



Summary of 2025 AACRAO Career-Profile Survey of 2025 U.S. Chief Admissions Officers

AACRAO Career Profile Survey Series

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Foreword

Reflecting on this fourth iteration of the AACRAO Chief Admissions Officer Career Profile report, I'm struck by how the role has evolved from primarily managing application-review processes to become a strategic cornerstone of institutional-enrollment success. The evolution of the chief admissions officer's role from an operational function to a strategic leadership position is remarkable. Data collected reaffirm what I've long believed. A chief admissions officer's role is central to learner access. As architects of opportunity and champions of enrollment goals, a chief admissions officer is uniquely positioned to drive positive change at their institution.

Yet the fundamental challenges facing chief admissions officers (CAdOS) persist. The profession continues to grapple with demanding travel schedules, intense pressure cycles and the ongoing scrutiny that comes with being at the center of national conversations about college access and equity. While celebrating this evolution, we must also recognize that transformation and challenge coexist in this dynamic profession.

In conversations with chief admissions officers around the United States, I've heard many stories of adaptation, innovation and resilience. These experiences are captured in the survey responses and personal reflections in this report, painting a vivid picture of a profession in the midst of transformation. What continues to sustain leaders in this profession is the fundamental belief their work transforms lives. Chief admissions officers featured in this report share a common thread. They are driven by the knowledge their decisions and leadership directly impact learners' futures and institutional success. I am moved by the personal stories and reminded of the passion and dedication that define the profession. These narratives illustrate the impact chief admissions officers better than any statistic. There remains a persistent pipeline challenge that demands urgent attention. While professional-development programs represent progress, we must acknowledge that meaningful change requires systemic transformation in how we identify, develop and support diverse talent throughout the admissions-profession pipeline. AACRAO is committed to expanding our efforts to create more inclusive pathways into the profession, but we must do more.

As we look to the future, I'm excited about the opportunities that lie ahead. This report serves as a valuable resource for those navigating CAdO careers. It offers insights into the skills, experiences and qualities that define successful chief admissions officers today, and this knowledge will help shape the profession as we move forward.

Special recognition goes to our partners at the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) for their collaboration in sharing the survey invitation with their membership. It significantly enhanced the reach and representativeness of this study.

I'm deeply grateful to all who contributed to this report. Your willingness to share your experiences and insights makes this work possible and helps strengthen our professional community.

Melanie Gottlieb
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Executive Summary

Following benchmarks in 2016, 2019 and 2022, this is the fourth report in the AACRAO Career Profile Series on chief admissions officers (CAOs). It provides comprehensive insights into the career trajectories, strategic responsibilities and professional experiences of CAOs across the United States. As a benchmark for enrollment leadership trends, the report offers critical guidance for aspiring CAOs and institutions seeking to strengthen their admissions leadership.

The CAO position stands at the forefront of higher education's most critical challenge: connecting talented learners with transformative educational opportunities. This benchmark reveals a profession evolving as enrollment landscapes become increasingly complex and competitive. Chief admissions officers simultaneously serve as enrollment architects, market analysts and learner-access advocates.

Core Insights

- **Career Trajectory and Significant Turnover:** The field is positioned for substantial turnover; 44% of chief admissions officers plan career moves within 3 years. This projected turnover creates challenges for institutional continuity, opportunities for professional advancement and fresh perspectives in admissions leadership.
- **Strategic Leadership Evolution:** Today's CAO operates beyond traditional admissions processing. Fifty-nine percent are responsible for Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) plan development, and 90% oversee comprehensive recruiting and applicant-to-matriculation operations. This expanded scope positions CAOs as central figures in institutional-enrollment strategy and learner access.
- **Career Mobility and Pathways:** Chief admissions officers demonstrate considerable institutional mobility; 78% have worked at two or more institutions during their careers. The primary pathway to the CAO position remains advancement within admissions offices. Fifty percent were hired internally, with 59% of those coming from admissions roles. Additionally, 25% assumed their current role after serving as CAO at another institution, indicating significant interinstitutional movement.

- **Demanding Work Environment with High Satisfaction:** Despite intensive demands—86% work 41+ hours weekly and 64% travel for work beyond conferences—CAAdOs report strong job satisfaction. Ninety-nine percent express some level of satisfaction with their positions; 61% are highly satisfied. Fair compensation emerges as the most critical retention factor, followed by appreciation and work-life balance. While 21% rank work-life balance as the top priority for retention, the data on actual work hours suggests this balance remains elusive for most CAAdOs.
- **Skills Requirements and Professional Challenges:** The role requires diverse competencies, with leadership, management, communication and enrollment management identified as most essential. CAAdOs face significant operational challenges, with time constraints being their primary concern, followed by inadequate financial resources and personnel-management pressures.
- **Broad Administrative Scope and Committee Engagement:** CAAdOs manage extensive responsibilities from strategic planning to operational execution. They participate broadly in institutional governance on enrollment-management committees (77%), strategic-planning committees (71%) and academic-policy committees (59%). Fifty-four percent are responsible for budget development.
- **Professional Development and Advancement Preparation:** CAAdOs are actively preparing for career advancement through diverse strategies, including pursuing a doctoral degree, leadership-development programs and functional-area diversification. Advanced education is a prominent preparation strategy, with many pursuing Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs in higher-education leadership.
- **Persistent Diversity Challenges:** Despite turnover in positions, demographic representation is largely static compared with previous surveys. The data reveal no significant changes in participation rates based on race, ethnicity or gender. This indicates a continued need for initiatives to increase diversity and create more inclusive pathways into enrollment leadership.
- **Institutional Positioning and Strategic Importance:** CAAdOs typically report to high-level administrators; 37% are supervised by vice presidents or vice chancellors and 37% serve as part of an institutional executive-leadership team. Most are positioned within enrollment-management divisions (40%) or report directly to the chief-executive division (26%), reflecting their strategic importance to institutional success.

Key areas explored in this report include leadership pathways and advancement patterns, enrollment-management responsibilities and institutional impact. These are essential competencies for success in complex admissions environments, professional satisfaction drivers, diversity within leadership ranks, guidance for emerging admissions leaders and demographic representation.

Practical Guidance

The intent of this report is to offer guidance for two key audiences—current chief admissions officers planning their next career move and individuals aspiring to enter the CAdO profession. Below is information to help anyone reach their goal.

For Current Chief Admissions Officers Planning Career Advancement

Data reveal 44% of CAdOs plan to make career moves within 3 years, with many preparing with advanced education and skill diversification. If you are currently a CAdO and are considering your next career move, keep in mind the following recommendations as you prepare.

