

OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

Collaborating to Shift Trends in
Christian Higher Education

naccap.org

Session Presenters:
Dr. Phil Cook &
Dr. Molly Smith





**PRESENTER:
PHIL COOK, PH.D.**

Who Am I

- 32 years in Christian Higher Education
- NACCAP President - 4 years
- Lee University (Cleveland, TN) - 28 years
- Ordained Minister
- Married with 3 adult married children & 1 grandchild
- Los Angeles Dodgers, Pittsburgh Steelers and University of Tennessee Football



**PRESENTER:
MOLLY SMITH, DSL**

Who Am I

- 25 years in Christian Higher Education
- NACCAP Vice President of External Engagement - 3 years
- Worked at 6 NACCAP member schools
- Former NACCAP Board Member
- Married with 1 teenager
- Higher Ed nerd, Soccer Mom, Volunteer at church and school

SESSION AGENDA

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- **Headlines & Trends**
 - **Data**
 - **Funnel Data**
 - **Admissions Benchmarking**
 - **State of the Profession**
 - **Obstacles**
 - **Opportunities**
 - **Recommendations**
 - **Collaboration**

PULSE CHECK



THE HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE



RECENT HEADLINES

- Soaring Tuition is Making College Unaffordable. We Can Fix This by Steve Klinsky U.S. News and World Report
- The Coming Decline in High School Graduate Counts, in 5 Charts by Ben Unglesbee, Higher Ed Dive
- Enrollment Reclaims Top Spot on List of Biggest Risks for Colleges by Susan Greenberg , Inside Higher Ed
- College Enrollment Rebounds, Surpassing Pre-Pandemic Levels, Washington Post
- Religious Colleges That Lean Into Their Identity Make Gains by Sara Weissman, Inside Higher Education
- Scaremongers Take Note: Christian Higher Education Enrollment Recently Grew by 1.4% by Perry Glanzer, Christian Scholar's Review
- The Sky is Not Falling, Revisited: Religious Private Institutional Enrollment is Stronger than State and Secular Private by Perry Glanzer, Christian Scholar's Review

NATIONAL STUDENT CLEARINGHOUSE RESEARCH CENTER

Research Center Finds a
Methodological Error Affecting
Preliminary Fall 2024 Higher
Education Enrollment Reports

October 2024: NSCRC report indicated first-year freshmen enrollment shrank 5% year over year.

January 2025: The center announced that college freshmen rose by approximately 130,000 students (5.5%).

The turnaround attributed to a misclassification of students as dual-enrolled instead of freshmen.

THE CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

TRENDS

- Dual Enrollment
- AI
- Community Colleges offering Bachelor's degrees
- Changing political administration
- College Closures
- International Student Concerns
- Federal Overtime Rules
- Affirmative Action and Legacy Policies
- Enrollment Cliff
- Gainful Employment Rules
- FAFSA
- Turnover at Senior Leader Levels

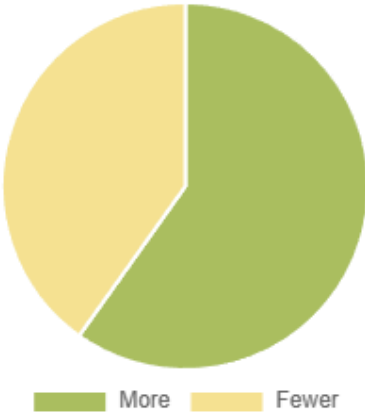


WHAT THE RESEARCH IS TELLING US - FRESHMEN

Dec. 2024 vs. December 2023

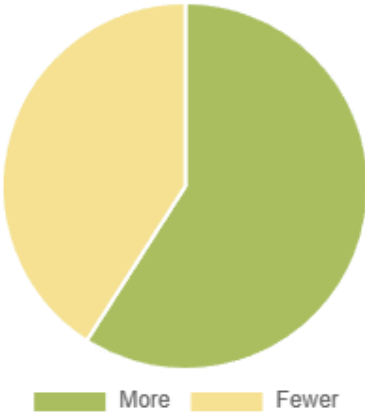
First-Year Student Applications

RESULT	#	% OF TOTAL	RANGE
More	76	59.84%	3 to 2391
Even	0	0.00%	
Fewer	51	40.16%	3 to 6167
No.Comp.	0	0.00%	



