



This case study is part of an eight-part series under APLU's Guided Pathways for 4-Year Institutions model.

To view the model and other case studies, visit
www.aplu.org/guidedpathways

4-Year Guided Pathways Case Study: Holistic Admissions Processes

Introduction

Holistic review is a postsecondary institution admissions strategy that assesses an applicant's unique experiences alongside traditional measures of academic achievement such as grades and test scores. It is designed to help universities consider a broad range of factors reflecting the applicant's academic readiness, contribution to the incoming class, and potential for success both in school and later as a professional. The desired outcomes of a holistic admission process will vary depending on each institution's mission and goals; however, one core goal of a holistic process is the assembly of a diverse student body — diverse not only in race, ethnicity, and gender, but also in experience, socioeconomic status, and perspective. Historically the strategies used to conduct such a review process are resource-intensive and extremely difficult to scale (e.g., multiple individual interviews, gathering of data from multiple sources, multiple applicant essays, etc.).

Description of Strategy

In 2014, APLU and USU partnered with the American Association of Medical Colleges, and the National Institutes of Health to form Urban Universities for Health (UU-HEALTH) resulting in a landmark study of holistic review in admissions, *Holistic Admissions in the Health Professions: Findings from a National Survey*. In 2017, APLU partnered with the College Board and over 25 member-institutions to pilot a dashboard providing numerous environmental factors to aid institutions in conducting holistic enrollment processes at scale.

After multiple years of testing, the dashboard pilot's findings were released and the tool was made available publicly in 2019 and called Landscape. The dashboard combines multiple sources of publicly accessible data on applicants' high schools and neighborhoods, or 'environmental factors', to strengthen the ability of admissions officers to comprehensively consider applicants at scale. Importantly, the use of such contextual information must be incorporated only as supplemental information to the existing information garnered through an institutions' application process. Enrollment processes that enable the consideration of environmental factors allow applicants' non-cognitive to be considered. Within the research pilot, "over 90% of participants reported that the dashboard made it easier to incorporate contextual information about students and provided a more comprehensive review of the applicant" (<https://professionals.collegeboard.org/landscape>).

Description of Strategy (cont.)

Holistic enrollment processes that account for the many cognitive and non-cognitive factors that contribute to students' postsecondary success can not only increase equitable access to an institution but it can also cultivate a campus culture that values the whole student. Understanding student cohorts' aggregate and subgroup characteristics can also enable campus communities to target success strategies for new and transitioning students.

Relation to the Model

Adopting a holistic admission process is one institutional practice that can be used to achieve a student-centered guided pathway. Given holistic admissions' focus on enrollment, the process is situated within the "On-Ramps" Recruitment phase of the model; however, increasing numbers of institutions who have adopted the use of holistic admissions processes, especially using additional contextual information, have begun leveraging that information to target student groups who may benefit from specific student services. For instance, students from rural communities may benefit from a targeted email campaign providing information about navigating public transit on- and off-campus.

Resources

- Learn about APLU's work on holistic admission: <https://www.aplu.org/members/commissions/urban-serving-universities/student-success/holistic.html>
- UU-Health's Report: *Holistic Admissions in the Health Professions: Findings from a National Survey*
- College Board's Landscape: <https://pages.collegeboard.org/landscape>