- **Manage Work-Life Balance:** Twenty-one percent of CAdOs identify work-life balance as their top retention priority, however, 86% work 41+ hours a week. Current CAdOs should proactively develop strategies for sustainable career longevity. Consider establishing clear boundaries during off-peak recruitment seasons, leveraging the 86% who report considerable job autonomy to create flexible scheduling arrangements. Advocate with supervisors for realistic workload expectations that align with institutional-enrollment goals.
- **Broaden Functional Expertise:** Given that 46% of those seeking advancement plan to pursue chief enrollment management positions, gain experience in areas beyond admissions, such as financial aid, retention initiatives, institutional research and budget management. It will be essential for career progression.
- **Pursue Advanced Education:** Advanced-degree completion, particularly doctoral programs in higher-education leadership, is a prominent preparation strategy among survey respondents. CAdOs should evaluate whether additional credentials align with their career goals and institutional expectations.
- **Develop Strategic Leadership Skills:** Fifty-nine percent of current CAdOs are responsible for SEM plan development. Being able to demonstrate strategic

thinking, data-analytics capabilities and comprehensive enrollment-management experience is critical for advancement to senior leadership roles.

- **Build External Networks:** Maintain professional relationships, and stay connected with executive search firms. These actions can facilitate career transitions.

For Aspiring Chief Admissions Officers

For those seeking to enter the CAdO profession, data provide clear guidance on typical pathways and preparation strategies.

- **Gain Admissions-Office Experience:** The most common pathway remains advancement within admissions offices; 59% of internally hired CAdOs come from admissions roles. Building comprehensive experience in recruitment, application review, data analysis and enrollment operations provides essential foundation skills.
- **Prepare for Significant Responsibilities:** Modern CAdOs manage extensive portfolios including budget development, committee participation across multiple institutional areas and supervision of staff teams. Developing management, communication and collaborative decision-making skills is essential.
- **Understand the Demands:** The CAdO role requires substantial time commitment and travel. Prospective CAdOs should evaluate their capacity for these professional demands.
- **Consider Geographic Flexibility:** Willingness to relocate may expand career opportunities. Survey responses indicate geographic constraints are a common challenge.

For real-world perspectives on navigating these challenges, see the advice from 85 experienced CAdO's in the advice for future CAdO's section and six personal essays in Appendix B, which offer candid reflections on career preparation and professional growth. We encourage you to read their stories.

Professional Development Resources

AACRAO offers several resources to support both current and aspiring chief admissions officers.

ASCEND Leadership Development Program

AACRAO's ASCEND Leadership Development Program provides a 9-month intensive executive-leadership experience designed to advance midcareer professionals from underrepresented communities into senior strategic positions. This hybrid program combines cohort learning, individual coaching and comprehensive career development to help leaders build on their strengths while promoting equity, innovation and systemic change in higher education.

Instructor-led courses:

- Essentials of Strategic Enrollment Management

On-demand learning options with a credential option:

- The Compliance Corner
- Core Concepts of Strategic Enrollment Management
- Enrollment Management: Environmental Scanning
- Holistic/Equitable Approach to Admissions
- Managing and Leading an Admissions Office

Advanced-education programs

- SEM-Endorsement Program

Publications

- The College Admissions Officer Guide
- Handbook of Strategic Enrollment Management
- Holistic Admissions: Predicting the Likelihood of Learner Success
- SEM as a Connector
- SEM Core Concepts
- SEM in Action

Research

AACRAO produces research on a number of topics. Reports are available to all AACRAO members.

AACRAO Research Grants

AACRAO supports career advancement through research grants that encourage applied scholarship in enrollment management while fostering leadership development. The program provides up to three annual stipends of \$2,000 to AACRAO members pursuing advanced degrees, with recipients presenting their findings at the AACRAO Annual Meeting and potential publication opportunities in *SEM Quarterly*. Research topics span enrollment management, admissions, diversity and access, learner success and related areas. Applications are accepted from October 1 through August 31 annually.

Approach to the Survey

Position titles served as the primary selection criterion for identifying AACRAO members at institutions in the United States who serve as the chief admissions officer. To ensure accuracy, the survey began with a question confirming each participant's role as a CAdO.

Response options have been continually refined through the survey series. Insights gleaned from responses in previous surveys have enhanced the clarity and relevance of questions. The 2025 report includes select data from all four surveys and offers a view of trends over time.

While some data from multiple years are presented, response percentages may not definitively reflect trends. This lack is due to respondent pools and institutional samples varying with each survey iteration. Readers are encouraged to consider the varying sample compositions when interpreting longitudinal data presented in this report.

Note about data. *In the interest of brevity, data are presented in the aggregate in this report. If you are interested in seeing institutional characteristics, such as size, type and control, this information is available for examination. Please contact Wendy Kilgore (wendyk@aacrao.org) for further information.*

Characteristics of Current Position

This report is based on a sample of 268 chief admissions officers in the United States, including 92% who serve as an institutionwide CAdO. The other 8% serve as a college or school CAdO within a comprehensive institution. Fifty-four percent of the institutions are undergraduate learners only, followed by 40% of respondents responsible for undergraduate and graduate/professional learners and 6% responsible for graduate and/or professional learners only.

Some institutions have chief admissions officers only; other institutions also have a chief enrollment management officer (CEMO). A CAdO is responsible for an institution's academic programming and vision. A CEMO oversees learner recruitment, admissions and marketing efforts. In some cases, an institution may combine the two positions.

Of the institutions represented in this report, the relationship between the two positions varies. Responses show the following:

- 46%¹ of institutions have a separate CAdO and CEMO
- 42% combine the CAdO and CEMO position into one position
- 6% have a CAdO and no CEMO position
- 5% have varied configurations of the two positions not captured by the descriptions above

Other CAdO characteristics of the responding institutions include the following:

- 37% are part of the institution's executive-leadership team
- 7% have voting rights on the faculty senate or equivalent faculty governing body
- 90% are responsible for recruiting and applicant-to-matriculation operations
- 20% have responsibility for registration/registrar-related services in a dual role

Similar to the results in the previous three reports, 69% of CAdO positions in 2025 require a master's degree. Doctorates are necessary for 2% of these roles, while 28% require at least a bachelor's degree. One percent have no specified minimum-education requirement.

The chief admissions officer position title varies. Below are some common descriptors used in titles, ranked from most common to least.

¹ Rounding may result in totals ranging from 99% to 101% throughout the report.