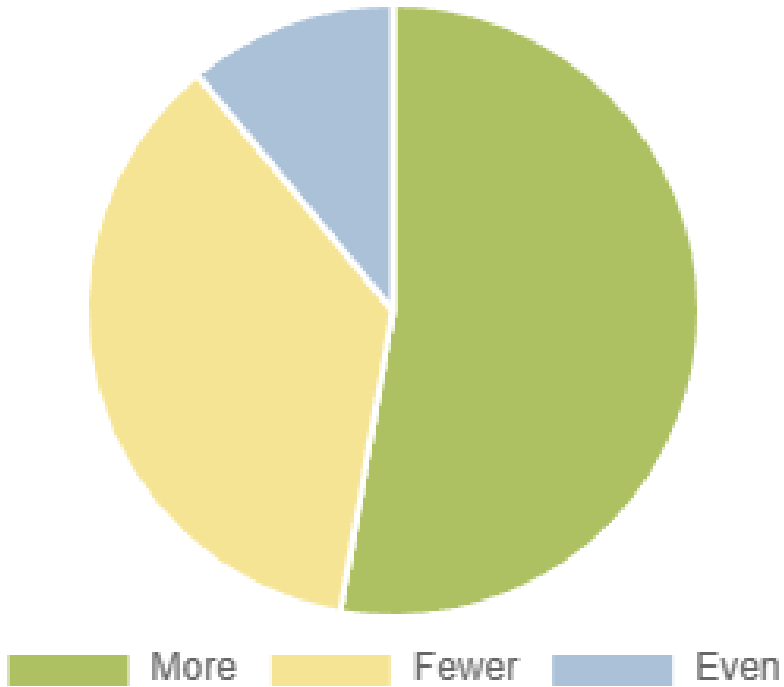
First-Year Student Admits

RESULT	#	% OF TOTAL	RANGE
More	75	59.06%	1 to 1269
Even	0	0.00%	
Fewer	52	40.94%	3 to 4942
No.Comp.	0	0.00%	



First-Year Student Deposits

RESULT	#	% OF TOTAL	RANGE
More	67	52.76%	1 to 226
Even	14	11.02%	
Fewer	46	36.22%	1 to 753
No.Comp.	0	0.00%	

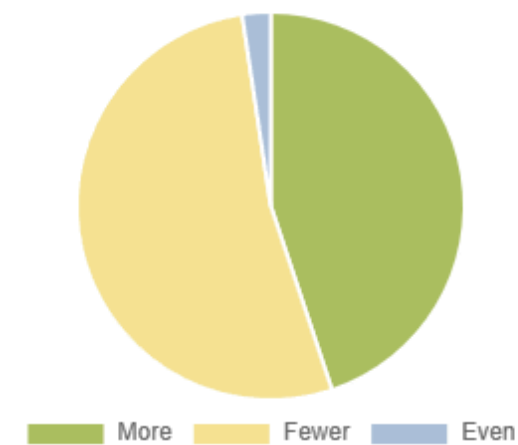


WHAT THE RESEARCH IS TELLING US - TRANSFER

Dec. 2024 vs. December 2023

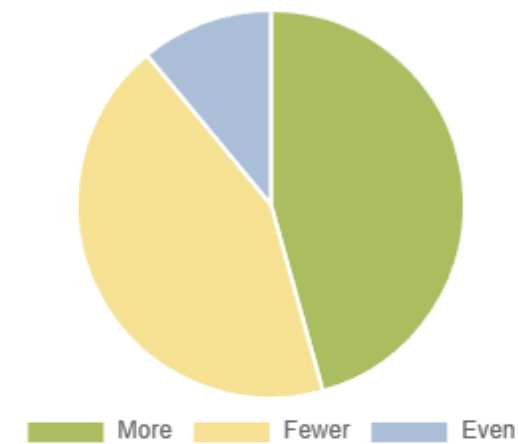
Transfer Student Applications

RESULT	#	% OF TOTAL	RANGE
More	57	44.88%	1 to 187
Even	3	2.36%	
Fewer	67	52.76%	1 to 463
No.Comp.	0	0.00%	



