

Admissions in the 21st Century

A Declaration of Values to Guide a Profession

This Declaration is part of the Task Force on Admissions in the 21st Century report entitled: *Preserving the Dream: An Open Letter to the Professionals in Admissions, Financial Aid and Counseling* which can be read in its entirety on www.collegeboard.com/admissionsinthe21stcentury

Preamble:

A new definition of academic excellence is needed in the United States. It should be more inclusive, more focused on student needs, and more dedicated to developing talent instead of selecting for talent in the admissions process while taking credit for the quality of the students who enroll. To that end, we offer ten principles to guide admissions, financial aid, and school counseling professionals. *We believe that:*

I. Education is essential in this new century. Unlike the 20th century, in this new world a college-educated citizenry is vital to the well being of the United States. A college education (two- or four-year) should be within the reach of everyone. To meet this goal, educators need to improve both high school and college graduation rates and recognize that unequal educational opportunities for some students require unusual responses from us all.

II. Institutional diversity is one of our greatest assets. The strength of American higher education lies in its diversity: All sectors of higher education have important roles to play in responding to the nation's educational challenges. The diversity of our system and the many missions pursued by some 4,000 accredited, non-profit, two- and four-year colleges and universities are essential to this diverse nation.

III. Education is a process, not a product. The profession (made up of admissions and financial aid officers and school counselors) understands education to be a process, not a product, and students to be learners, not clients or customers. Competition and commercialism in our environment should not deter us from our educational goals.

IV. The school-to-college transition should be seen as a learning opportunity. At its best, admission is about "fit" between student and institution. The profession encourages students and parents to see college admission as part of an educational learning process, one that encourages student exploration, autonomy, responsibility and maturity.

V. Student preparation must be improved. We believe that schools and colleges and universities should collaborate to make a college-preparatory curriculum the "default" curriculum for every student, beginning in eighth grade, with planning starting in middle school. Achieve's "American Diploma Project," the Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate and the College Board Standards for College Success are all good places to start building rigorous curricula that prepare all students for college enrollment and success.

VI. School-University Partnerships are essential and should be expanded and strengthened. The profession encourages school-university partnerships to improve academic preparation, foster student aspiration, and provide early awareness programs for all students – especially first-generation college students and their families.

VII. Professional norms must govern student admission. The profession insists that colleges and universities should commit to 1) providing concise information about their programs and requirements; 2) presenting themselves clearly, forthrightly and accurately; 3) selecting students using valid and equitable methods; and 4) using test results in accordance with professional norms and expectations (see the College Board statement on responsible use of admissions examinations).

VIII. Financial aid processes should be simplified and focused. The profession believes that financial aid processes (at the institutional, state and federal levels) need to be simplified and made more coherent and predictable, with the goal of minimizing confusion on the part of students and families. The profession also believes that merit aid, particularly when financed publicly by regressive taxes or lotteries, has to clear a very high bar before it can justify itself as “student aid.”

IX. Access to success, not simply access, must be the goal. As the College Board’s College Keys Compact emphasized, admission is a hollow promise without financial aid and student and academic support. The profession believes that all institutions and faculty must be dedicated to the success of students once admitted. The institutional aspiration should be that all students succeed in attaining the goals they set for themselves on enrollment, e.g., a training certificate, successful transfer to a four-year institution, or an associate’s or bachelor’s degree.

X. College rankings must be revisited. The profession urges the College Board to convene a panel of experts (including statisticians, sociologists, and students of organizational behavior) to explore the validity, reliability and value of existing rankings and suggest, if necessary, new ways of providing better information to students and the general public. What the profession needs are accurate and educationally defensible assessments that focus on outcomes and help students and the public understand institutional value and functioning, without minimizing the importance of diversity or distorting institutional purposes.