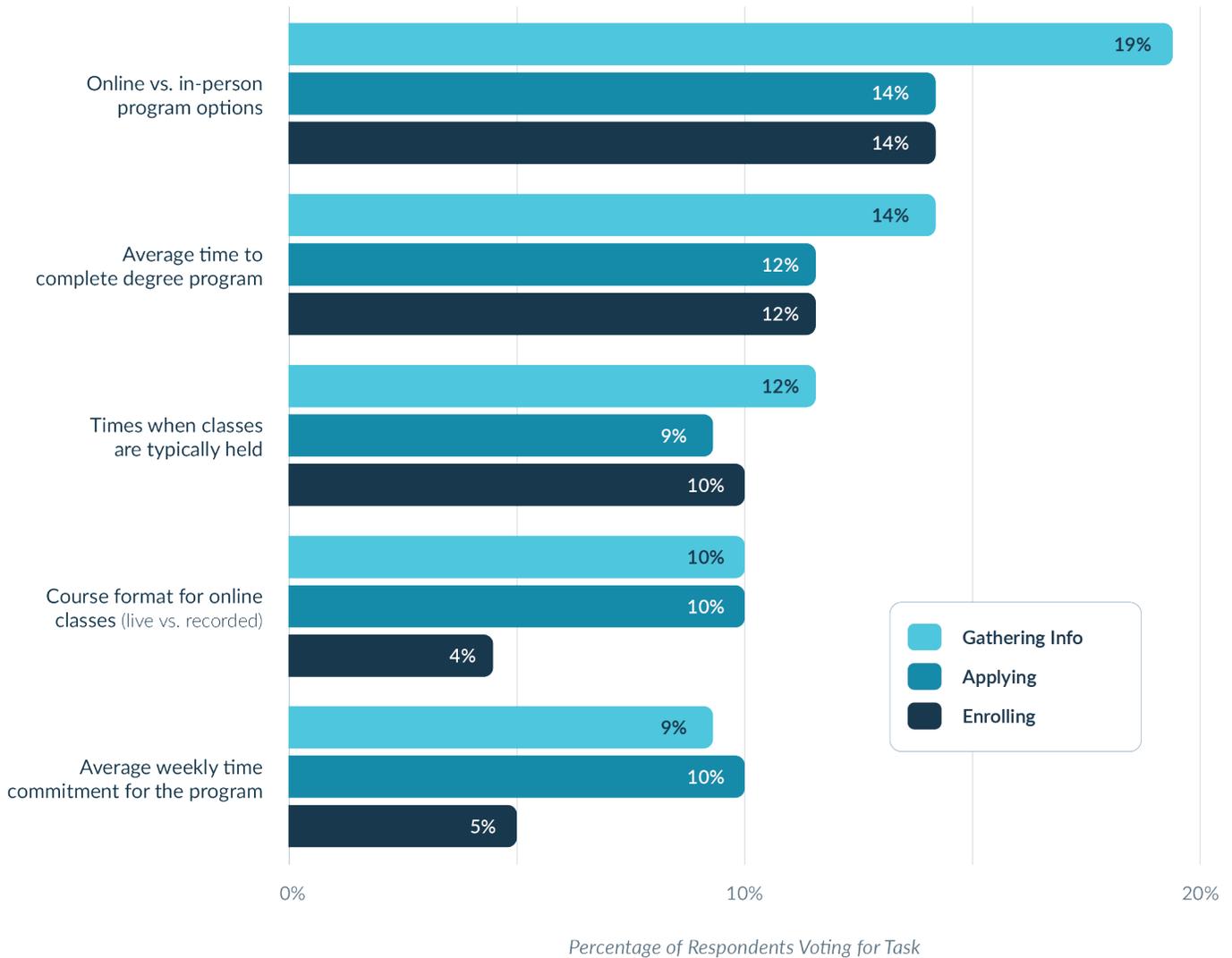
Show me the receipts. For Enrolling students, student success stories leap to the forefront as their #2 priority. Placement rates, student satisfaction, and other outcomes-related confidence builders matter as students progress through the funnel.

What these results tell us is clear: While every student needs access to core academic program information, institutions have an opportunity to shift tone, highlight different elements, and guide users differently depending on where they are in the funnel. Someone exploring options is asking, "Could this work for me?" Someone enrolling is asking, "Is this really going to be worth it?" The best digital experiences anticipate both questions—and answer them before students have to dig.