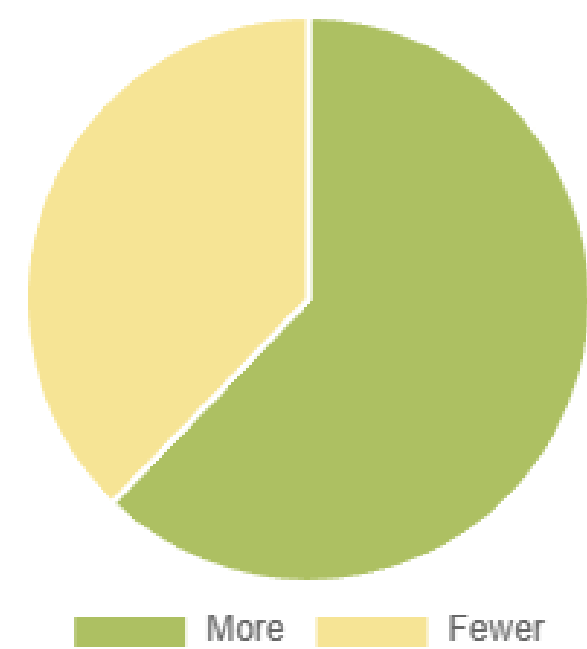
Transfer Student Admits

RESULT	#	% OF TOTAL	RANGE
More	58	45.67%	1 to 88
Even	14	11.02%	
Fewer	55	43.31%	1 to 240
No.Comp.	0	0.00%	



Transfer Student Deposits

RESULT	#	% OF TOTAL	RANGE
More	40	31.50%	1 to 57
Even	40	31.50%	
Fewer	47	37.01%	1 to 181
No.Comp.	0	0.00%	

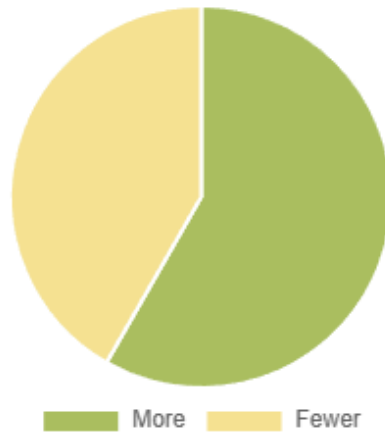


WHAT THE RESEARCH IS TELLING US - TOTAL NEW STUDENTS

Dec. 2024 vs. December 2023

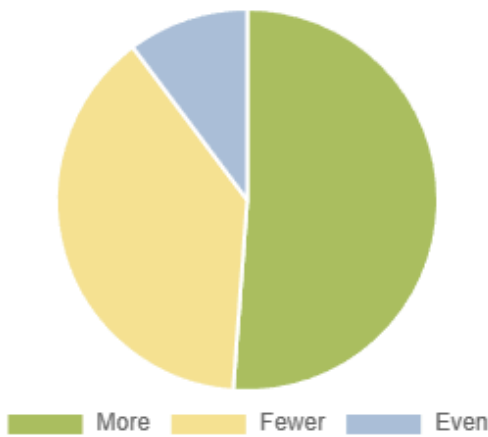
Total New Student Admits

RESULT	#	% OF TOTAL	RANGE
More	74	58.27%	2 to 1244
Even	0	0.00%	
Fewer	53	41.73%	1 to 4923
No.Comp.	0	0.00%	



