

MWA College Access Report for 2020-21

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Global Disruptions to College Access and the Future of Work: What It Means for Wave-Makers

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I. Pandemic Impact on Overall College Admissions

Because of the pandemic, many students will be applying to colleges this year without standardized tests such as the SAT or ACT, which, prior to this year, were long held as important metrics for gaining admission to competitive institutions. We suspect that college-bound students with GPAs of between 2.00 to 2.49 will be most impacted by changes in admissions criteria, leaving them most susceptible to undermatching this year.

When I managed a college admissions consulting firm, our guidance was based on findings from an internal annual regression analysis of admissions results from the most competitive colleges in the country. The regression analysis allowed us to forecast a student's likelihood of admission to a particular college based on fourteen variables, which fell into three broad categories: academics, standardized tests, and extracurricular activities. The weight of each variable would differ from campus to campus and year to year.

Here's what we found:

- We found that on average, approximately 30% of admissions decisions to **highly competitive colleges** could be attributed to variables related to academics and standardized tests, while an estimated 70% could be attributed to variables related to extracurricular activities.
- For **less competitive or non-competitive colleges**, we found the opposite to be true: approximately 70% of admissions decisions could be attributed to academics¹ and standardized tests alone, with extracurricular activities amounting to no more than 30% of admissions decisions or being insignificant altogether.

We see this reflected in actual college applications. Take, for example, the Common Application or University of California application, which allow applicants to include detailed information on extracurricular activities, including the names of clubs and organizations, positions held, duration of involvement, and free-response areas for personalized summaries. The California State University application, by contrast, only asks applicants to provide information on academics and standardized tests, with no option to submit any level of detail on extracurricular activities.

¹ Prior to the pandemic, the California State University system used an eligibility index to determine admission based on minimum GPAs and SAT or ACT scores. Additionally, due to impactation, certain majors place heavier weighting on GPAs in math courses and/or math subsection scores on standardized tests. In CSU parlance, when a campus or major is "impacted," it means that it has reached or surpassed its existing enrollment capacity in terms of its instructional resources and physical size.

Fewer opportunities to highlight achievements² on a college application significantly impact a student’s ability to differentiate themselves from other applicants and to compete for a limited number of available seats at an institution.

II. Potential Impact on MWA College Admissions

Here’s how I believe the pandemic will impact college admissions for different segments of students at Making Waves:

I suspect that for students bound for **less competitive colleges**, the inability to submit standardized test scores due to pandemic-related cancellations would leave them short on a significant variable that would otherwise have allowed them to further compete and differentiate themselves from other applicants. They essentially would only be able to compete on academics alone, consisting of variables like course rigor, grade point average, and trend. I project that students bound for less competitive colleges will be most susceptible to undermatching³ this season.

I suspect that students bound for **highly competitive and competitive colleges** will maintain the most opportunity to compete by differentiating themselves from other applicants based on their extracurricular activities and other significant variables⁴. Their inability to submit standardized tests would have minimal impact on the competitive advantage of these students, due to the demonstrated diminished significance of testing to compete for admission to their target schools in the first place. I project that students bound for highly competitive, competitive, and non-competitive colleges (as you’ll see in the bullet point below) will be least susceptible to undermatching this season.

I suspect that students bound for **non-competitive colleges** will experience minimal impact from pandemic-related disruptions, given that their target schools place few additional requirements, if any, beyond a high school diploma.

To what degree do we suspect that college-bound seniors will be impacted by college access disruptions related to COVID-19?				
Academic Profile of Students	Students Bound for Highly Competitive Colleges	Students Bound for Competitive Colleges	Students Bound for Less Competitive Colleges	Students Bound for Non-competitive Colleges
Degree of Impact	Least Susceptible to Undermatching	Least Susceptible to Undermatching	Most Susceptible to Undermatching	Least Susceptible to Undermatching

² See Table 1: “Comparison of Typical Achievements Requested in College Applications.”

