

## Princeton Review 2009 "College Hopes & Worries Survey" Findings

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The Princeton Review 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. The 2009 survey appeared in The Princeton Review book, Best 368 Colleges: 2009 Edn. (Random House, July 2008) in a paper version readers could mail or fax to the company. It also ran on [www.PrincetonReview.com](http://www.PrincetonReview.com) where users could complete the survey online from late January to mid-March 2009.

Findings for the 2008-09 survey are based on responses from 15,722 people: 12,715 (81%) high school students applying to colleges and 3,007 (19%) parents of college applicants. Respondents came from all 50 states, DC, the Virgin Islands, Guam and Puerto Rico. The company awarded a \$1,000 college scholarship to one survey participant chosen at random and it sent a copy of one of the following Princeton Review books -- *Paying for College Without Going Broke*, *The Guide to College Majors*, or *Parents' Guide to College Life* -- to 25 participants chosen at random.

### 2009 Survey Questions / Findings

The first question, What would be your "dream" college?, was fill-in-the-blank. The remaining questions were all multiple-choice. Some questions are repeated year-to-year (and if so, past year's results are shown below).

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

The pluralities (choices receiving the highest percentage of responses) are underlined.

#### **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, of more than 700 colleges, universities and other post-secondary institutions that respondents in varying numbers (as few as one or as many as more than 700 respondents) named as their "dream schools,"

The 10 colleges students most named were:

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

The 10 colleges parents most named were:

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

#### **2) How would you gauge your stress level about the college application process?**

Students indicated slightly higher stress levels than parents did, and stress levels were the highest since we began the survey in 2003. 66% of respondents overall reported "Very High" or "High" levels of stress, up 5% from 2008.

22% Very High (23% Students, 18% Parents)

44% High (45% Students, 42% Parents)

Combined 66% Very High or High (up 5% from last year)

30% Average (29% Students, 36% Parents)

03% Low (02% Students, 03% Parents)

01% Very Low (01% Students, 01% Parents)

### **3) How would you rate the amount of information and support you've received from your (your child's) school guidance counselor to help you through your (your child's) college applications for admission and financial aid?**

Students and parents generally gave their guidance counselors high marks.

42% of respondents overall rated them "Outstanding" or "Very Good" (up 11% from last year) though 26% rated them "Fair" or "Poor."

11% Outstanding (11% Students, 11% Parents)

31% Very Good (31% Students, 28% Parents)

Combined 42 % Outstanding or Very Good (up 11% from last year)

32% Adequate (32% Students, 31% Parents)

16% Fair (16% Students, 18% Parents)

10% Poor (10% Students, 12% Parents)

Combined 26% Fair or Poor

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

The plurality (34%) of students chose the answer "taking admission and placement tests" as the toughest part of their application experience while the plurality of parents (33%) chose "completing applications" as the toughest part of their children's college application experience.

19% Research: Getting info on colleges / winnowing a list of schools (19% Students, 23% Parents)

33% Admission and placement tests: taking the SAT, ACT, or APs (34% Students, 26% Parents)

25% Applications: meeting requirements, completing forms, getting everything in on time (24% Students, 33% Parents)

23% Anxious wait for acceptance/aid letters and deciding college to attend (23% Students, 18% Parents)

### **5) What's your biggest concern about applying to or attending college?**

The plurality (37%) of students and parents alike was most concerned that they (or their child) will get into their first choice college but won't have sufficient funds/aid to attend it.

25% Won't get into first-choice college (26% Students, 19% Parents)

37% Will get into first-choice college, but won't have sufficient funds/financial aid to attend  
(37% Students, 37% Parents)

29% Will get into a college I (my child) want(s) to attend, but will take on major loan debt to do so  
(28% Students, 35% Parents)

09% Will attend a college I (my child) may regret (09% Students, 09% Parents)

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

The majority of parents (53%) parents and the plurality of students (35%) would like their ideal college to be 0 to 250 miles from home. However, 65% of students selected answer choices in ranges of 250 miles or more.