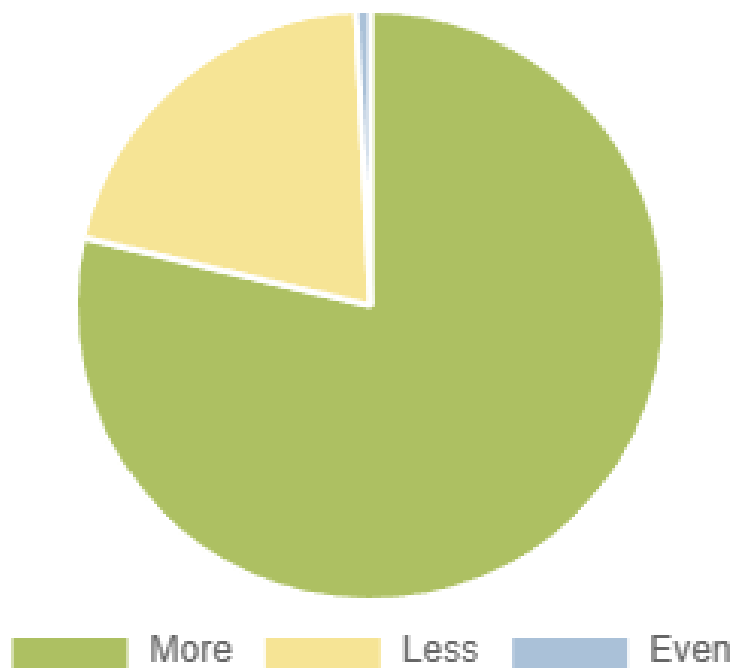
Total New Student Deposits

RESULT	#	% OF TOTAL	RANGE
More	65	51.18%	1 to 283
Even	13	10.24%	
Fewer	49	38.58%	1 to 934
No.Comp.	0	0.00%	



Fall 2025 New Student Enrollment Goal vs. Fall 2024 Actual

RESULT	#	% OF TOTAL	RANGE
Enroll More	100	78.74%	1 to 112
Remain Even	1	0.79%	
Enroll Fewer	26	20.47%	1 to 224
No Goal Listed	0	0.00%	



WHAT ARE WE NOTICING?



- **Applicants - 2025 vs. 2024**
 - 34% down in apps 10 or more
 - 7% flat (+ or - 10 apps)
 - 53% up 10 or more apps
 - 28% up 100 or more apps
- **Admits - 2025 vs. 2024**
 - 32% down in admits 10 or more
 - 12% down in admits 100 or more
 - 13% flat (+ or - 10 admits)
 - 49% up 10 or more admits
 - 19% up 100 or more admits

- **Goals - 2025 vs. 2024**
 - 14% report a lower goal
 - 12% report a stable goal
 - 62% report a goal of 10+ more
 - 13% report a goal of 50+ more

FALL 2024 ENROLLMENT FUNNEL

All Schools

Student Status	First Year	Transfer	Total
Applicants	314,285	41,570	355,855
Admits	209,164	23,824	232,988
Deposits	58,083	13,226	71,309
Enrollments	47,697	10,866	58,563
Yield Rates	First Year	Transfer	Total
%App/Adm	66.6%	57.3%	65.5%
%Adm/Dep	27.8%	55.5%	30.6%
%Adm/Enr	22.8%	45.6%	25.1%