How Students Prioritize Outcomes-Related Information

N=1,034

Career paths and success stories from graduates of the program
- Gathering Info: 12%
- Applying: 12%
- Enrolling: 20%

Internship opportunities available for a program
- Gathering Info: 11%
- Applying: 8%
- Enrolling: 16%

Employment rates for graduates of the program
- Gathering Info: 11%
- Applying: 15%
- Enrolling: 15%

Student satisfaction with program
- Gathering Info: 12%
- Applying: 11%
- Enrolling: 15%

Employment projections for occupations related to the program
- Gathering Info: 12%
- Applying: 6%
- Enrolling: 10%

Legend:
- Gathering Info
- Applying
- Enrolling

Percentage of Respondents Voting for Task

Comparing Priorities: Two-Year vs. Four-Year Institutions

In this section, we'll examine how the information priorities of students who intend to enroll at a two-year institution differ from those of students who plan to enroll in a four-year institution. Understandably, we find considerable overlap between nontraditional and two-year segments as well as traditional and four-year segments. However, looking at prospective students through the lens of institutional type produced a handful of new and helpful insights.

Top Admission and Financial Aid Tasks

Two-Year
1. Total cost of attendance
2. Payment plan options
3. Financial aid forms ◆
4. Types of financial aid
5. Financial aid eligibility requirements
6. Application requirements
7. Actual cost to attend after estimated financial aid
8. Acceptance rate
9. Loan repayment options and policies ◆
10. Application fee cost and waiver

Four-Year
1. Total cost of attendance
2. Acceptance rate
3. Types of financial aid
4. Payment plan options
5. Application fee cost and waiver
6. Actual cost to attend after estimated financial aid
7. Admission criteria ◆
8. Financial aid eligibility requirements
9. Application requirements (transcripts, recommendation letters)
10. Status of my application ◆

◆   Indicates a top task that is unique to the segment.

Differences That Matter

Common ground. Although two-year and four-year students place priority on a small handful of tasks that the other segment does not, what's striking is how little their admission and aid priorities vary. In all, two-year and four-year students share 80% of their top 10 tasks, although the order of priority differs.

Top Academic Program Tasks

Two-Year
1. Tuition and fees for the major/program
2. Online vs. in-person program options
3. Financial aid options for specific majors/programs
4. Average time to complete degree program ◆
5. List of all programs/majors offered
6. Times when classes are typically held ◆
7. Online student support services ◆
8. Courses required for the program/major
9. Average weekly time commitment for the program ◆
10. Course descriptions and syllabi

