



The Princeton Review 2015 College Hopes & Worries Survey Report

The Princeton Review, one of the nation's best known education services companies, has conducted this survey of college applicants and parents of applicants since 2003. The survey is published in company's annual "*Best Colleges*" book and is accessible on www.princetonreview.com

The 2015 survey appeared in *The Best 379 Colleges: 2015 Edition* (Penguin Random House, August 2014) and on www.princetonreview.com where respondents completed the survey from August 2014 through early March 2015.

Findings are based on responses from 12,062 people: 80% (9,650) were students applying to colleges and 20% (2,412) were parents of college applicants. Respondents came from all 50 states and DC, plus more than 20 countries abroad.

The company awards a \$2,000 college scholarship check to one survey participant chosen at random and it sends a complimentary copy of a Princeton Review book to 25 participants chosen at random. Winners of books in 2015 can choose either *Colleges That Pay You Back*, *If the U Fits*, or *Paying for College Without Going Broke*.

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2015 Survey Questions / Findings

In this report, the percent of respondents overall (students plus parents) choosing an answer is shown to the left of each answer choice. To the right of each answer choice, the percent of students and the percent of parents choosing that answer are shown in parentheses.

The pluralities (answer choices selected by the highest percent of respondents) or the majorities (answer choices selected by 51 percent or more of respondents) are underlined.

The first question, "What would be your 'dream' college...?" was fill-in-the-blank. The remaining questions were all multiple-choice. Some questions have been asked annually or for several past years.

1) What would be your "dream" college? What college would you most like to attend (or see your child attend) if chance of being accepted or cost were not an issue?"

For this fill-in-the-blank question, respondents wrote in the names of more than 700 colleges, universities and other post-secondary institutions as their "dream college." Some schools were named by more than 500 respondents: Others were named by only a few.

The colleges most named by students as their "dream college" were:

1/ Stanford Univ., 2/ Harvard College, 3/ New York Univ., 4/ Columbia Univ.,
5 / Univ. of California, Los Angeles, 6/ Yale Univ., 7/ Massachusetts Institute of Technology,
8/ Princeton Univ., 9/ Cornell Univ., 10/ Univ. of Pennsylvania.

The colleges most named by parents as their "dream college" for their child were:

1/ Stanford Univ., 2/ Harvard College, 3/ Princeton Univ., 4/ Yale Univ., 5/ Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 6/ New York Univ., 7/ Columbia Univ., 8/ Univ. of Michigan--Ann Arbor,
9/ Univ. of Notre Dame, 10/ Univ of California, Los Angeles.

2) How many colleges will you (your child) apply to?

The plurality (43%) of respondents said they/their child would apply to 5 to 8 colleges (down 5% from 2014). Twenty-five percent said they/their child would apply to 9 or more colleges (up 4% from 2014).

32% One to 4 (33% Students, 30% Parents)

43% Five to 8 (41% Students, 47% Parents)

19% Nine to 12 (19% Students, 19% Parents)

06% Thirteen or more (07% Students, 04% Parents)

Combined: 25% applying to 9 or more.

3) What is / will be the toughest part of your (your child's) college application experience?

The plurality (34%) of respondents chose the answer, "Taking the SAT, ACT or AP exams" (down 1% from the plurality of 35% so answering in 2014). However, nearly as many respondents (33%) chose the answer, "Completing applications for admission and financial aid" (and that was the answer parents most chose).

14% Researching colleges: choosing schools to apply to (13% Students, 20% Parents)

34% Taking SAT, ACT, or AP exams (35% Students, 28% Parents)

33% Completing applications for admission and financial aid (32% Students 35% Parents)

19% Waiting for the decision letters: choosing which college to attend (20% Students, 17% Parents)

4) Which college admission exam do you wish you (your child) could take if all of the following options were available? (Note the new redesigned SAT won't be offered until spring of 2016, but imagine all three tests were current options as you make your answer choices. For more information about the current and the new redesigned SAT, go to www.princetonreview.com/satchanges)

While the plurality (39%) chose the ACT, 37% would take the current SAT. Only 24% would prefer the new SAT. Seventy-six percent would prefer either of the current tests (ACT or SAT) to the new SAT.