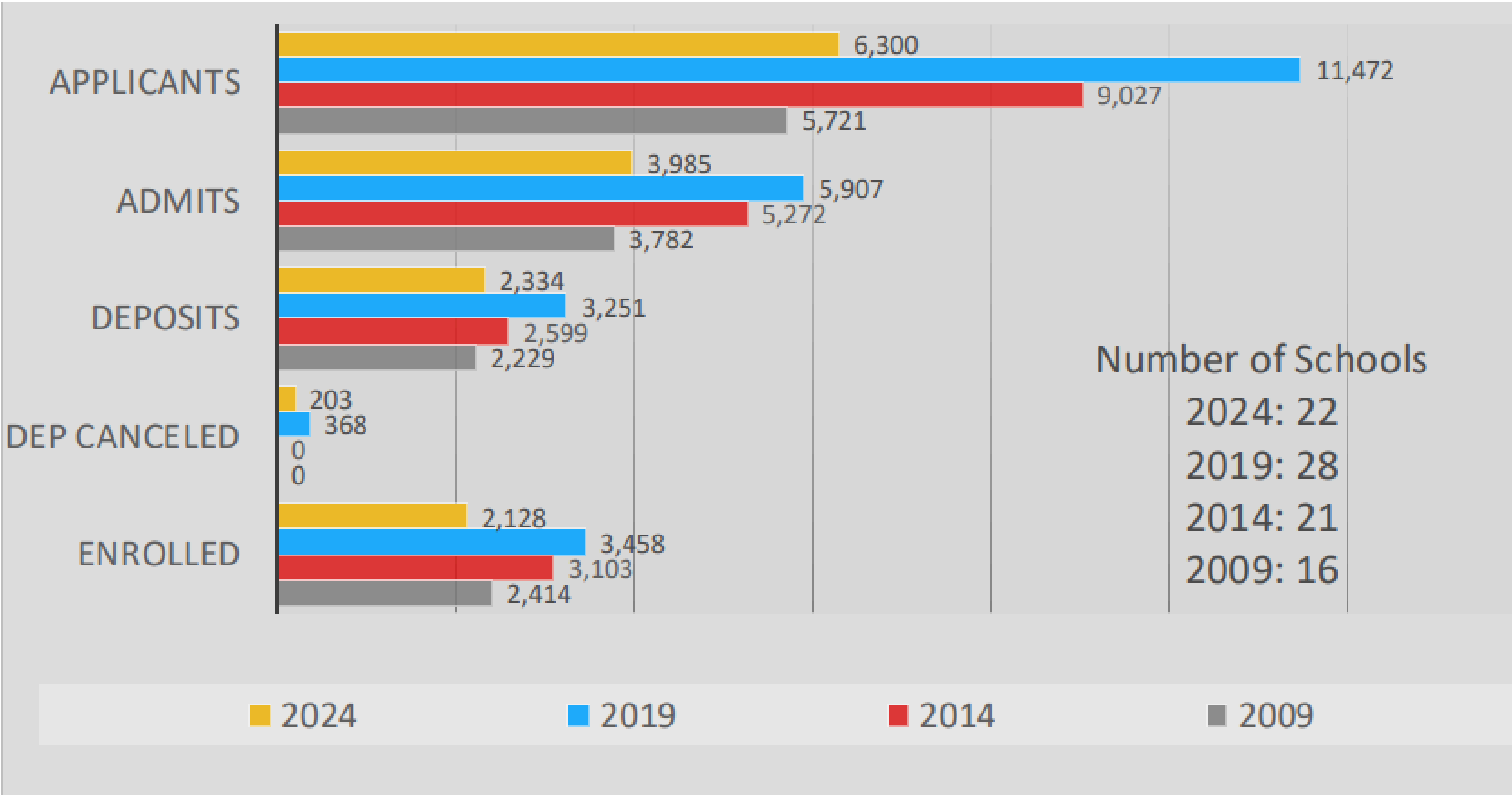
FALL 2024 ENROLLMENT FUNNEL

Bible Colleges

Student Status	2024	2023	Difference	% Change
Applicants	6,300	6,245	55	0.9%
Admits	3,985	3,652	333	9.1%
Deposits	2,334	1,950	384	19.7%
Canceled	203	168	35	20.8%
Enrollments	2,128	2,004	124	6.2%
Yield Rates	2024	2023	Difference	% Change
%App/Adm	63.3%	58.5%	4.8%	8.2%
%Adm/Dep	58.6%	53.4%	5.2%	9.7%
%Dep/Canc	8.7%	8.6%	0.1%	1.0%
%Adm/Enr	53.4%	54.9%	-1.5%	-2.7%

