What Prospective Students *Really* Think

2017 National Report on the Perceptions and Communication Preferences of High School Students

How do today's Generation Z high school students prefer to engage with colleges and universities? What does this generation expect from the college shopping process, and what would they like colleges to know?

To find out, RNL surveyed a national sample of these students in mid-2017. [1] Following are the key takeaways from this study, including **important differences based on students' backgrounds, ethnicity, and region of the country**.

1 "When I apply, it doesn't necessarily mean I'm serious about enrolling."

WHY TODAY'S APPLICATIONS ARE LESS LIKELY TO PREDICT ENROLLMENT

35%
of students applied to more than five colleges and universities

44%
confirmed that they failed to complete at least one of their applications

56%
said they left applications incomplete because they were initially interested but changed their mind, or because they at first thought applying was an easy way to learn about the school

🔑 KEY TAKEAWAY

**In today's environment, applications are less reliable for predicting enrollment likelihood.**

Recommended action:
Instead of assuming applicants from Generation Z are interested or committed, it's important to immediately assess their priorities to learn how serious they are—and to keep your institution high on an applicant's radar with communications that are tailored and timely to their decision.

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2 "My parents and I are worried about how we are going to pay for college."

ANTICIPATED DIFFICULTY IN PAYING FOR COLLEGE

67% Somewhat difficult

16% Extremely difficult

83% TOTAL
will have at least some difficulty paying for college
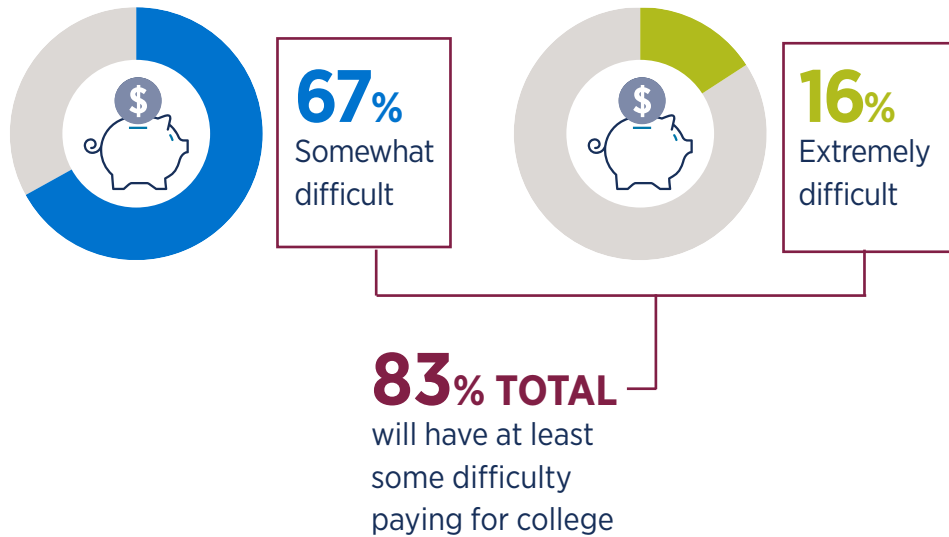
Survey choices included *quite* difficult, *somewhat* difficult, and *not* difficult (17 percent).

KEY TAKEAWAY
With today's angst around college costs, broad statements and statistics about financial aid are no longer enough.

Recommended action:
Use analytics to pinpoint each student's potential need level, then segment your messages and aid awards to address specific situations. Also, be sure to price your institution optimally and provide a quick net price calculator on your website to demonstrate your affordability.

Optimize your yield by addressing affordability and awarding more strategically

With today's pressures on both affordability and net revenue, balancing both is more crucial than ever. Learn how RNL can help you take a more precise, data-informed approach and optimize your class yield.

Visit RuffaloNL.com/Optimize

3

"As a first-generation student, I am less likely to use email when I want to reach out to a school that hasn't contacted me."

SURVEY QUESTION

*If you were interested in a college before they contacted you…
how would you contact them? (Choose best response only.)*

38%
of first-generation students would send an email as their first contact

@

50%
of students with college-graduate parents would send an email as their first contact

BEYOND EMAIL

FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS		NON-FIRST-GENERATION
26%	Call admissions office	**24%**
14%	Request info from website	**11%**
12%	Visit in person	**10%**
6%	Send a letter	**2%**
4%	Use social media	**1%**
1%	IM a counselor	**2%**

KEY TAKEAWAY

It's dangerous to assume that all college-bound high school students prefer to communicate the same way.

Recommended action:

Take a multichannel approach to engaging prospective students. Email, website, social media, phone calls, text messages, and direct mail should all work together so you engage students across all channels. Furthermore, consider using engagement strategies such as "fit quizzes" that assess student interest in specific programs so you can tailor your outreach to their interests.