39% 0 to 250 miles (35% Students, 53% Parents)

30% 250 to 500 miles (31% Students, 30% Parents)

18% 500 to 1,000 miles (19% Students, 11% Parents)

13% 1,000 miles or more (15% Students, 06% Parents)

**7) 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?**

Overall, 66% of respondents said they would favor having such information (up 3% from in 2008), and 24% said it would "Strongly" or "Very Much" contribute to their assessment of a school. Students placed higher value on this information than parents did.

06% Strongly (07% Students, 05% Parents)

18% Very Much (19% Students, 14% Parents)

Combined 24% Very Much or Strongly

42% Somewhat (42% Students, 40% Parents)

Combined 66% Somewhat, Very Much or Strongly (Up 03% from last year)

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

08% Not at All (08% Students, 11% Parents)

Combined 34% Not Much or Not at All

**8) Has the downturn in the economy affected your (your child's) decisions about applying to or attending college?**

67% of respondents overall say the economic downturn has affected their decisions, with 31% saying it has affected them "Very Much" or "Extremely." Students tended to be slightly more affected by it than parents.

11% Yes: Extremely (11% Students, 11% Parents)

20% Yes: Very Much (20% Students, 18% Parents)

36% Yes: Somewhat (37% Students, 34% Parents)

Combined 67% Yes

33% No: Not at all. (32% Students, 37% Parents)

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

The plurality (38%) of respondents overall said they are applying to colleges with "lower sticker prices" though among parents, the plurality (36%) said their children were applying to more "financial aid safety schools."

- 38% It has changed the kinds of colleges I'm applying to  
(e.g. applying to colleges with lower sticker prices) (38% Students, 36% Parents)
- 34% It has increased the number of colleges I'm applying to  
(e.g. applying to more "financial aid safety" schools) (33% Students, 38% Parents)
- 28% It has narrowed the geographical range of schools I'm applying to  
(e.g. applying to more schools closer to home to save on travel costs) (29% Students, 26% Parents)

#### **10) How many colleges will you (your child) apply to?**

Almost half (46%) of respondents overall said they (their child) will (or did) apply to 5 to 8 colleges, However, 20% said they (their child) will apply to 9 or more colleges.

- 34% One to 4 (34% Students, 35% Parents)
- 46% Five to 8 (46% Students, 47% Parents)
- 16% Nine to 12 (16% Students, 15% Parents)
- 04% Thirteen or more (04% Students, 03% Parents)
- Combined: 20% applying to 9 or more.

#### **11) 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?**

The majority (56%) of parents estimate their child's college degree to cost more than \$100,000, while the majority (64%) of students selected answer choices in ranges of less than \$100,000.

- 40% More than \$100,000 (36% Students, 56% Parents)
- 28% \$75,000 to \$100,000 (28% Students, 26% Parents)
- Combined: 68% said More than \$75,000 (Down 03% from last year)
- 18% \$50,000 to 75,000 (19% Students, 12% Parents)
- 11% \$25,000 to \$50,000 (13% Students, 05% Parents)
- 03% Up to \$25,000 (04% Students, 01% Parents)
- Combined: 14% said Less than \$50,000

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

Among respondents overall, 85% said financial aid would be "Very" or "Extremely" necessary (with 60% saying "Extremely" necessary. Students tended to be somewhat concerned than parents.

- 60% Extremely (60% Students, 58% Parents)
- 25% Very (26% Students, 23% Parents)
- 85% said Extremely or Very necessary (Up 1% from last year)
- 13% Somewhat (12% Students, 16% Parents)
- 02% Not at all (02% Students, 03% Parents)

#### **13) 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 majority (48%) of respondents overall said they (their child) would likely attend the college that will be the "best overall fit," the percentage choosing this answer has decreased for four consecutive years

while the percentage saying they'd choose the school with the best program for their/their child's career prospects has increased. Only about 1 of 10 respondents, since the survey began, would choose the school with the best academic reputation.

10% College with best academic reputation (11% Students, 07% Parents)

06% College that will be the most affordable (06% Students, 07% Parents)

36% College with best program for my (my child's) career interests (37% Students, 35% Parents)

48% College that will be the best overall fit (46% Students, 51% Parents)

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