FALL 2024 ENROLLMENT FUNNEL

Historical Data - Bible Colleges



COST TO RECRUIT

Admissions
Benchmarking Data

FALL OF	COST TO RECRUIT A STUDENT	INCREASE OVER PREVIOUS YEAR	FALL OF	COST TO RECRUIT A STUDENT	INCREASE OVER PREVIOUS YEAR
2023	\$4,937	4.16%	2007 **	\$2,326	12.37%
2022	\$4,740	21.18%	2006 *	\$2,070	-1.99%
2021	\$3,912	1.53%	2005	\$2,112	-1.45%
2020	\$3,853	7.67%	2004	\$2,143	5.36%
2019	\$3,578	5.52%	2003	\$2,034	-0.54%
2018 ***	\$3,391	8.07%	2002	\$2,045	7.80%
2017	\$3,138	-5.20%	2001	\$1,897	2.54%
2016	\$3,310	3.01%	2000	\$1,850	5.35%
2015	\$3,214	7.15%	1999	\$1,756	4.65%
2014	\$2,999	5.15%	1998	\$1,678	6.07%
2013	\$2,852	-0.53%	1997	\$1,582	1.80%
2012	\$2,867	12.42%	1996	\$1,554	3.88%
2011	\$2,551	0.12%	1995	\$1,496	-0.40%
2010	\$2,547	1.99%	1994	\$1,502	6.22%
2009	\$2,498	1.37%	1993	\$1,414	
2008	\$2,464	5.93%	Total Increase		249.17%

STAFF SIZE

Admissions Benchmarking Data

STAFF SIZE — PROFESSIONAL STAFF FTE						STAFF SIZE — RECRUITING FTE					
Category	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Category	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
All Participants	9.1	8.6	8.2	8.8	9.3	All Participants	6.3	5.8	5.6	5.9	6.2
Canada	7.1	6.6	6.0	5.9	7.3	Canada	5.5	5.1	4.7	4.6	5.6
Great Lakes	9.7	9.5	9.0	10.4	9.5	Great Lakes	6.5	6.0	5.7	6.5	6.1
Midwest	8.3	7.5	7.2	8.0	8.5	Midwest	5.9	5.5	5.2	5.7	5.2
Northeast	9.0	8.8	9.4	8.7	9.8	Northeast	5.7	5.4	6.1	6.3	7.3
Northwest	7.8	8.4	8.1	9.0	8.3	Northwest	4.6	5.2	5.2	5.8	4.8
Southeast	9.1	8.7	7.8	7.6	9.8	Southeast	6.8	6.2	5.5	5.2	6.5
Southwest	12.3	11.5	11.4	13.5	12.3	Southwest	7.9	7.2	7.2	8.8	8.5
Smallest #	4.3	4.5	4.0	3.9	5.0	Smallest #	3.0	3.1	2.8	2.9	3.6
Small #	6.9	6.5	6.8	7.4	7.2	Small #	4.8	4.6	4.6	4.8	4.5
Medium #	8.9	8.7	8.6	9.2	9.9	Medium #	5.8	5.8	5.9	6.6	7.1
Large #	9.4	9.5	10.4	10.7	11.0	Large #	7.1	6.7	7.2	7.2	7.2
Largest #	15.7	16.0	15.6	15.5	16.2	Largest #	10.7	10.2	10.2	10.2	10.4
Bible College	4.3	4.6	4.1	3.7	4.9	Bible College	3.0	3.0	2.9	2.7	3.5
CCCU	10.6	10.1	9.6	10.1	10.0	CCCU	7.2	6.7	6.5	6.8	6.6
Other CLA	8.4	8.1	7.7	9.6	10.5	Other CLA	6.1	5.8	5.3	6.3	6.9

STATE OF THE PROFESSION

What challenges do you face leading the enrollment team at your institution?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Finding good team members	27.12%
▼ Keeping good team members	52.54%
▼ Helping campus colleagues understand and prioritize their role in recruiting students	45.76%
▼ Marketing and awareness gaps (“We’re the best kept secret”)	62.71%
▼ Vendors who oversell and underdeliver	8.47%
▼ The changing nature of the profession	32.20%
▼ Demographic challenges	38.98%
▼ The affordability/value continuum	71.19%

STATE OF THE PROFESSION

What is the biggest challenge to Christian colleges meeting enrollment goals?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Culture wars and the increasing polarization of our culture	32.20%
▼ Gen Z characteristics with regard to faith	25.42%
▼ Lack of support from pastors/youth pastors to encourage students to consider Christian colleges	20.34%
▼ Perception of the value of a Christian college relative to other options	67.80%
▼ The challenge of finding, supporting, and keeping good enrollment leaders given the pressure of the role	16.95%
▼ I'm not convinced our challenges are all that different from the rest of higher education	16.95%
▼ Increased competition among other Christian institutions	18.64%
▼ Increased competition from state-funded institutions	37.29%
▼ Affordability	72.88%

A group of five people are climbing a tall, dark wooden obstacle wall. Two men are at the top, one helping the other. A woman is reaching up from the middle. Another woman is climbing from the bottom. A man is at the very bottom, looking up. The sky is cloudy.