39% The ACT (39% Students, 38% Parents)

37% The SAT (38% Students, 32% Parents)

Combined 76% would prefer the ACT or SAT

24% The new redesigned SAT (23% Students, 30% Parents)

5) What do you estimate your (or your child's) college degree will cost, including four years of tuition, room & board, fees, books and other expenses?

Nearly 9 out of 10 respondents (87%) estimated their college cost to be more than \$50,000 and within that cohort 42% estimated it to more than \$100,000. Parents' estimates of college costs were

higher than students': 82% of parents estimated their costs as more than \$75,000 while 65% of students had this estimate.

42% More than \$100,000 (39% Students, 58% Parents)

26% \$75,000 to \$100,000 (26% Students, 24% Parents)

19% \$50,000 to 75,000 (20% Students, 12% Parents)

Combined: 87% said More than \$50,000

10% \$25,000 to \$50,000 (12% Students, 05% Parents)

03% Less than \$25,000 (03% Students, 01% Parents)

6) How necessary will financial aid (education loans, scholarships or grants) be to pay for your (your child's) college education?

Ninety percent of respondents said financial aid would be "extremely" or "very" necessary (up 1% from 2014). Within that cohort, 66% said "extremely." Eight years ago (2007), the first year this question was asked on the survey, 78% of respondents said financial aid would be "extremely," or "very" necessary, with 51% saying "extremely."

66% Extremely (66% Students, 67% Parents)

24% Very (24% Students, 21% Parents)

Combined 90% said Extremely or Very Necessary

09% Somewhat (09% Students, 11% Parents)

01% Not at all (01% Students, 01% Parents)

7) What's your biggest concern about applying to or attending college?

The plurality (39%) said "Level of debt...to pay for the degree" was their biggest concern – up 4% from the 35% that chose this answer in 2014. This was also the biggest concern among the plurality in 2013. For the six years prior (2007 to 2012), the biggest concern among the plurality (34%) was "Will get into their first choice college but won't have sufficient funds/aid to attend it." In 2006, the biggest concern among the plurality (34%) was "Won't get into first-choice college."

20% Won't get into first-choice college (21% Students, 18% Parents)

35% Will get into first-choice college, but won't be able to attend due to high cost and/or insufficient financial aid (34% Students, 37% Parents)

39% Level of debt I (my child) will take on to pay for the degree (39% Students, 39% Parents)

06% Will attend a college I (my child) may not be happy about (06% Students, 06% Parents)

8) How would you gauge your stress level about the college application process?

Stress levels have increased annually among respondents. This year, 98% reported stress, and seven out of 10 (73%) gauged their stress levels as "very high" or "high"-- up 4% since 2013. More students (75%) than parents (67%) reported high stress levels. In 2003, when The Princeton Review first conducted this survey, only 56% of respondents reported "very high" or "high" levels of stress.

29% Very High (30% Students, 24% Parents)

44% High (45% Students, 43% Parents)

Combined 73% Very High or High_ (up 14% from 2003)

25% Average (23% Students, 31% Parents)

02% Low (02% Students, 02% Parents)

00% Very Low (00% Students, 00% Parents)

9) Ideally, how far from home would you like the college you (your child) attend(s) to be?

Parents want their children to attend college closer to home. The majority (52%) of parents said they would like their child to attend a college *less than 250* miles from home. The majority (63%) of students said they would like to attend a college *more than 250* from home. Among that student cohort, 34% would prefer a college 500+ miles from home and 14% wish they could attend a college 1,000+ miles from home.

40% Less than 250 miles (37% Students, 52% Parents)
29% 250 to 500 miles (29% Students, 29% Parents)
18% 500 to 1,000 miles (20% Students, 11% Parents)
13% More than 1,000 miles (14% Students, 08% Parents)

10) When it comes to choosing which college you (or your child) will attend, which of the following do you think it is most likely to be?

The plurality (42%) would choose the college that's the "best overall fit." Nearly as many (40%) said they'd pick the college "best for their career interests." Only about 1 of 10 respondents (09%) said they'd choose the college with the "best academic reputation" or "most affordable" college.