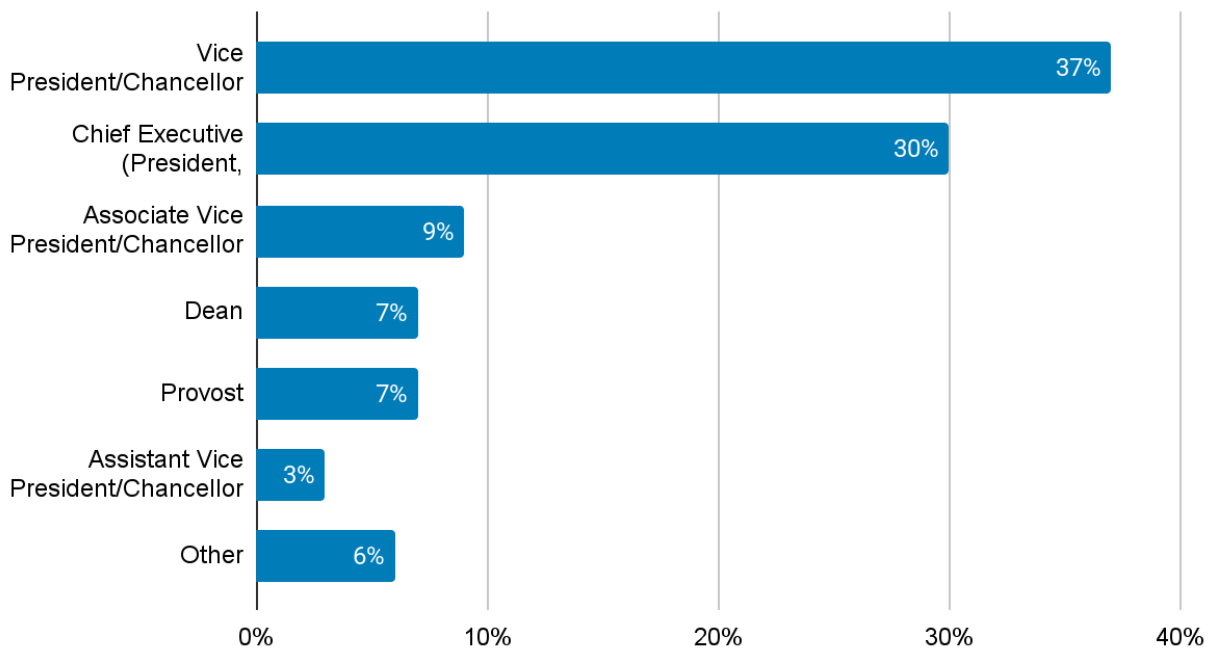
Appendix A contains the full list.

- Director
- Vice President
- Assistant/Associate Vice President/Chancellor
- Dean, including Assistant and Associate
- Executive Director
- Vice Provost/Vice Chancellor
- Senior Director

Organizational Structure

This section examines a chief admissions officer's organizational placement and role in institutional governance. The survey inquired about the reporting structure and divisional placement of a CAdO within an institution. Data show most are supervised by high-level administrators and positioned within enrollment-management divisions. A vice president or vice chancellor supervises 37% of the respondents. Figure 1.

Figure 1: Immediate Supervisor for the CAdO Position



Most chief admissions officers are positioned within the enrollment-management division (40%), followed by the chief-executive division (26%), academic affairs (15%), learner affairs (12%) and 1% each in business affairs and institutional advancement. The remaining 6% report to other divisions not listed in the response choices.

Time in Current Position

Responses in all three career profile series reports indicate that all three positions (chief admissions officers, chief enrollment management and registrars) have similar tenures. More than half of CAdOs have been in their current position for less than 5 years, compared to 48% of registrars in 2024 and 58% of chief enrollment management officers in 2023. Data indicate 2025 respondents have been in their positions as follows:

- 57% for less than 5 years
- 24% for 5 to 10 years
- 11% for 10 to 15 years
- 2% for 15 to 20 years
- 5% for 20+ years

Careers in Higher Education

Forty-nine percent of current CAdOs have spent their entire professional career in higher education, compared to 68% in 2016, 77% in 2019 and 78% in 2022. Among current CAdOs, an additional 45% have spent 50% to 99% of their career in higher education. The remaining 5% have spent 49% or less of their career in higher education.

Fifty-eight percent of chief admissions officers have more than 20 years experience in higher education. The respondents' years of experience in higher education are detailed as follows:

- 34% have 25+ years
- 24% have 20 to 25 years
- 23% have 15 to 20 years
- 13% have 10 to 15 years
- 4% have 5 to 10 years
- 1% have less than 5 years

Career Paths Leading to Current Role

The career path to the CAdO position is closely tied to previous experience in an admissions office or as a CAdO at another institution.

- 25% assumed their current role after serving as a CAdO at another institution
- 50% were hired into their current role from another position within the same institution; of those, 59% came from a position within the admissions office at that institution
- 21% came from another institution but were not the CAdO at that institution; of those, 56% came from a position within the admissions office
- 3% came from a position in a higher-education-related organization
- 1% came from a position outside higher education

As noted in the data above, among those new to the position, the predominant path to the CAdO position is the admissions office within the same institution. The remainder from higher education came from the following functional areas:

- enrollment management
- learner affairs
- registration and records
- financial aid
- institutional research
- enrollment services
- faculty
- other functional area not listed as response choices in the survey

Institutional Experience and Mobility

Chief admissions officers demonstrate considerable institutional mobility throughout their careers. The survey reveals most CAdOs are highly mobile professionals; 78% have worked at two or more institutions during their careers. Specifically, 22% have worked at one institution, 17% at two institutions, 24% at three institutions, 18% at four institutions and 19% at five or more institutions. This distribution indicates institutional mobility is the norm rather than the exception among chief admissions officers. Experience across different institutional characteristics include the following.

- **Different institutional types:** Fifty-three percent of chief admissions officers have worked at institutions of different types than their current institution. Forty-seven percent have remained within the same institutional type throughout their careers.
- **Different institutional controls (public versus private):** Fifty-two percent of CAdOs have worked at institutions with different control structures than their current institution. Forty-eight percent have remained within the same control type throughout their careers.
- **Different institutional sizes using IPEDS categories:** Data reveal that CAdOs demonstrate extensive mobility across institutional sizes. Representation is relatively evenly distributed across all IPEDS size categories. Unlike the more pronounced patterns seen in institutional control mobility, the similar percentages across size categories (ranging from 10 to 23%) indicate CAdOs do not show strong preferences for particular institutional sizes during their career progression. This broad distribution demonstrates that institutional size may be less influential in career decisions, compared to other institutional characteristics. Chief admissions officers gain experience managing admissions processes across the full spectrum of institutional scales.

