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## Top Colleges See Little Fall in Commitments

By [JACQUES STEINBERG](#)

In an early indication that the economic downturn may not have disrupted students' college choices as much as schools had feared, more than a dozen top colleges said last week that accepted applicants had committed themselves to attending next fall at about the same rate as last year.

Among the private colleges reporting little variation in their admissions yields were [Harvard](#), [Yale](#), Princeton, [Wesleyan](#), Smith, Kenyon and Whitman. Among public colleges, the Universities of Virginia and Wisconsin reported similar results.

But those yields came at a price: many of the colleges said they had increased their financial aid budgets, often significantly, over last year's.

The dean of admissions at [Pomona College](#) in California, Bruce Poch, said, "For all the Chicken Little and Henny Penny hysteria and dire predictions, it seems to have worked out just fine here." At Pomona, 384 applicants sent in their deposits, only 6 fewer than the goal the college had set. The class is "essentially full," Mr. Poch added, though some students on the waiting list might be offered admission.

The dean of admissions and financial aid at [Harvard](#), William R. Fitzsimmons, had anticipated a drop in the yield of as much as 5 percentage points because of the poor economy. But about 76 percent of those accepted to Harvard, or nearly 1,560 applicants, have signaled their intention to attend — "right where we were at the end of last year," Mr. Fitzsimmons said.

As much as 65 percent of the incoming freshman class at Harvard could end up receiving direct, need-based scholarships, compared with 58 percent in the current freshman class, Mr. Fitzsimmons said. In response, Harvard expects to increase its undergraduate financial aid budget by \$9 million, or 7 percent.

At [Yale](#), nearly 70 percent of those accepted, or about 1,330 students, have signaled their intention to enroll, a percentage nearly identical to last year's, said Jeffrey Brenzel, the dean of undergraduate admissions.

"Our yield so far has been significantly stronger than we expected," Mr. Brenzel wrote in an e-mail message. "Given the economy, we thought that more students not eligible for need-based financial aid from Yale might accept merit scholarships offered by a number of excellent colleges."

The next freshman class at Yale is oversubscribed by about 17, which does not bode well for the 468 applicants on the waiting list.

Princeton's yield of 60 percent this year is a percentage point higher than last year's, which is noteworthy given that the university is trying to increase its freshman class size by about 60, to 1,300.

[Wesleyan University](#) in Middletown, Conn., said it too had received a response from accepted applicants at a rate similar to last year's — about 35 percent, or 760, said they would attend. The senior associate dean of admissions, Greg Pyke, said he was surprised that the economy had not “really driven the yield down.” He credited Wesleyan's increasing of its financial aid offers as a factor.

Another situation being closely monitored is whether public universities are being overrun with candidates, as some high school seniors seek a less expensive education than many private colleges offer.

At the [University of Virginia](#), this year's yield — 49 percent, representing 3,100 deposits — is only 1 percentage point higher than last year's. The [University of Wisconsin](#) said its yield this year — 41 percent, or about 5,550 deposits — was a drop of 2 percentage points from last year's. But the university said appeals of financial-aid decisions among accepted freshmen had increased 20 percent over last year.

The State University of New York at New Paltz said it had gotten the admissions yield it wanted: about 20 percent, compared with 24 percent last year. But to lower its yield, New Paltz had to close off applications at about 15,250 and offer several hundred fewer acceptances than it did a year earlier.

“The next question is whether the deposits are hard or soft,” said L. David Eaton, the vice president for enrollment. Mr. Eaton said he wondered whether some students had put in a \$250 deposit to New Paltz, as well as deposits elsewhere, to hedge their bets.

[Georgetown University](#), [Providence College](#) and [Hartwick College](#) were among those that said last week that they still had openings in their incoming freshman classes. Officials at the [University of California, Los Angeles](#), said they would not have data before June 1.

All told, the institutions that have reported their yields are a fraction of the nation's estimated 2,000 four-year colleges, which means it will probably be months before the full picture is known.

*Tamar Lewin, Lisa W. Foderaro and Rebecca R. Ruiz contributed reporting.*

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