³ According to Bellwether Education Partners, “undermatching” occurs when a student attends a college that is less selective than their credentials would otherwise allow. Students from low-income families are more likely to undermatch when enrolling in college. Less selective institutions often have less financial aid to give, fewer supports for students, and lower graduation rates. Under-matched students face longer odds to complete a post-secondary degree or certificate.

⁴ See Table 1: Comparison of Typical Achievements Requested in College Applications.

III. Data

College Readiness

Approximately 82.7% of students from the Class of 2021 are bound for “highly competitive” or “competitive” colleges, representing an estimated 8% decrease from last year.

	College Competitive			College Ready	Total Students
	Highly Competitive	Competitive	Less Competitive	Non Competitive	
Institutional Selectivity					
Qualifying GPA	3.0 or higher cum.	2.50-2.99 cum.	2.0-2.49 cum.	1.0-1.99 cum.	
18th Wave	70 (67.3%)	16 (15.4%)	9 (8.7%)	9 (8.7%)	104
17th Wave	60 (69.8%)	18 (20.9%)	7 (8.1%)	1 (1.2%)	86

Post-Secondary Planning

From an initial survey (n=93), approximately 90% of students from this year’s graduating class have a post-secondary plan so far, with about 80% choosing college.

Post-secondary Plan	Percentage of 18th Wave with Interest
Four-year college or university	69.9% (65 students)
Community college	9.7% (9 students)
Military enlistment	0.0% (0 students)
Trade program or apprenticeship	1.1% (1 students)
Gap year program	1.1% (1 students)
Job program	4.3% (4 students)
Full-time employment	3.2% (3 students)
“I’m not sure”	10.8% (10 students)

Estimated College Application Pathways Engagement for Wave 18

% Applying to 4-Year Schools	% Applying to 2-Year Schools	% Alternative Pathways
70%	20-25%	5%-10%

IV. Analysis

We expect that 95% or more of our graduates will have a post-secondary plan, however, we are anticipating that fewer students will choose college, opting for alternative pathways instead.

- Projecting a **10% increase** in students who choose something other than college
- About **90% choosing college**
 - with a potentially a greater share of students choosing community college
 - potentially fewer admits to CSU due to new admissions criteria (increase to 2.5 cumulative GPA minimum)
- Highly competitive students are expected to see admits that are **comparable to last year's class**
- Less desire by students **to venture out of the area**
- Unknown variables connected to students including
 - family members needing them to work and contribute to the household due to unemployment, loss of work hours offered, and lost jobs (5 students, so far, have come forward with this information, some of whom are academically high-achieving and bound for highly competitive colleges)

V. Next Steps/Pivots

Given the context of the pandemic, in addition to our efforts to advance the Strategic Plan of Making Waves, we will make certain enhancements to benefit different segments of our graduating class, with special attention paid to reducing the effects of undermatching among those bound for less competitive colleges so that the Expected College Completion⁵ (ECC) rate of this cohort is as high as its academic profile will allow.

Specifically, here are distinct shifts that will occur this season:

- Based on findings from Bellwether Education Partners related to our Strategic Plan, **we will be helping each student apply to colleges that have the highest Estimated College Completion (ECC) rates** available to them, based on their academic profiles.
- **We will enhance our college list building efforts** for students bound for less competitive colleges by helping them identify institutions⁶ that will allow them to highlight more than just academics and standardized test scores on their applications. For students bound for California State University, we will encourage them to pursue the option of being considered for the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), which allows for students to submit five short essays⁷.
- We will explore participation in programs such as MicroCollege Honors Pathway Program that target high school seniors who fall into our non-competitive group but are still interested in college.

⁵ See Table 2: "Selectivity Index to Match by Estimated College Completion Rate" and Table 3: "Sample Match by Estimated College Completion Rate."

⁶ While we may succeed in helping students bound for less competitive institutions gain admission, it is worth noting that these institutions are typically not as generous with financial aid. Financial aid may be a competing factor which may cause students bound for less competitive institutions to choose to attend a non-competitive institution due to cost, which is a type of undermatch.

⁷ Based on our findings at Making Waves, it is largely students with an Expected Family Contribution of \$0.00 that are accepted into EOP.