Administrative Scope

Chief admissions officers manage extensive, varied responsibilities that span strategic committee work, day-to-day operational functions and supervision. Data reveal the comprehensive scope of a typical CAdO's role, highlighting active engagement across multiple institutional areas. This multifaceted position encompasses diverse duties from enrollment management and recruitment operations to strategic planning and institutional reporting, demonstrating the central role CAdOs play in institutional success.

Team Management

The size of a CAdO's team varies. However, the number of direct reports is not statistically related to the size of the institution nor the position to which the CAdO reports.

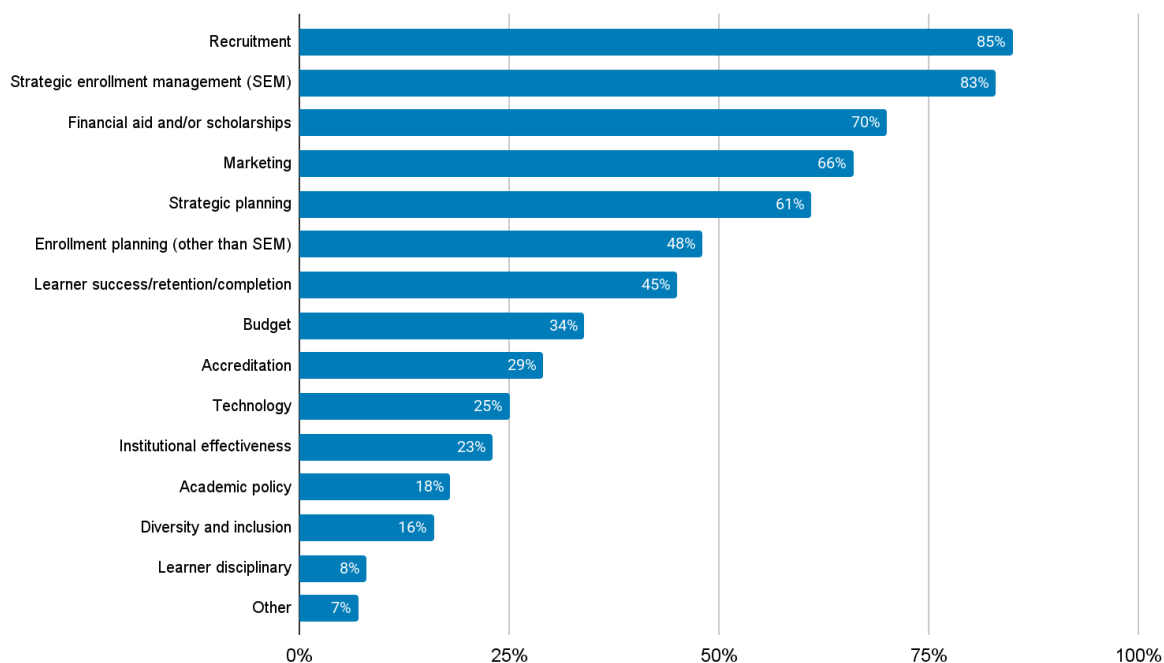
Regarding direct reports (employees for whom the chief admissions officer is responsible for performance evaluations and who report to no other person), the survey revealed similar data to previous years:

- 50% supervise 1 to 5 direct reports
- 39% supervise 6 to 10 direct reports
- 11% supervise more than 10 direct reports

Committee Participation

Chief admissions officers serve on various institutional committees, reflecting their strategic role in enrollment and institutional planning. Figure 2. Seven percent report additional recurring committee responsibilities beyond the standard options, including specialized areas such as admissions training, campus leadership, curriculum oversight, emergency management, international programs, orientation planning and veteran services.

Figure 2: Regular and recurring committee responsibility



Learner-Onboarding Processes

A new question added to the 2025 survey asked, “Which aspects of the student onboarding process currently report to your position?” Answers to this question reveal 90% of CAdOs oversee recruiting and applicant-to-matriculation operations. This represents a comprehensive approach to learner onboarding that spans the entire

enrollment funnel, compared to the 5% who are responsible only for recruiting or only for applicant-to-matriculant operations.

Dual-Role Responsibilities

Another new question added to the 2025 survey asked, “Some CAdO positions are also responsible for registration and registrar-related services in a dual role. Are you also responsible for registration and registrar-related services?” Eighty percent of respondents indicate they focus solely on admissions functions. Twenty percent serve in dual roles that include registration and registrar-related services. Comprehensive institutions are less likely to combine these functions into hybrid positions that manage both admissions and academic record-keeping responsibilities.

Portfolio of Responsibilities

Table 1 presents a portfolio of responsibilities typical for the CAdO position. Each column category was defined as follows.

- **Responsible:** I perform this myself. I do not delegate the activity or responsibility.
- **Supervise:** I have responsibility, but I have delegated the performance of this activity. I supervise the person responsible for it.
- **Participate:** I neither delegate nor supervise this activity but influence decisions related to that function.
- **Inform:** I have no authority or responsibility for this activity but inform others about this function.
- **N/A:** none of the above

The figures in red highlight the highest percentage of responses per responsibility.

Table 1.

Table 1: Portfolio of responsibilities					
	Responsible	Supervise	Participate	Inform	N/A
Ad-hoc reporting and research	39%	28%	28%	4%	1%
Budget development	54%	12%	27%	4%	3%
Campus visits (in-person and virtual)	8%	79%	7%	4%	4%
Enrollment reporting	56%	22%	20%	2%	0%
Evaluation and analysis of marketing and recruitment effectiveness	54%	28%	13%	3%	1%
International admission	9%	64%	10%	8%	9%
Managing technology solutions	17%	49%	28%	6%	1%
New learner recruitment	17%	75%	6%	2%	0%
Non-degree admission	8%	53%	7%	13%	19%
Orientation	2%	20%	36%	30%	11%
Re-admit processing	10%	56%	10%	11%	13%
Related website development and maintenance	9%	37%	34%	16%	4%
Residency determination	6%	31%	16%	16%	31%
SEM plan development	59%	5%	29%	4%	3%
Social media posting and management	0%	45%	28%	23%	3%
Target market identification	48%	29%	17%	5%	0%
Territory management	17%	69%	6%	3%	6%
Transfer credit evaluation	2%	44%	19%	24%	11%
Veterans' education certification and reporting	1%	17%	24%	31%	26%
Yield management	35%	56%	7%	1%	2%

Key Responsibilities, Essential Skills and Primary Challenges

Key responsibilities include enrollment management, meeting enrollment goals, data analytics, recruitment and outreach. This position requires a diverse skill set, with leadership and management, communication and enrollment-management abilities of greatest importance.

Table 2.