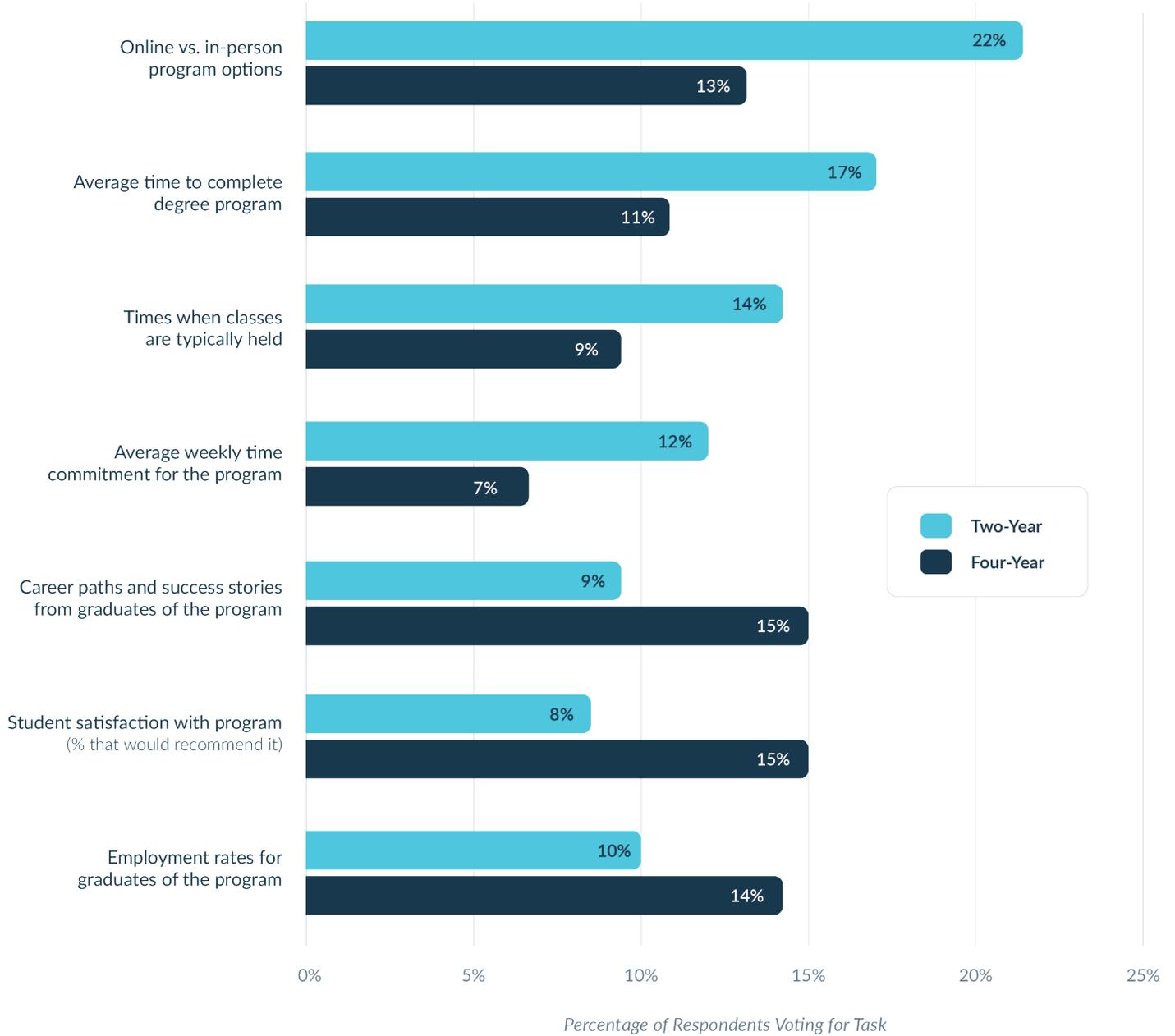| Four-Year |
|---|
| 1. Tuition and fees for the major/program |
| 2. Financial aid options for specific majors/programs |
| 3. Courses required for the program/major |
| 4. Career paths and success stories from graduates of the program ◆ |
| 5. Student satisfaction with program (% that would recommend it) ◆ |
| 6. List of all programs/majors offered |
| 7. Employment rates for graduates of the program |
| 8. Online vs. in-person program options |
| 9. Internship opportunities available for a program |
| 10. Course descriptions and syllabi |

◆ Indicates a top task that is unique to the segment.

Differences That Matter

Short-term practicality vs. long-term value. Although two-year and four-year students enjoy considerable common ground in admissions and aid priorities, we see considerable differences in program-related priorities. Two-year students place a premium on concrete, practical considerations like modality, time to complete, class times, and average weekly time commitment. While four-year students share some of these priorities, in general, they place considerably more emphasis on tasks that will help them decide if their investment of time and money will pay off in the long run.

How Two-Year and Four-Year Students Rank Program-Related Tasks

N=1,034

Online vs. in-person program options
- Two-Year: 22%
- Four-Year: 13%

Average time to complete degree program
- Two-Year: 17%
- Four-Year: 11%

Times when classes are typically held
- Two-Year: 14%
- Four-Year: 9%

Average weekly time commitment for the program
- Two-Year: 12%
- Four-Year: 7%

Career paths and success stories from graduates of the program
- Two-Year: 9%
- Four-Year: 15%

Student satisfaction with program (% that would recommend it)
- Two-Year: 8%
- Four-Year: 15%

Employment rates for graduates of the program
- Two-Year: 10%
- Four-Year: 14%

Legend:
- Two-Year
- Four-Year

X-axis: 0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25%

Percentage of Respondents Voting for Task

Comparing Priorities: Prospective Students vs. Higher Ed Professionals

To deepen the insight from this research, we didn't just ask students what they care most about—we also asked the people who serve them every day. In a follow-up survey, we asked 98 higher education professionals—primarily from marketing, admissions, and enrollment offices—to predict which tasks prospective students prioritize most when visiting a university website.

This comparison provides an important lens on the assumptions, instincts, and mental models that guide institutional decision-making. While the sample of higher ed professionals isn't intended to be statistically representative of the field as a whole, it offers a strong directional view of how the people responsible for shaping the digital experience think students engage.

Some results affirm what we might hope: Higher ed professionals often have a solid grasp of what matters most to students. But the comparison also highlights blind spots and missed cues, where institutional expectations diverge from student priorities. In a landscape where attention is scarce and competition is high, even small misalignments can lead to confusion, lost interest, or missed opportunities.

