



2012 College Hopes & Worries Survey Report

The Princeton Review, one of the nation's best known education services companies, has conducted this survey of high school students applying to colleges and parents of college applicants since the 2002-03 school year. Respondents who complete the survey are readers of the company's annual "Best Colleges" book and users of its site, www.princetonreview.com.

The 2012 survey appeared in The Princeton Review book, *The Best 376 Colleges: 2012 Edition* (Random House, August 2011) in a paper version readers mailed or faxed to the company. The survey also ran on www.princetonreview.com where users completed the survey online during the 2011-12 school year through March 9, 2012.

Findings for the 2012 survey are based on responses from 10,650 people: 70% (7,455) were high school students applying to colleges and 30% (3,195) were parents of college applicants. Respondents came from all 50 states, DC, the Virgin Islands, Guam, and Puerto Rico and more than 20 countries abroad.

The company awards a \$1,000 college scholarship check to one survey participant chosen at random, and it sends 25 participants also chosen at random one of the following Princeton Review books (their choice): *ACT or SAT?: Choosing the Right Exam For You*, *Paying for College Without Going Broke*, or *The Portable Guidance Counselor*.

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2012 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. The percent of students and the percent of parents choosing that answer is shown to the right and 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 in past years. (For a report with archival data on past years' surveys and findings, contact Jeanne Krier at 212-539-1350.)

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?"

In their answers to this fill-in-the-blank question, respondents wrote in the names of more than 500 colleges, universities and other post-secondary institutions as their "dream college" (with some schools named by only one respondent and others named by more than 500 respondents as their "dream college").

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

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

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

1/ Stanford Univ., 2/ Princeton Univ., 3/ Harvard College,
4/ Univ. of Notre Dame, 5/ Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 6/ Univ. of Pennsylvania, 7/
Cornell Univ., 8/ Duke Univ., 9/ Yale Univ., 10/ Univ. of Southern California

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

The plurality (49%) of respondents overall said they/their child will apply to 5 to 8 colleges while 21% said they/their child will apply to 9 or more colleges.

30% One to 4 (29% Students, 30% Parents)
49% Five to 8 (48% Students, 51% Parents)
17% Nine to 12 (18% Students, 16% Parents)
04% Thirteen or more (05% Students, 03% Parents)
Combined: 21% applying to 9 or more.

3) What has been, or do you think will be the toughest part of your (your child's) college application experience?

The plurality of students (35%) chose the answer, "taking admission and placement tests" as the toughest part of their application experience while the plurality of parents (30%) chose the answer, "completing applications for admission and financial aid."

22% Researching colleges: choosing schools to apply to (20% Students, 25% Parents)
32% Taking the SAT, ACT, or APs (35% Students, 29% Parents)
27% Completing applications for admission and financial aid (25% Students 30% Parents)
19% Waiting for the decision letters: choosing which college to attend (20% Students, 16% Parents)

4) 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?

87% of respondents overall – nearly 9 out of 10 – estimated their college cost to be more than \$50,000 (and within that cohort 45% estimated it at more than \$100,000. Parents' estimates of

college costs were higher than students': 81% of parents estimated their college costs will be more than \$75,000 while 65% of students had this estimate.

- 45% More than \$100,000 (40% Students, 57% Parents)
- 25% \$75,000 to \$100,000 (25% Students, 24% Parents)
- 17% \$50,000 to 75,000 (19% Students, 12% Parents)
 Combined: 87% said More than \$50,000
- 10% \$25,000 to \$50,000 (13% Students, 05% Parents)
- 03% Less than \$25,000 (03% Students, 02% Parents)

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

Among respondents overall, 86% said financial aid would be "extremely" or "very" necessary with 61% of that cohort saying "extremely." Five years ago, in 2007, the first year this question was asked on the survey, 78% of respondents overall said financial aid would be "extremely," or very" necessary, with 51% saying "extremely."

- 61% Extremely (61% Students, 61% Parents)
- 25% Very (26% Students, 22% Parents)
 86% said Extremely or Very necessary
- 12% Somewhat (12% Students, 15% Parents)
- 02% Not at all (01% Students, 02% Parents)

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

Among respondents overall, the plurality (34%)'s biggest concern was that they/their child "will get into their first choice college but won't have sufficient funds/aid to attend it." This has been the biggest concern among the plurality of respondents since 2007. In 2006, the biggest concern among the plurality (also 34%) of respondents was that they/their child "won't get into first-choice college."

- 29% Won't get into first-choice college (31% Students, 24% Parents)
- 34% Will get into first-choice college, but won't have sufficient funds/financial aid to attend (33% Students, 37% Parents)
- 27% Will get into a college I (my child) want(s) to attend, but will take on major loan debt to afford it (26% Students, 28% Parents)
- 10% Will attend a college I (my child) may not be happy about (10% Students, 11% Parents)

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

Among respondents overall, 71% reported "very high" or "high" levels of stress. That's up 2% from 2011 and up 15% from 2003, 56%, when The Princeton Review first conducted this survey. More students (73%) than parents (66%) reported high stress levels.