Table 2. Top 5 roles & responsibilities, skills & attributes for a CAdO position		
Rank	Roles & responsibilities	Skills & attributes
First	Enrollment management/meeting enrollment goals	Leadership and management
Second	Recruitment and outreach	Communication
Third	Data analytics	Collaborative decision-making and consensus-building (tied with communication)
Fourth	Communication plan development	Enrollment management
Fifth	Market analysis	Problem solving

Chief admissions officers encounter multifaceted operational challenges in their daily work, with time constraints the most pressing concern. Inadequate financial resources create additional operational constraints, while personnel management adds complexity to the role. Meeting enrollment goals remains a persistent challenge in today's competitive higher-education environment. The interconnected nature of admissions work, requiring effective relationships with other departments across an institution, further impacts daily operations.

Table 3.

Table 3: Top 5 challenges faced by CAdO's	
First	Time to get things done
Second	Inadequate financial resources
Third	Personnel management
Fourth	Meeting enrollment goals
Fifth	Interconnected nature of the work (relationships with other departments)

Workload

The previous three reports showed that the CAdO position involves a significant time commitment. This year's data shows the same.

- 86% of CAdOs work 41+ hours a week
- 60% work between 45 and 54 hours a week
- 8% work more than 55 hours a week (the maximum number of hours was 70, with a mean of 61)

Chief admissions officers may also travel for their position.

- 64% travel for work outside professional conferences and other professional-development activities
- 73% travel 10 to 20 business days a year
- 36% travel more than 20 business days a year

The daily-meeting schedule for CAdOs can be intense. The number of daily calendared meetings, not including ad hoc meetings, is reported as:

- 3% have one meeting
- 11% have two meetings
- 29% have three
- 27% have four
- 16% have five
- 14% have more than five

Job Satisfaction and Factors for Retention

Respondents were asked to react to descriptive statements focusing on factors for retaining CAdOs in their position and other aspects of job satisfaction. Data are summarized by the focus area below.

- **Keys to CAdO Retention:** Fair compensation is the most important factor in retaining CAdOs in 2025. This is followed by appreciation and a work-life balance. Increased responsibility/enlarged professional portfolio and access to professional-development opportunities are not as important.
- **Overall Job Satisfaction:** Ninety-nine percent of CAdOs express some level of satisfaction with their current position. Among the respondents, 61% selected “describes me very well” or “describes me extremely well” when asked their level of agreement with “I am satisfied with my current position.” Thirty percent chose “describes me moderately well,” 8% selected “describes me slightly well” and 1% opted for “does not describe me.”
- **Recognition of Skills:** Most CAdOs believe their professional and personal skills are appreciated at their institution. Eighty percent chose “always” or “most of the time” as their level of agreement with “My professional and personal skills are appreciated at my institution.” An additional 12% selected “about half the time.”
- **Opinions about Enrollment Goals:** Sixty-seven percent of CAdOs either “strongly agree” or “agree” their institution’s enrollment goals are reasonable and can be accomplished with resources available to them. Eighteen percent “neither agree nor disagree.” The remaining 16% either “disagree” or “strongly disagree.”
- **Pressure to Perform:** The vast majority of CAdOs experience significant performance pressure in their roles. Eighty-four percent feel pressure to perform “always” or “most of the time.” Fifty-one percent report they “always” feel this pressure, and 33% experience it “most of the time.” Only 9% feel the pressure “about half the time,” while a small minority experience it “sometimes” (5%) or “never” (2%).
- **Autonomy:** Eighty-six percent of CAdOs agree they have considerable freedom in their job.
- **Support for Professional Development:** Seventy-six percent of CAdOs feel supported in their professional-development activities.

Career Aspirations, Preparation and Challenges

Aspirations and Timing

CAdOs were asked about their next career move; 38% do not have a plan. Of the remaining CAdOs:

- 26% intend to stay at their current institution for the foreseeable future
- 17% intend to change institutions
- 16% intend to retire from their current position
- 4% plan no longer to work at an institution

Of those who have a plan for their next career move and will seek a position other than a CAdO in higher education, positions sought fall into the following categories:

- 46% will seek a chief enrollment management officer position
- 22% are undecided on the position they will seek
- 13% will seek an unspecified administrative position
- 10% will seek a chief academic officer position or other position not listed in the survey as a response choice
- 7% will seek another position not listed in the survey
- 2% will seek a chief academic officer position

All were asked when they intend to make their next career move. Forty-four percent intend to do so within 3 years or less. Thirty-four percent have not yet decided when they will make their next career move, and 22% selected 4 or more years as their timeline for a change.

Preparation for Next Career Move

Open-ended responses reveal the comprehensive range of approaches CAdOs are taking to prepare for their next career move, reflecting diverse career paths and aspirations within the profession. The diversity of preparation strategies reflects the varied career aspirations within enrollment management, from those seeking advancement within their current institutions to those preparing for senior-executive roles or exploring opportunities outside traditional higher education.

Advanced Education and Credential Acquisition: The pursuit of advanced education is the most prominent preparation strategy among respondents. Many are actively

pursuing, or planning to pursue, doctoral degrees, with specific mentions of Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs in higher-education leadership and educational leadership. Several respondents noted they are "working on my doctorate," "pursuing an Ed.D.," "currently pursuing my Ph.D." or "starting my doctorate this fall."

Master's-degree completion is also common, with professionals pursuing degrees in higher-education administration and related fields. Some respondents mention they are "about to start my master's to prepare me for the next career move" or working toward "a second master's degree." Additional certifications in areas, such as data management and specific workshops on financial aid and registrar functions, are also being pursued.

Professional Development and Skill Enhancement: Respondents emphasize continuous learning through professional development activities, such as attending conferences, workshops, seminars and webinars. Several specifically mention staying current with industry trends and taking advantage of professional-development opportunities.

Technology skills, particularly related to artificial intelligence (AI), emerged as a focus area. Many respondents mention "gaining more experience using AI in admissions work," "learning generative AI and its impact on higher education" and "investigating the utilization of AI." Data analytics skills are also being developed, with mentions of "building data-analysis skills" and "skill development in data analytics."

Financial-aid knowledge is a significant area for skill development. Several respondents noted efforts to understand financial aid at a higher level, learn about alternative financial-aid-packaging strategies and gain more experience with financial-aid strategies.

Leadership Development and Strategic Experience: Many professionals are actively pursuing leadership development through various programs and experiences. Specific mentions include "leadership and fellowship programs," "Enrollment Leadership Academy," "leadership institutes" and "executive coaching." Some noted participation in "leadership programs for university presidency."

Strategic-planning experience is being gained through participation in institutional committees and taking on additional responsibilities. One respondent mentioned "serving on the newly established strategic enrollment management committee responsible for developing a universitywide enrollment plan."

