



RETHINKING DEMONSTRATED INTEREST

Demonstrated interest policies, which favor applicants who express interest in enrolling at a given college, exacerbate inequities in college access for low-income, first-generation, and rural students.¹ By choosing to consider demonstrated interest in admissions decisions, institutions enable privileged students to 'work the system' to their advantage.

Middle-achieving, high-income students are more likely to benefit from a demonstrated interest policy than students from a lower socioeconomic background.²

This is especially true at selective colleges and universities—institutions that often are well-positioned to support historically underserved students' success. In fact, approximately 7 in 10 highly selective private institutions (74 percent) and 4 in 10 highly selective public institutions (41 percent) use applicant interest in admissions decisions.³

Colleges and universities use demonstrated interest to increase and/or predict the share of accepted applicants who enroll, also known as yield. Measuring student interest to predict yield may be a useful way to plan for the upcoming academic year.⁴ However, **using demonstrated interest to influence who is admitted puts underserved students at a distinct disadvantage by valuing things privileged students are more likely to have: time, money, and knowledge of the admissions system.⁵**



VISITING CAMPUS REQUIRES SUBSTANTIAL INVESTMENTS OF TIME AND MONEY.

On-campus engagements, such as college visits, are often more beneficial in admissions decisions than off-campus engagements, like speaking with an admissions officer over the phone.⁶ This is for exactly the reasons on-campus engagements are likely to be less accessible to students from low-income backgrounds: they require a considerable commitment of time and resources (e.g., travel costs and time off from work).⁷



INSTITUTIONS OFFER RURAL STUDENTS AND STUDENTS FROM LOW-INCOME BACKGROUNDS FEW OPPORTUNITIES TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR INTEREST VIA IN-PERSON, OFF-CAMPUS ENGAGEMENTS.

Research shows that institutions prioritize off-campus recruitment events for out-of-state students, primarily through college fairs and high school visits in affluent and/or suburban communities in other states.⁸ This means that even off-campus strategies for demonstrating interest can be inaccessible to in-state students from low-income backgrounds and rural students.



RACIAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC DISPARITIES LEAVE MANY STUDENTS WITHOUT AN INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE OF THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS PROCESS.

College counselors are a primary source of insight on the application process, including the strategies for demonstrating interest that institutions are most likely to value.⁹ The racial and socioeconomic disparities that permeate our K-12 education system often mean that students from low-income backgrounds and first-generation students have less access to college counselors or family members with extensive experience with the admissions process—in other words, people who can advise them how to work the system.¹⁰

DEMONSTRATING INTEREST IN A GLOBAL PANDEMIC: With stay-at-home orders, travel bans, and social distancing requirements in place, institutions have had to rethink how students demonstrate their interest in attending a college.¹¹ Moving forward, colleges and universities should consider making permanent changes that improve equity by, for example, treating virtual campus visits or interviews as equal to on-campus engagements.



OPENING THE DOOR TO OPPORTUNITY: RETHINKING DEMONSTRATED INTEREST

Creating a more equitable and just higher education system starts with implementing equitable admissions practices.

INSTITUTIONAL LEADERS SHOULD:

RETHINK CONSIDERING DEMONSTRATED INTEREST WHEN MAKING ADMISSIONS DECISIONS:

Left unchecked, demonstrated interest policies perpetuate privilege. Institutions should not consider demonstrated interest when deciding whether to admit an applicant unless paired with extensive training for admissions staff and deliberate, equity-minded recruitment strategies to level the playing field.

ENSURE ALL STUDENTS CAN MEANINGFULLY ENGAGE WITH THE INSTITUTION DURING THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS:

Institutions should recruit students from diverse locations and backgrounds by ensuring on- and off-campus engagements are available to all students. For example, institutions should subsidize on-campus visits for students from low-income backgrounds who may not otherwise have the resources to participate.¹² And they should do everything in their power to ensure that students from low-income backgrounds and rural students have equitable opportunities to demonstrate their interest in the most effective ways.¹³

INCREASE TRANSPARENCY ABOUT HOW DEMONSTRATED INTEREST IS CALCULATED AND CONSIDERED:

Colleges and universities must be intentional and transparent about communicating all of the factors that inform an admissions decision.

For full citations, please visit: www.ihep.org/mostimportantdoor/sources

1. Clinedinst, 2019
2. Bowman & Bastedo, 2018.
3. Institute for Higher Education Policy analysis of Undergraduate & Undergraduate Financial Aid Databases compiled by Peterson's as part of the Common Data Set Initiative, 2018.
4. Dearden, Li, Meyerhoefer, & Yang, 2017.
5. Dearden, Li, Meyerhoefer, & Yang, 2017.
6. Dearden, Li, Meyerhoefer, & Yang, 2017.
7. Dearden, Li, Meyerhoefer, & Yang, 2017.
8. Han, Jaquette, & Salazar, 2019.
9. George-Jackson & Gast, 2015.
10. The Education Trust, 2019; Clinedinst, 2019; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper.
11. Moody, 2020.
12. Dearden, Li, Meyerhoefer, & Yang, 2017.
13. Dearden, Li, Meyerhoefer, & Yang, 2017.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT WWW.IHEP.ORG