09% College with best academic reputation (10% Students, 07% Parents)
09% College that will be the most affordable (09% Students, 09% Parents)
40% College with best program for my (my child's) career interests (41% Students, 36% Parents)
42% College that will be the best overall fit (40% Students, 48% Parents)

11) If you (your child) had a way to compare colleges based on their reputation with regard to specific majors or programs (i.e. which schools had excellent departments for "x"), how much would this contribute to your (your child's) decision to apply to or attend a school?

A solid majority (99%) of respondents said having information about colleges' reputations with regard to majors/departments would contribute "strongly," "very much," or "somewhat" to their application/acceptance decisions with 82% of that cohort saying "strongly" or "very much."

35% Strongly (34% Students, 38% Parents)
47% Very Much (47% Students, 47% Parents)
17% Somewhat (18% Students, 14% Parents)
Combined 99% Somewhat, Very Much or Strongly
01% Not Much (01% Students, 01% Parents)
00% Not at All (00% Students, 00% Parents)

12) If you (your child) had a way to compare colleges based on their commitment to environmental issues (from academic offerings to practices concerning energy use, recycling, etc.), how much would this contribute to your (your child's) decision to apply to or attend a school?

A majority (60%) of respondents said having information about colleges' commitment to environmental issues would contribute "strongly," "very much," or "somewhat" to their application/attendance decisions.

06% Strongly (06% Students, 05% Parents)
14% Very Much (14% Students, 14% Parents)
40% Somewhat (41% Students, 39% Parents)
Combined 60% Somewhat, Very Much or Strongly
30% Not Much (29% Students, 31% Parents)

10% Not at All (10% Students, 11% Parents)

Note: Princeton Review resources for parents and students on this subject include: Green Rating scores (from 60 to 99) that the company annually tallies for more than 860 colleges. The scores appear in school profiles at www.princetonreview.com and in various Princeton Review books. The company also publishes a free downloadable book, *The Princeton Review Guide to Green Colleges* annually in April at <http://www.princetonreview.com/green-guide>

13) What will be the biggest benefit of your (your child) attending college and earning a college diploma?

The plurality (45%) view the main benefit of a college degree as "a potentially better job and higher income" (down 6% from the plurality of 51% that chose this answer in 2014). Thirty-one percent consider "exposure to new ideas" and 24% see "education" as the primary benefit.

24% The education (24% Students, 28% Parents)

31% The exposure to new ideas (32% Students, 24% Parents)

Combined 55% chose answers related to education and learning

45% The potentially better job and higher income (44% students, 48% Parents)

14) On the whole, do you believe college will be "worth it" for you/your child?

Respondents almost unanimously view college as worth their investment.

99% Yes (99% Parents, 99% Students).

01% No (01% Parents, 01% Students).

15) (Optional) What advice would you give to college applicants or parents of applicants going through this experience next year

On this open-ended question, "Start early" has been the advice most given by students and parents every year. About 50% of respondents say this. See samplers of students' and of parents' advice on the "College Hopes & Worries Survey" area of Princeton Review site at www.princetonreview.com/college-hopes-worries

*Survey respondents – year over year:

2014-15 / 12,062 people: 9,650 students and 2,412 parents

2013-14 / 14,150 people: 10,116 students and 4,034 parents

2012-13 / 14,125 people: 9,955 students and 4,170 parents

2011-12 / 10,650 people: 7,455 students and 3,195 parents

2010-11 / 12,185 people: 8,219 students and 3,966 parents

2009-10 / 12,174 people: 9,132 students and 3,042 parents

2008-09 / 15,722 people: 12,715 students and 3,007 parents

2007-08 / 10,388 people: 8,776 students and 1,612 parents

2006-07 / 5,854 people: 4,594 students and 1,260 parents

2005-06 / 4,902 people: 3,890 students and 1,012 parents

2004-05 / 3,930 people: 2,885 students and 1,045 parents

2003-04 / 3,339 people: 3,036 students and 303 parents

2002-03 / 1,003 people: 901 students and 102 parents