Networking and Relationship Building: Professional networking is a critical preparation strategy, with numerous respondents stating "networking" as their primary activity. Specific professional organizations mentioned include NASPA, AACRAO and NACAC. Many are "joining institutional, local and national organizations while also attending professional-development events."

Several respondents mentioned working with career coaches to determine their next move and to help determine how their talents and experience fit into different professional opportunities. Executive search firms are also part of networking strategies, with mentions of "staying in touch with executive search firms" and "meeting with search firms."

Mentorship and Direct Learning: Mentorship relationships are valued by many respondents, with mentions of "seeking mentors," being "mentored by current dean" and having "conversations with professional mentors." Some are learning directly from current leadership, such as "working closely with the current VP to gain experience" or "learning as much as I can from my current supervisor, who is approaching retirement."

Functional Area Diversification: CAdOs are strategically expanding their experience across multiple functional areas. Common areas mentioned include:

- financial-aid administration and strategies
- learner retention and success initiatives
- institutional research and data analytics
- registrar functions and learner accounts
- marketing and communications skills
- budget-management and financial-portfolio understanding

One respondent noted: "I am intentionally gaining additional experience across higher education beyond admissions and enrollment management." This includes teaching in First Year Experience programs, gaining faculty experience, building Title IX compliance experience and developing institutional policy expertise.

Research, Publication and Professional Contribution: Some CAdOs are engaging in scholarly activities, including working "on some publications and research articles" and "conducting research on enrollment management with the goal of publishing in peer-reviewed journals." Conference presentations and staying current with enrollment-management trends and issues are also mentioned.

Cross-Institutional Learning and Consulting: Some mention gaining experience through consulting work, including exploring consultant roles and assisting other institutions within their same system with enrollment-management efforts.

Presidential and Executive Preparation: A few CAdOs are specifically preparing for senior executive roles through specialized programs. Some mention contemplating "applying for something like the CIC Presidential Vocation and Institutional Mission program" and "working with the university president on leadership development beyond enrollment management and admissions."

Current Role Excellence and Performance: Many respondents emphasize focusing on success in their current positions as preparation for advancement. This includes "setting and meeting enrollment goals," "doing the best job in my current role to build experiences and success" and "building a resume with successful accomplishments at my current institution."

Exploring Alternative Career Paths: Some CAdOs are exploring opportunities beyond traditional higher-education roles, including consulting work, positions with vendors, K-12 education and for-profit organizations in the higher-education space. A few mentioned "exploring what it would be like to move into consultant roles" and networking with people who have transitioned to different sectors.

No Active Preparation or Limited Capacity: Several respondents indicate they are not actively preparing for a career move. Their reasons include recent career changes, satisfaction with current roles and planning to leave education in the future. One respondent noted the challenge of preparation time. "I don't have time to prepare (per se); I work 60 hours a week and have a family. I'm just doing everything I can to keep my skills fresh and marketable through the work I do every day."

Challenges to Making Their Next Career Move

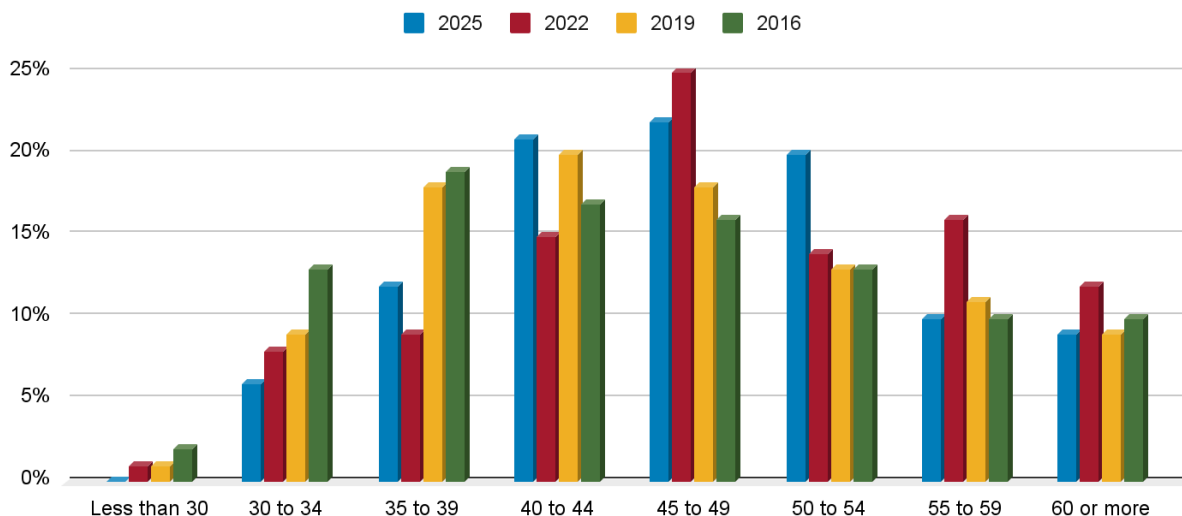
The survey included an open-ended question asking respondents to identify challenges they perceive they will need to address to meet their next career goal. Responses varied widely and were often deeply personal, reflecting the diverse circumstances and aspirations of enrollment-management professionals. Analysis of these responses reveals several recurring themes. Some mirror the preparation themes, though individual experiences and concerns differ significantly across respondents.

- **Educational Credentials:** Many respondents mention the need to complete or obtain advanced degrees, particularly doctoral credentials (Ph.D. or Ed.D.). Some express uncertainty about whether the investment in additional education is worthwhile, while others view advanced degrees as necessary for career advancement into senior leadership positions.
- **Skills and Experience Expansion:** Respondents frequently cite the need to broaden their expertise beyond their current areas of specialization. Common areas include financial-aid knowledge, data analytics and forecasting, retention initiatives, budget management, academic-affairs experience and emerging technologies, including AI.
- **Industry and Environmental Challenges:** A substantial number of responses reference concerns about the broader higher-education landscape, including declining enrollment, negative public perception of higher education, political pressures, budget constraints and increased competition among institutions.
- **Geographic and Personal Limitations:** Geographic constraints due to family obligations, a spouse's career or personal preferences are frequently mentioned as limiting factors in career mobility. Work-life balance and time-management challenges are also common concerns.
- **Institutional and Performance Pressures:** Many respondents express concern about meeting enrollment goals in challenging markets, navigating institutional politics, demonstrating success despite external pressures and working effectively with limited resources.
- **Career-Transition Barriers:** Several themes emerge around difficulties in making career transitions, including moving from specialized to comprehensive roles, transitioning between different institutional types and being perceived as ready for advancement without previously holding similar positions.
- **Discrimination and Bias Concerns:** Some respondents specifically mention concerns about age, gender and racial bias in hiring processes. They note challenges for women and people of Color in accessing leadership positions.