In the discussion that follows, we look at where professionals and students aligned, where they diverged, and what that means for the way institutions structure their websites—and communicate their value.

Admission and Financial Aid Tasks

Students
1. Total cost of attendance (tuition, fees, room & board, and expenses)
2. Payment plan options ◆
3. Types of financial aid (scholarship, grants, loans, work-study)
4. Acceptance rate ◆
5. Financial aid eligibility requirements
6. Actual cost to attend after estimated financial aid
7. Financial aid forms ◆
8. Application requirements (transcripts, recommendation letters)
9. Application fee cost and waiver ◆
10. Admission criteria (GPA, test scores, etc.)

Higher Ed Professionals
1. Total cost of attendance (tuition, fees, room & board, and expenses)
2. Application deadlines ◆
3. Admission criteria (GPA, test scores, etc.)
4. Admissions application portal (begin, continue, submit) ◆
5. Actual cost to attend after estimated financial aid
6. Application requirements (transcripts, recommendation letters)
7. In-person campus visit options ◆
8. Types of financial aid (scholarship, grants, loans, work-study)
9. Status of my application ◆
10. Overview of how to apply for financial aid ◆

◆ Indicates a top task that is unique to the segment.

The comparison between prospective students and higher ed professionals shows moments of striking alignment, but also exposes notable blind spots that, if left unaddressed, could lead to missed opportunities and frustrating website experiences.

Differences That Matter

Overestimating process and deadlines. Higher ed professionals significantly overestimated how much students prioritize the mechanics and timing of the admissions process:

- *Application deadlines* were selected by 41% of professionals vs. just 13% of students (a 29-point gap).
- The *Application portal* was overestimated by higher ed professionals by 20 percentage points.
- *Admission criteria (e.g., GPA, test scores)* and *Application requirements* were also assumed to be more important than students actually indicated.

These gaps suggest that while institutions are focused on compliance and milestones, students may be assuming they'll find that information easily—or may prioritize bigger-picture questions first.

Underestimating financial complexity.
Surprisingly, many tasks related to the details of financial aid were underestimated by professionals:

- *Financial aid eligibility requirements* were selected as a top task by 19% of students but only 9% of professionals.
- *Financial aid forms, Application fee waivers,* and *Financial aid staff contact information* were also far more important to students than professionals realized.
- *Loan repayment policies* and *Actual cost after aid* were selected by students at significantly higher rates.

This highlights a disconnect in how institutions perceive the depth and specificity of students' cost-related concerns. Students aren't just looking for sticker price—they want to understand the personal impact and how to navigate complex systems.

Undervaluing payment and planning tools.
One of the most striking gaps was around *Payment plan options*, which 20% of students selected as a top task—compared to just 4% of higher ed professionals. This practical tool may be a key decision driver, particularly for price-sensitive students who need to understand how they'll pay, not just how much.

Academic Program Tasks

Students
1. Tuition and fees for the major/program
2. Financial aid options for specific majors/programs ◆
3. Online vs. in-person program options
4. Courses required for the program/major
5. List of all programs/majors offered
6. Average time to complete degree program
7. Career paths and success stories from graduates of the program
8. Employment rates for graduates of the program ◆
9. Student satisfaction with program (% that would recommend it) ◆
10. Course descriptions and syllabi ◆

Higher Ed Professionals
1. List of all programs/major offered
2. Career paths and success stories from graduates of the program
3. Courses required for the program/major
4. Program rankings and national recognition ◆
5. Tuition and fees for the major/program
6. Internship opportunities available for a program ◆
7. Program concentrations and specializations ◆
8. What makes the program different from options at other schools ◆
9. Median salaries of program graduates ◆
10. Online vs. in-person program options

◆ Indicates a top task that is unique to the segment.

When we asked higher ed professionals to identify what they believe prospective students prioritize most when exploring academic programs online, we uncovered some of the widest gaps in perception across the entire study. While professionals showed strong instincts in a few areas, there were also striking mismatches, especially around what information students actually need to make decisions.

This part of the research reveals where institutional assumptions align with student behavior—and where they drift apart. Understanding these gaps can help universities build more relevant and responsive academic content that truly supports prospective students' decision-making.

Differences That Matter

Overemphasis on general listings and marketing narratives. Some of the most overestimated tasks reflect an internal lens on what institutions believe students *should* value:

- *List of all programs offered* was selected by 55% of professionals—but just 15% of students.
- *Career outcomes* and *Alumni stories* were similarly overestimated (40% vs. 13%).
- *Program rankings*, *Concentrations*, and *What makes the program unique* were all selected by more than one in five professionals, but by fewer than one in 10 students.