4 "After I hear from a college that interests me, I first go online to check them out."

CONDUCTING INDEPENDENT RESEARCH ONLINE IS THE PREFERRED APPROACH OF GEN Z

How Gen Z students express interest when...

They receive direct mail:

39%
Go to the school's website

33%
Conduct their own research online

6%
Look up the school on social media

They receive an email:

44%
Click on the embedded links

31%
Go to the school's website

27%
Conduct their own research online

Students chose up to two responses on the survey, including the options shown above as well as calling the college (8 percent), talking with a counselor (8-12 percent), emailing or texting the school (2-3 percent), and, for direct mail, returning a reply card (4 percent).

KEY TAKEAWAY
Don't expect today's students to fill out reply cards.

Recommended action:
With limited experience in a linear request-response world, most of these students prefer to go on a **self-guided, digitally focused search** for information—using the wide range of tools at their fingertips. In this environment, colleges and universities must prepare a strong and comprehensive online presence that is ready to respond to students' self-chosen paths of exploration, while continually nudging each student to tap and keep exploring.

Read how one college used student-directed exploration to enroll more biology majors
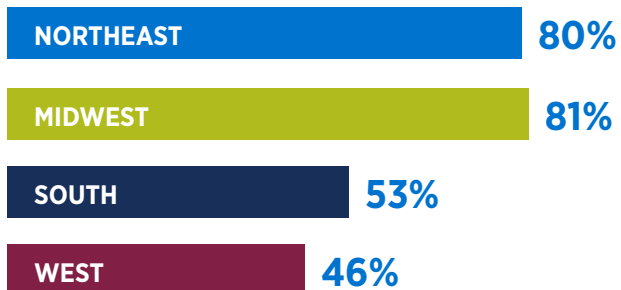
Learn how Austin College in Texas took a trailblazing approach to increasing enrollment in a specific program of study.

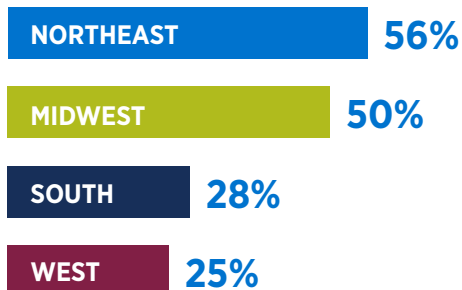**Visit RuffaloNL.com/AustinCollege**

5 "High schools are a go-to resource for college information for some, but not all, students of my generation."

HIGH SCHOOL COLLEGE-PLANNING ACTIVITIES ARE IMPORTANT TO STUDENTS IN GENERAL, BUT FEWER STUDENTS FROM THE WEST AND SOUTH PARTICIPATE

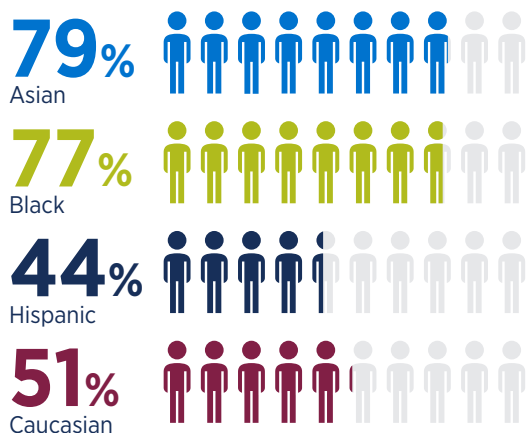**Met with a high school counselor to plan for college:**

NORTHEAST	80%
MIDWEST	81%
SOUTH	53%
WEST	46%

Attended a college night or fair at my high school:

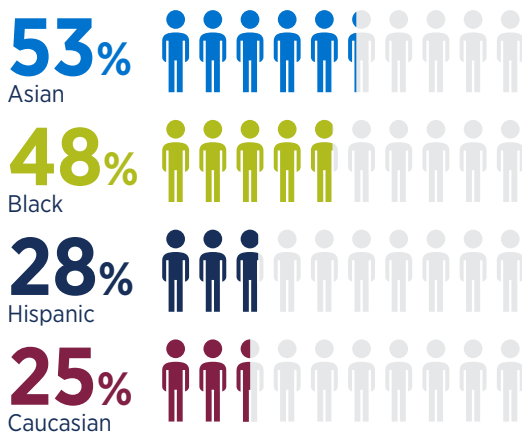|	
NORTHEAST	56%
MIDWEST	50%
SOUTH	28%
WEST	25%