Demographics

Age data since 2016 appears to show the possibility of a shift toward a slightly higher average age category over the last two reports for individuals holding the CAdO positions. Figure 3.

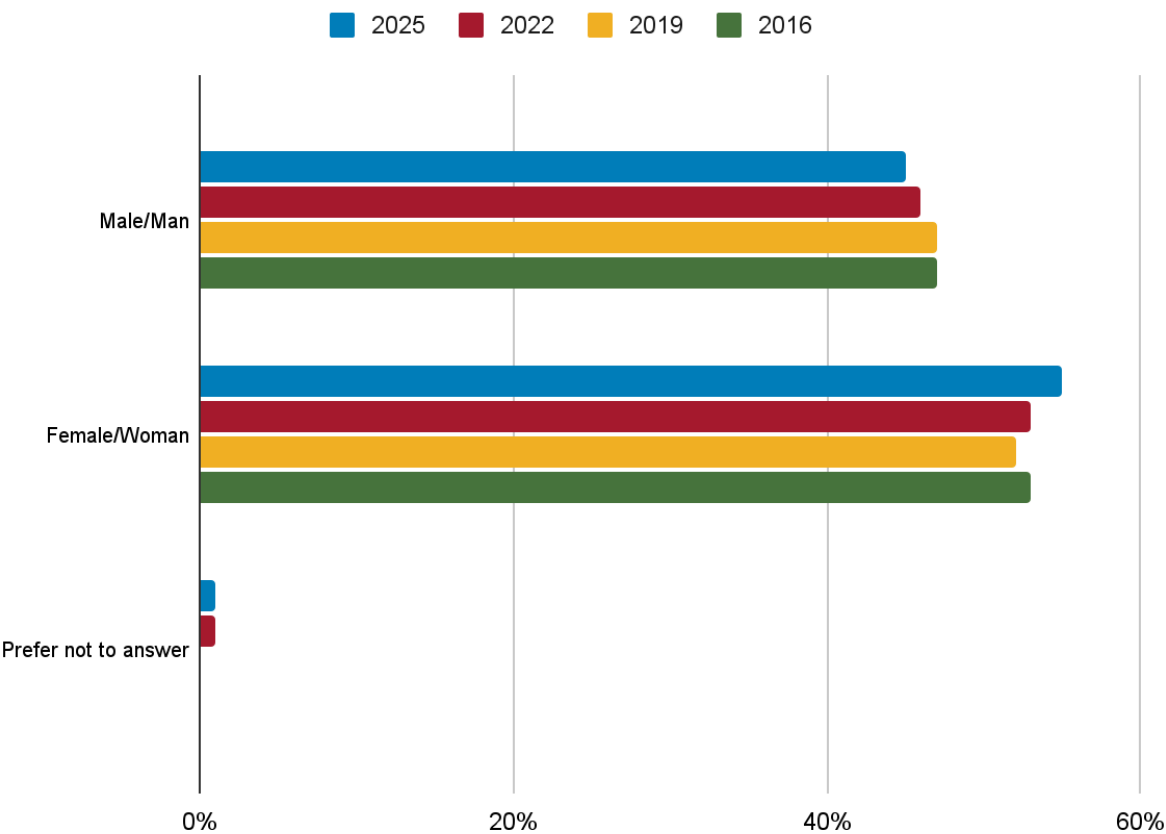
Figure 3: Age of respondents 2025, 2022, 2019 and 2016



The data reveal no significant changes since 2016 in participation rates based on race, ethnicity or gender, despite the turnover rate in these positions.

When examining diversity in the CAdO role, gender-identity response choices were updated for the 2025 survey. Transgender, nonconforming gender identity and other gender categories were included. However, none of the respondents identified with these categories, so these categories are not included in Figure 4.

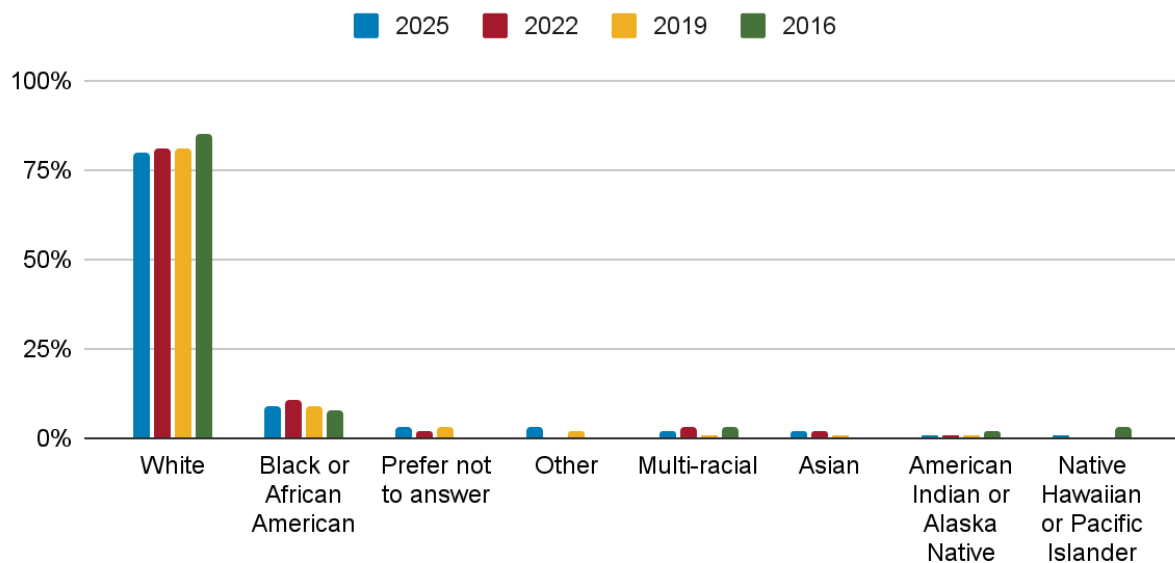
Figure 4: Gender identity 2025, 2022, 2019 and 2016



Note: Gender-identity response choices were updated for the 2025 survey.