These results suggest that while universities often lean on reputation-building content, many students are more focused on concrete, functional details.

Students want financial and structural specifics. Professionals significantly underestimated cost-related and logistical questions that drive student decision-making:

- *Financial aid options specific to programs* was selected by 19% of students, but only 2% of professionals.
- *Course descriptions*, *Times when classes are held*, and *Weekly time commitment* were similarly undervalued by professionals.

- Tasks related to *Online vs. in-person format*, *Support services*, and *Program flexibility* (like accelerated options) were selected by students but overlooked by many professionals.

This points to a critical gap: Students are practical planners, trying to piece together not just what they'll study, but how it will fit into their lives and budgets.

Undervalued support, access, and modality needs. Many student-selected tasks received 0% selection from higher ed professionals:

- *Online student support*, *Accreditation*, *Technology requirements*, *Fellowship funding*, and *Graduate assistantships* were all identified by students but ignored by professionals.
- Other support-related concerns—like *Faculty accessibility*, *Capstone requirements*, and *Licensure information*—also appeared in student responses, suggesting a more holistic concern with readiness, affordability, and fit.

While individually these tasks may seem like lower priorities, they often matter deeply to nontraditional, international, or graduate students—audiences that institutions are increasingly trying to grow.

Rethinking Assumptions to Improve the Student Experience

The wide gaps in this portion of the research suggest that marketing and admissions professionals often view program pages as storytelling spaces, while students treat them as decision-making tools. That difference in orientation can lead to misplaced emphasis—on brand, breadth, and prestige—rather than on affordability, feasibility, and daily realities.

This doesn't mean that storytelling has no place. It means that stories must be anchored in practical value and supported by the clear, detailed information that helps students decide: *Can I do this? Will this work for me? Is it worth it?*

When institutions use real student behavior—not assumptions—to guide website strategy, they're far more likely to build experiences that not only attract interest but also convert it into confident enrollment decisions.

Applying
This Research

We launched this research because we wanted to create a practical resource to help colleges and universities make more effective, student-centric websites. Here's how you can begin applying our Top Tasks research to improve your .edu.

STEP 1

Measure Your Current Top Tasks Performance

Begin by measuring how well users can complete their highest-priority tasks. This can be accomplished in person or remotely through a series of user testing sessions. Here's what to track.

- **Task Success Rate:** What percentage of users is able to complete the task in question (e.g., find and understand *Total cost of attendance*)? If they give up, click away, or misinterpret what they find, that's a failed task.

- **Time-On-Task:** How long do students take to complete the task?

- **Error Rate:** How often do users go down the wrong path, even if they're ultimately able to complete the task? For a task like *Total cost of attendance*, this could mean students clicking into a financial aid FAQ or undergraduate tuition table when they meant to find graduate costs.

- **Qualitative User Feedback:** Asking users questions like "How confident are you that you understand your total cost of attendance?", "Was there a point where you felt stuck or unsure?", and other follow-ups can reveal important insights into the underlying causes of task success or failure.

How Many Tasks and How Many Users Should I Test?

Time and resources for ongoing improvement to your website are limited, and that's where the value of Top Tasks truly shines. Because you know the tasks that are truly essential to your users, you can confidently focus your efforts on the handful of areas that will make the biggest difference to the largest number of users. To that end, you should begin by testing your top tasks, the handful of tasks that account for the top 25% of votes in the survey. While your top tasks are few in number, they're tremendously important, and reasonably thorough testing could very well produce more than enough spin-off projects to keep you busy for quite a while.

How many users should you include in your test? The answer might shock you. Testing with as few as five users is usually enough to uncover the most important issues that are tripping up your users.[1] But to make it work, you need to get a few things right.

- **Recruit the right users.** If you intend to understand how prospective undergraduates engage with your site, you need to run tests using actual prospective undergrads, not staff or campus ambassadors masquerading as high school students.

- **Consider segment-specific insights.** If you want to see how one segment of students fares on a set of tasks versus another, you'll want to make sure you have at least five participants from each segment.

- **Consider task complexity.** Complex, multistep tasks can sometimes reveal a broader range of usability issues. In those cases, you may need to include more users in your test to identify patterns.