- ***We will identify specific students who are bound for less competitive institutions*** and encourage them to take an SAT or ACT exam administration if seats become available, even if the administration is out of the area⁸. Students will be identified⁹ if they have a University of California and California State University GPA of between 2.00 and 2.49 and have a 2019 PSAT score that is within competitive range for the colleges they are targeting for admission¹⁰.
- ***We will be increasing the amount of available support time*** for personal statements, supplemental essays, activities descriptions, letters of recommendation, interview preparation, and demonstrated interest opportunities, such as virtual visits, for students submitting applications that allow for these areas to be highlighted, particularly for those bound for competitive or highly competitive institutions.
- In anticipation of a potential increase in the number of students who are bound for community colleges, ***we will be increasing the amount of available support time for exploration and enrollment***. Together with CAP, our college success program, we are embarking on an initiative that ladders-up to our Strategic Plan to better understand the user experience of a community college bound student at Making Waves. It is worth noting that in an initial survey of post-secondary plans, we are seeing that approximately 10% of rising graduates are giving thought to alternative pathways after high school, including trade programs, apprenticeships, gap year programs, job programs, or full-time employment. We suspect that these students may ultimately choose to attend community colleges, but this initial pulse check represents an increase from prior years.

Lastly, a conversation about the future of higher education is not complete without a conversation about the future of work. Work will likely be the main source of income for most Wave-Makers, but as the future of work changes, so must our approach for positioning our students to contribute to the workforce -- failure to do so may perpetuate income inequality for our community, despite our efforts to push back against educational inequality. To that end, as we build a vision for the future of work and what it means for Wave-Makers, we are asking ourselves the following questions, based on insights from McKinsey Global Institute¹¹:

- What training or preparation can we offer so that Wave-Makers can adapt to a workforce characterized by the rise of automation and artificial intelligence?
- What supports and resources can we offer so that Wave-Makers can thrive in changing models of work and work structure, including remote work, gig work, and fissured work?
- What guidance can we offer so that Wave-Makers can attain the financial means to live the lives they want for themselves?

More than ever, we are committed to meeting this challenge, leveraging our full resources and capabilities to prepare our Wave-Makers for what's now and what's next.

⁸ Prior to the recent wildfires, a limited number of seats were available in Fairfield and Sacramento. No seats were available in Berkeley, Oakland, or Richmond -- cities where Wave-Makers have taken the SAT and ACT in previous years.

⁹ We estimate that there are 10 to 15 seniors who fit this criteria.

¹⁰ A University of California and California State University GPA of 2.50 now deems a student eligible for admission to a CSU, meaning that a student with this GPA are essentially guaranteed admission to their local CSU campus, provided that they apply. Prior to the pandemic, the CSU used an eligibility index which specified minimum GPAs and SAT or ACT scores for admission.

¹¹ For further reading, see ""How Will Automation Affect Jobs, Skills, and Wages?" by Peter Gumbel and Michael Chui at McKinsey and Company (2018).

APPENDIX

Table 1. Comparison of Typical Achievements Requested in College Applications. Applications to highly competitive institutions typically allow students to highlight more achievements than applications to less competitive or non-competitive institutions.

	College Competitive		College Ready
	Highly Competitive	Less Competitive	Non Competitive
Academics			
Grade Point Average	✓	✓	✓
Course Rigor	✓	✓	✓
Honors and Advanced Placement (AP) Points	✓	✓	✓
Semesters of College Prep (a-g) Coursework	✓	✓	✓
Trend	✓	✓	✓
Standardized Tests¹²			
SAT / ACT			
SAT Subject Tests			
AP Exams			
Extracurricular Activities			
Community Service	✓		
School Clubs	✓		
Arts	✓		
Athletics	✓		
Paid Work	✓		
Enrichment Programs	✓		
Leadership	✓		
Internship	✓		
Capstone Project	✓		
Harder to Measure Variables			
Personal Statement	✓		
Supplemental Essays	✓		
Letters of Recommendation	✓		
Demonstrated Interest	✓		

¹² Through a personal connection, we have heard that University of California, Berkeley may place heavier weighting on Advanced Placement (AP) exam scores and SAT Subject Test scores as a result of the pandemic-related shifts. A formal statement from University of California is expected this fall.