- 26% Very High (26% Students, 24% Parents)
- 45% High (47% Students, 42% Parents)
 Combined 71% Very High or High (up 15% from 2003)
- 27% Average (25% Students, 32% Parents)
- 02% Low (02% Students, 02% Parents)
- 00% Very Low (0% Students, 0% Parents)

8) 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 (51%) of parents said they would ideally like their child to attend a college less than 250 miles from home, while 67% of students said they would ideally like to attend a college more than 250 from home. Among that student cohort, 37% would prefer a college 500+ miles away and 17% wish they could attend a college further than 1,000 miles from home.

38% Less than 250 miles (33% Students, 51% Parents)

29% 250 to 500 miles (30% Students, 28% Parents)

18% 500 to 1,000 miles (20% Students, 13% Parents)

15% More than 1,000 miles (17% Students, 08% Parents)

9) 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?

While the plurality (45%) of respondents overall said they/their child would likely attend the college that will be the "best overall fit," only about 1 of 9 respondents (11%) indicated they'd choose the college with the best academic reputation.

11% College with best academic reputation (12% Students, 09% Parents)

06% College that will be the most affordable (06% Students, 06% Parents)

38% College with best program for my (my child's) career interests (39% Students, 35% Parents)

45% College that will be the best overall fit (43% Students, 50% Parents)

10) 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 solid majority (65%) of respondents overall said having such information would contribute "strongly," "very much," or "somewhat" to their decisions while 35% of them indicated said it would contribute "not much" or "not at all." Students have consistently placed higher value on information about colleges' commitments to the environment than parents have.

07% Strongly (08% Students, 05% Parents)

17% Very Much (19% Students, 12% Parents)

41% Somewhat (41% Students, 41 % Parents)

Combined 65% Somewhat, Very Much or Strongly

26% Not Much (24% Students, 30% Parents)

09% Not at All (08% Students, 12% 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 and reports for 700+ colleges which appear in school profiles in various Princeton Review books and on its website; and a free downloadable guide, *The Princeton Review Guide to Green Colleges* which the Company teams up with the United States Green Building Council to make available to students annually

<http://www.princetonreview.com/green-guide.aspx>.

11) Has the state of the economy this year affected your (your child's) decisions about applying to or attending college?

Among respondents overall, 75% said the state of the economy has affected their decisions about college. That's up 3% from last year. More students (77%) reported this than parents (70%).

- 15% Yes: Extremely (15% Students, 14% Parents)
- 23% Yes: Very Much (24% Students, 21% Parents)
- 37% Yes: Somewhat (38% Students, 35% Parents)
- Combined 75% Yes
- 25% No: Not at all. (23% Students, 30% Parents)

12) If your answer to the previous question was one of the "Yes" choices, how would you describe the major way the economy has affected your (your child's) college application decisions?

The majority (52%) of respondents overall said they are applying to more "financial aid safety" schools." That's an 18% increase over the 34% of respondents that selected this answer in 2009.

- 24% Am applying to colleges with "lower sticker prices" (22% Students, 29% Parents)
- 52% Am applying to more "financial aid safety" schools (54% Students, 47% Parents)
- 24% Am applying to colleges closer to home to save on travel (24% Students, 24% Parents)

13) If you (your child) had a way to compare colleges based on their commitment to making their school affordable (from their generosity with scholarships to their financial aid), how much would this contribute to your (your child's) decision to apply to or attend a school?

Ninety-six percent of respondents overall said information about a college's commitment to affordability would contribute favorably to their decisions to apply to or attend a school.

- 42% Strongly (41% Students, 45% Parents)
- 37% Very Much (38% Students, 34% Parents)
- 17% Somewhat (17% Students, 17% Parents)
- Combined 96% Somewhat, Very Much or Strongly
- 03% Not Much (03% Students, 03% Parents)
- 01% Not at All (01% Students, 01% Parents)

Note: Princeton Review resources for parents and students on this subject include: "Financial Aid Ratings" (scores from 60 to 99) that the Company annually tallies and reports for 600+ colleges which appear in school profiles in various Princeton Review books and on its website; an annual list of "Best Value Colleges" that the Company teams up with USA TODAY to report; a companion guidebook - *The Best Value Colleges: The 150 Best-Buy Schools and What It Takes to Get In* (www.princetonreview.com/best-value-colleges.aspx); and an annual list of the top 20 ranking colleges for "Great Financial Aid" which appears in its *The Best 376 Colleges* guidebook and on www.princetonreview.com/college-rankings.aspx.

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

Among respondents overall, 58% saw the main benefit of a college degree as a potentially better job, higher income and career training: 42% saw the education and learning as the key benefit.

19% The education (20% Students, 18% Parents)

23% The exposure to new ideas (24% Students, 20% Parents)

Combined 42% chose answers related to education and learning

58% The potentially better job, higher income and career preparation (56% students, 62% Parents)

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

"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.aspx