---

1   Nielsen, J. (2000, March 19). Why you only need to test with 5 users. Nielsen Norman Group. https://www.nngroup.com/articles/why-you-only-need-to-test-with-5-users/

STEP 2

Develop and Test Your Solution(s)

Armed with data and a clearer sense of what's preventing your users from being as successful as they could be, you should be well positioned to develop a hypothesis or two about how to improve task completion. In doing so, be mindful of the following:

How should content vary by intended audience? The research shows that different types of students have different needs— traditional undergrads vs. adult learners, graduate vs. undergraduate students, etc. A one-size-fits-all approach won't cut it.

- Use segmented navigation pathways or content blocks that help users self-identify and get tailored information.
- Ensure your pages answer not just *what* the program is, but *how* it fits into different students' lives (modality, time commitment, support services).

Bridge the gap between internal beliefs and student reality. The comparison between student-selected tasks and what professionals *thought* students would prioritize revealed several key blind spots. Closing those gaps is both a content challenge and a culture challenge.

- Share this data internally to start conversations across departments about misaligned assumptions.
- Use it to resolve content prioritization debates—especially when internal stakeholders advocate for content students don't value.
- Encourage decision-makers to shift from thinking "What do we want to say?" to "What are students trying to do?"

Make the invisible visible. Some of the most important content for students—like payment plans, eligibility rules, support services, and funding by program—can be hard to find, buried deep within departmental pages or hidden behind jargon.

- Elevate these topics to more prominent positions on the site.

- Use common student search phrases as labels and headers. (e.g., "cost of attendance after aid" vs. "Net Price Calculator")

- Treat affordability and feasibility as first-tier content, not fine print.

Once you've implemented your proposed changes on a staging site or in your prototyping tool of choice, it's time to retest and validate that you've sufficiently moved the needle in the right direction.

STEP 3

Go Live and Plan Your Next Test

Ideally, the cycle of testing and iteration should be an ongoing process to improve users' ability to accomplish top tasks.

This research is a starting point. Student expectations, digital habits, and financial realities will continue to evolve and so must our websites. Institutions that ground their decisions in real student priorities rather than assumptions will be better positioned to engage, support, and enroll the students they aim to serve.

We hope this research helps your institution move confidently toward a more student-centered web experience—and we're here to help if you'd like to explore what that could look like on your campus.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Jarrett Smith
SVP OF STRATEGY, ECHO DELTA

Jarrett Smith is the Senior Vice President of Strategy and a partner at Echo Delta, where he oversees market research, creative development, and media strategy for a nationwide roster of higher education clients. He also hosts Echo Delta's popular Higher Ed Marketing Lab podcast. As a small-college graduate and former public school teacher, Jarrett brings a lifelong passion for education and an abiding belief in its power to change the trajectories of individuals and communities.

Grant De Roo
FOUNDER AND PRINCIPAL, ADV MARKET RESEARCH

As ADV's Founder and Principal, Grant leads all research ADV conducts for colleges and universities around the nation. Prior to founding ADV, Grant was the Research Director at a large national agency and formerly served as the Associate Director of Admissions at Elon University, where he learned how to collect, analyze, and act on data in recruitment and enrollment. Today, Grant's work includes extensive research on institutional brand perception, program demand, enrollment modeling, program modality, pricing and marketability, and competitive analysis. Grant is a frequent presenter at industry conferences and holds an MBA in data analytics from Elon University.

ABOUT THE SPONSORS

ECHO DELTA
Higher Education Marketing & Consulting

Echo Delta helps colleges and universities drive enrollment, increase yield, and attract right-fit students through full-funnel, integrated marketing and enrollment consulting. From launching a one-of-a-kind recruitment campaign to modernizing your campus visit and shaping your next class, Echo Delta works as an extension of your team, delivering data-backed insights and custom solutions tailored to your unique needs.

ECHODELTA.CO

ADV | MARKET RESEARCH & CONSULTING

ADV is a higher education market research and brand strategy firm specializing in customized research to solve challenges related to enrollment, marketing, and strategy. Our expertise spans from small liberal arts colleges to large research universities, ensuring that every institution receives the personalized attention and innovative strategies they need to thrive. ADV's understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities within higher education enable us to help our clients enhance their brand strength, increase enrollment, and achieve long-term success.

ADVMARKETRESEARCH.COM

HOW TO CITE THIS REPORT

Echo Delta, ADV Market Research (2025).
Designing for Decisions: How Prospective Students Rank Academic, Admissions, and Financial Aid Information on University Websites

All material in this document is copyright © 2025 by Echo Delta. Permission is required to distribute information from Echo Delta either in electronic or print form.

For legal, copyright, or usage questions relating to this research report, please reach out to info@echodelta.co.