Table 2. Selectivity Index to Match by Estimated College Completion Rate. Beginning in 2020, this is the index to be used to “match” college-going Wave-Makers to their target ECC when building college lists.

Highest Score		Final High School GPA							
ACT	SAT	<1.74	1.75 - 1.99	2.00 - 2.49	2.50 - 2.75	2.75 - 2.99	3.00 - 3.24	3.25 - 3.74	3.75+
24+	1090+	52%	52%	52%	79%	79%	88%	88%	88%
21 - 23	980 - 1080	42%	42%	52%	66%	79%	79%	79%	79%
18 - 20	870 - 970	42%	42%	52%	66%	66%	79%	79%	79%
16 - 17	790 - 860	29%	42%	42%	52%	52%	52%	66%	79%
<16 or No ACT	<790 or No SAT	29%	42%	42%	42%	42%	42%	52%	52%

Target Estimated College Completion (ECC) Rate

This selectivity index, based on a version prepared by Bellwether Education Partners, can be used to determine a “match” between student qualifications and estimated college completion (ECC) rates. Estimated college completion rates represent the average six-year grad rates of similarly rated institutions within each of Barron’s selectivity ratings. Six-year grad rates pulled from IPEDs for the 2011 cohort of first-time, full-time students seeking a bachelor degree or equivalent at four-year institutions (n=1,300 institutions).

Footnote to Table 2: This selectivity index, based on a version prepared by Bellwether Education Partners, can be used to determine a “match” between student qualifications and estimated college completion (ECC) rates. Estimated college completion rates represent the average six-year grad rates of similarly rated institutions within each of Barron’s selectivity ratings. Six-year grad rates pulled from IPEDs for the 2011 cohort of first-time, full-time students seeking a bachelor degree or equivalent at four-year institutions (n=1,300 institutions).

Table 3. Sample Match by Estimated College Completion Rate. A college-going student with a GPA of 2.75 and an SAT Score of 870 should expect to “match” with an institution with an estimated college completion (ECC) rate of 66.0%.

Highest Score		Final High School GPA							
ACT	SAT	<1.74	1.75 - 1.99	2.00 - 2.49	2.50 - 2.75	2.75 - 2.99	3.00 - 3.24	3.25 - 3.74	3.75+
24+	1090+	52%	52%	52%	79%	66%	88%	88%	88%
21 - 23	980 - 1080	42%	42%	52%	66%	79%	79%	79%	79%
18 - 20	870 - 970	29%	42%	42%	52%	66%	79%	79%	79%
16 - 17	790 - 860	29%	42%	42%	52%	52%	52%	66%	79%
<16 or No ACT	<790 or No SAT	29%	42%	42%	42%	42%	42%	52%	52%

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Table 4. MWA & the ECC. See below for a breakdown of Wave 18 using the ECC framework.

College Matching Index Aggregate Data - 17th Wave, MAY 2020

	Two Year College	Four Year College	Somewhat Competitive	Competitive	Very Competitive	Most Competitive	TOTAL
<i># of Stus.</i>	2	12	8	11	32	23	88
<i>% of Stus.</i>	2.3%	13.6%	9.1%	12.5%	36.4%	26.1%	100%

	Cumulative GPA - 9th-1st semester 12th Grade							
Highest Score (SAT or ACT)	<1.74	1.75-1.99	2.00-2.49	2.50-2.75	2.75-2.99	3.00-3.24	3.25-3.74	3.75+
1090+ / 24+						(1)	(3)	(19)
980-1080 / 21-23				(2)	(2)	(1)	(5)	(10)
870-970 / 18-20			(1)	(3)	(2)	(4)	(6)	(2)
790-860 / 16-17	(1)		(4)	(1)	(3)	(3)	(4)	(2)
<790 / <16 or no testing	(1)	(2)	(2)	(2)	(1)	(1)		