ASIAN AND AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS DEPEND ON HIGH SCHOOL COLLEGE-PLANNING ACTIVITIES AT HIGHER RATES

Met with a high school counselor to plan for college:

79% Asian
77% Black
44% Hispanic
51% Caucasian

Attended a college night or fair at my high school:

53% Asian
48% Black
28% Hispanic
25% Caucasian

🔑 **KEY TAKEAWAY**
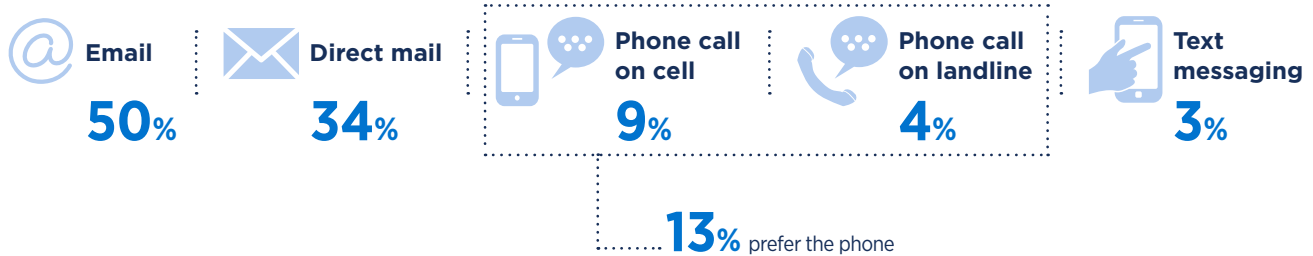**The influential role of high schools in recruitment should not be overlooked.**

Recommended action:
Focus outreach directly on high school counselors, and encourage students to participate in high school college-planning activities. Notice that, again, it is never safe to assume that all students will behave and respond the same way. Instead, **outreach must be individualized and personalized.**
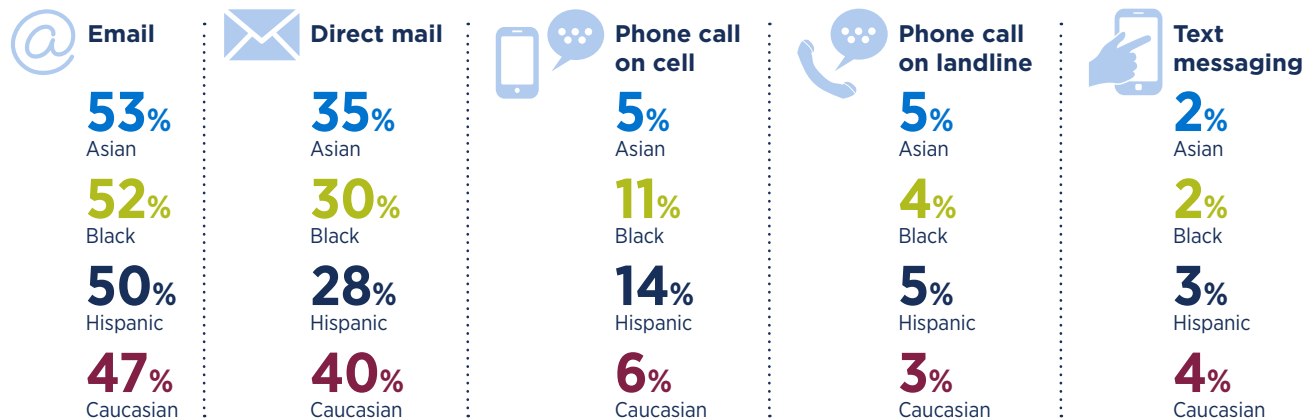
6 "What's the best way for a college to reach me? Personalize my experience!"

SURVEY QUESTION

If you have never communicated with a specific college or university, how do you prefer they first communicate with you?

Email
50%

Direct mail
34%

Phone call on cell
9%

Phone call on landline
4%

Text messaging
3%

13% prefer the phone

Preferences by ethnicity

	Email	Direct mail	Phone call on cell	Phone call on landline	Text messaging
Asian	53%	35%	5%	5%	2%
Black	52%	30%	11%	4%	2%
Hispanic	50%	28%	14%	5%	3%
Caucasian	47%	40%	6%	3%	4%

19% of Hispanic students preferred a phone call vs.