OBSTACLES

- **Staffing Issues**
 - Hiring
 - Turnover
- **Issues outside of our control**
 - FAFSA
 - Campus Problems
- **Change in strategy** (e.g. no longer buying names)

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a large, ornate golden key. The hand is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the frame. The background is a blurred blue suit jacket. The right side of the image is a solid dark blue rectangle containing white text.

OPPORTUNITIES

- **Increasing efficiency**
 - Automating systems
 - Building processes
- **New institutional Initiatives**
 - Scholarship Programs
 - New in-demand academic degree
 - New athletic offerings
- **New (well-known)hire**
 - Faculty
 - Coach

CURRENT BEST PRACTICES



- Let Data Drive Decisions

- Personalize Communication

- Double down on your Christian Distinctive

- Consider price and discount rate

- Know the Generation you are Recruiting

- Be Strategic about “non-traditional” students

- Evaluate Campus Visits

- Leverage technology for enrollment: CRM, Engaging website

- Remove Unnecessary Barriers: Eliminate references, accept self-reported gpa

- Staff Professional Development & Advancement Structure

- Optimize Church Relations

- Diversify lead generation services

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Admissions Benchmarking Data

- **Technology and streamlining processes and systems**
 - Automate Processes
 - Utilize a good CRM with people who know how to use it
- **Organizational capabilities**
 - Hire the right people
 - Train them well
 - Continue to invest
- **Leverage Influencers**
 - Empower and equip your campus to be good partners to admissions
- **Analytics and Metrics**
 - Evaluate your return on your investments
 - Encourage staff to review reports and find solutions
 - Use reports to identify trends in your own funnel and make adjustments
 - Gather information from outside your institution to help identify opportunities

LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER



- “Advancing Christian Education” can (and should be done together).
- Our true competitors are often not other Bible schools or Christian Colleges/Universities
- What we have done in the past may not get us to the future. Gather ideas from successful schools.

LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER - ENCOURAGEMENT



- "We're in this together. Onward."
- "Keep your eye on the ultimate goal, which is participation in the building of God's kingdom."
- "Be Creative...look for other revenue generating funnel opportunities to feed and make traditional more sustainable."
- "What you do matters... even on hard days. - Invest in and build a leadership team. - Create pathways to promotion for young enrollment professionals so that we can build tomorrow's EM leaders. - Do not work in a silo, and keep your cabinet colleagues informed on progress toward goals and how their respective divisions/offices can contribute."

LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER - ENCOURAGEMENT



- "This culture has shifted. The students have changed. Not all the challenges that we face are a result of failed work, or mistakes on our campus. Some of the things we are up against are simply the time and place of our culture."
- "Enrollment management for Christian higher education institutions is not getting easier (quite the opposite), but it is SO worth it!"
- Thank you for being committed to this important work that we do. The world needs Christian colleges to continue to send out students into our broken world with a strong, moral compass.

COLLABORATE WITH US



MEMBERSHIP

Join over 200 college/university and seminary members in advancing Christian education. You'll gain:

- a valuable network
- industry insight through research and professional development
-

SHARE DATA

Sharing information makes us stronger

- Funnel Data
- Admissions Benchmarking
- State of the Profession
- Market Research Study
- Additional surveys on industry trends

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

NACCAP offers a plethora of training opportunities to staff at all levels of their careers:

- SNAC
- Webinars
- Annual Conference
- LDEP

PROMOTE

NACCAP helps colleges & universities bridge to students through:

- Connection with K-12 counselors
- THE Guide to Christian Higher Education
- 150+ College Fairs throughout the US and internationally

LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER



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- Our true competitors are often not other Bible schools or Christian Colleges/Universities
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GET IN TOUCH WITH US



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