9% of Caucasian students

15% of black students preferred a phone call as well

40% of Caucasian students preferred direct mail the most

Only **28%** of Hispanic students preferred direct mail

KEY TAKEAWAY
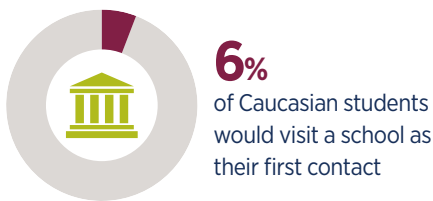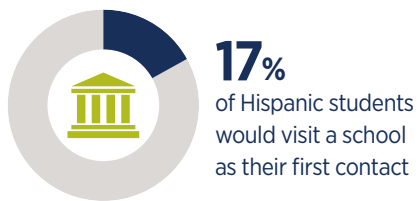**It's important to let students lead.**

Recommended action:
Learn the preferences of individual students, then plan and execute your personalized multichannel outreach to connect with students in the ways they find the comfortable. In addition, **use a differentiated strategy based on ethnicity** to heed the preferences of specific groups, and don't overlook the role of the telephone.

7 "As a Hispanic student, I am more likely to visit the school in person when I want to reach out to a school that hasn't contacted me."

SELF-DIRECTED HISPANIC STUDENTS ARE 3X MORE LIKELY TO VISIT A SCHOOL IN PERSON THAN CAUCASIAN STUDENTS

If you were interested in a college before they contacted you... how would you contact them? (Choose best response only.)

17% of Hispanic students would visit a school as their first contact

6% of Caucasian students would visit a school as their first contact

BEYOND A CAMPUS VISIT

If you were interested in a college before they contacted you... how [else] would you contact them?

HISPANIC		CAUCASIAN
40%	Send an email	**54%**
18%	Call admissions office	**26%**
13%	Request info from website	**9%**
8%	Send a letter	**3%**
3%	Use social media	**1%**
1%	IM a counselor	**0%**
0%	Send a text message	**1%**

KEY TAKEAWAY

For Hispanic students in particular, deploy front-end strategies that support their penchant to visit your campus.

Recommended action:
For those less willing to come on campus, offer other easy alternatives to experience campus life (but not virtual tours, which tend to be ineffective according to RNL research[2]). **Also, notice the nuances.** While Hispanic students are less likely to place a phone call than Caucasian students, they are more likely to want to receive a phone call, as shown on the previous page.

[2] Ruffalo Noel Levitz (2016). *2016 marketing and student recruitment practices benchmark report for four-year colleges and universities.* Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Ruffalo Noel Levitz. Retrieved from www.RuffaloNL.com/BenchmarkReports.

MARKETING AND RECRUITMENT INNOVATIONS
for connecting with Generation Z

Purpose-built solutions to increase engagement and boost enrollment.

RNL Student Journey

CREATES a student-driven, personalized enrollment experience for students and parents using dynamic content, marketing automation, and interactive fit quizzes. The result is a revolutionary experience that is fully aligned with how today's students seek information.

RNL Demand Builder™

MAXIMIZES prospective student engagement through true multichannel experiences and generates genuine interest from your student search list. Build a pool of interested students and engage them to increase application and enrollment rates.

RNL Web Strategy and Interactive Marketing Services

ENSURES your website and digital strategy drives online engagement and builds on your unique value proposition. Strengthen your market awareness by building a strong digital presence, and convey your benefits and offerings in a way that resonates with prospective students.

RNL Applicant Cultivator™

LAUNCHES campaigns that build a stronger applicant pool of qualified, interested applicants who are a great fit for your institution and goals. RNL Applicant Cultivator's predictive analytics, inquiry surveys, and compelling marketing communications move students to complete their applications.

RNL Forecast*Plus*™

IDENTIFIES which students are most likely to enroll using predictive modeling. Forecast*Plus* for Recruitment is a highly advanced analytics tool for enrollment management. Powered by customized, multi-variable analyses, it uses your past enrollment data to predict your future enrollment results.

RNL TrueCost Calculator™

DELIVERS highly accurate net price estimates to students in minutes with a powerful, fully customized recruitment tool. With its customization for merit awards and incredibly easy-to-use interface, the RNL TrueCost Calculator creates a compelling case for your institution's affordability.

Demographics of the national sample

642 HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS PARTICIPATED IN THE RNL TELEPHONE SURVEY

CLASS

14% sophomores—Class of 2019
35% juniors—Class of 2018
51% seniors*—Class of 2017

PARENTAL EDUCATION

39% first-generation
61% non-first-generation

GENDER

60% male
40% female

REGION

19% Northeast
21% Midwest
32% South
28% West

ACADEMIC ABILITY

50% high academic ability
50% average academic ability

RACE/ETHNICITY

19% Asian
25% African American
21% Hispanic
35% Caucasian

*Only seniors' responses are reported on page 1, *why today's college applications are less likely to predict enrollment.*

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Call **800.876.1117** today to discuss your enrollment strategy or email: **ContactUs@RuffaloNL.com**

Learn more: **RuffaloNL.com/CompleteEnrollment**