Self-reported race data remain largely consistent across all four cohorts. Figure 5. In the 2025 data, 8% of respondents identify as Hispanic or Latino, consistent with previous surveys, so this category was not included in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Self-reported race data 2025, 2022, 2019 and 2016



Note: the race categories changed between the 2016 and 2019 surveys

Advice to Future Chief Admissions Officers

Drawing from years of experience, 85 seasoned chief admissions officers contributed their words of wisdom, offering a unique window into the profession that benefits current and aspiring practitioners. Analysis of the responses reveals a wealth of practical advice and diverse perspectives on the multifaceted nature of a CAdO's role and the many skills needed for success in this dynamic field.

The areas outlined below highlight key themes and specific guidance gleaned from their words of wisdom.

Professional Development and Learning

- pursue learning opportunities within and outside your institution
- develop expertise in data analysis, interpretation and financial understanding of your institution
- master technology platforms and stay current with evolving tools and trends
- seek mentorship
- consider mentoring others as you advance in your career
- build knowledge across multiple functional areas beyond admissions

Relationship Building and Networking

- cultivate strong relationships across campus departments and with external partners
- develop an intentional professional network within, and adjacent to, enrollment management
- invest time in getting to know your team personally and professionally
- build trust through transparency and consistent follow through on commitments

Leadership and Team Management

- prioritize the development and well-being of your staff
- promote team members' growth and delegate opportunities that match their strengths
- balance supporting your team with advocating for institutional needs
- manage people, processes and projects with equal attention to detail and strategy

Learner-Centered Focus

- maintain clarity about your purpose in helping learners succeed in higher education
- make decisions that benefit both learner and institutional goals
- each applicant is an individual with unique circumstances and aspirations

Adaptability and Change Management

- embrace the rapidly changing nature of higher education while maintaining core values
- develop comfort with ambiguity
- Be able to pivot strategies when needed
- stay informed about external factors affecting enrollment and institutional sustainability

Communication and Collaboration

- ask clarifying questions
- advocate for resources
- support your office's needs
- present information, starting with a rationale, before sharing supporting data
- listen actively in meetings

- contribute meaningfully to institutional discussions
- build consensus while maintaining confidence in your professional expertise

Career Strategy and Self-Advocacy

- understand your market value and advocate for appropriate compensation and resources
- set personal and professional boundaries early; maintain them consistently
- choose positions at institutions that align with your values and provide adequate support
- recognize when leadership changes or institutional constraints may limit your effectiveness

Resilience and Perspective

- develop strategies for coping with the emotional highs and lows inherent in enrollment work
- focus energy on factors within your control, rather than external pressures
- maintain humor and perspective during challenging periods
- Acknowledge that institutional success requires collective effort
- accept that perfection is impossible

Financial and Strategic Acumen

- develop a comprehensive understanding of institutional budgets and revenue models
- learn to navigate vendor relationships and contract negotiations
- use data strategically to demonstrate impact and secure resources
- understand how enrollment decisions affect multiple areas of the institution

Beyond survey responses, six chief admissions officers contributed personal essays. Found in Appendix B, these accounts reveal the daily realities of the role of a CAdO. Essays share candid reflections on professional preparation and describe varied routes into the profession.

The collective wisdom shared in this section and in Appendix B reflects the resilience, dedication, and strategic thinking that define successful chief admissions officers. As the profession continues to evolve amid changing enrollment landscapes and institutional needs, these insights serve as both a roadmap for those entering the field and a reminder of shared purpose for current practitioners. We intend to replicate this survey and report every 3 years. We welcome your feedback on this one. Please direct

any questions regarding this or other AACRAO reports to Wendy Kilgore
(wendyk@aacrao.org), Senior Director of Research.

Appendix A: Position Titles

Assistant Dean of Admissions
Assistant Vice Chancellor for Admissions & Recruitment
Assistant Vice President
Assistant Vice President & Director of Admissions
Assistant Vice President for Enrollment Management
Assistant Vice President for Enrollment Management and Executive Director of Undergraduate Admissions
Assistant Vice President of Admission
Assistant Vice President of Admissions
Assistant Vice President of Enrollment
Assistant Vice President of Enrollment Management
Assistant Vice President of Enrollment Management & Dean of Admission
Assistant Vice President of Enrollment Management and Chief Enrollment Officer
Assistant Vice President, Admissions
Assistant Vice President, University Admissions and Enrollment
Assistant Vice Provost and Executive Director of Undergraduate Admissions
Assistant Vice Provost for Undergraduate Admissions
Associate Dean of Student Affairs
Associate Dean, Admissions and Records
Associate Provost for Enrollment Management
Associate Vice Chancellor and Executive Director of Admissions
Associate Vice Chancellor Enrollment Management
Associate Vice Chancellor for Enrollment
Associate Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management
Associate Vice Chancellor, Enrollment Management
Associate Vice President & Dean of Admissions
Associate Vice President for Admission & Financial Aid
Associate Vice President for Admissions
Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management
Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management and Marketing
Associate Vice President for Strategic Enrollment Management
Associate Vice President for University Admissions
Associate Vice President of Enrollment
Associate Vice President of Enrollment Management
Associate Vice President of Marketing & Enrollment Management
Associate Vice President of Strategic Enrollment

Associate Vice President, Enrollment Management, Admissions
Associate Vice Provost & Director of Admissions
Associate Vice Provost for Enrollment and Executive Director of Admissions
Associate Vice Provost, Undergraduate Admission
Associate VP - Enrollment Management
Associate VP for Enrollment–Undergraduate Admissions
Associate VP for Enrollment Management
Asst. Director of International Admissions
AVC, Enrollment Management
AVP and Dean of Admissions
AVP and Director of Admissions
AVP for Enrollment
AVP for Enrollment Management
AVP Strategic Enrollment Management
Dean of Admission
Dean of Admissions
Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid
Dean of Enrollment
Dean of Enrollment Management
Dean of Enrollment Management & Recruitment
Dean of Institutional Effectiveness and University Registrar
Dean of Strategic Recruitment Initiatives, Admissions, and Financial Aid
Dean of Student Services
Dean of Undergraduate Admission/Associate Vice President
Dean, Student Access
Dean, Undergraduate Admission & Financial Aid
Dean, Undergraduate Admissions
Director for Enrollment Management
Director for Medical School Admissions, SOM
Director of Admissions
Director of Admissions–Operations
Director of Admissions/Registrar
Director of Admissions & Enrollment Operations
Director of Admissions & Student Scholarships
Director of Admissions and Recruitment
Director of Admissions and Registrar
Director of Admissions and Student Records
Director of Admissions and Welcome Center

Director of Enrollment
Director of Enrollment & Student Success
Director of Enrollment Management
Director of Enrollment/Registrar
Director of Graduate Admissions
Director of Graduate Admissions and Programs
Director of Graduate & Undergraduate Admissions
Director of New Student Engagement/Director Jackson College Hillsdale, PDSO
Director of Recruitment and Enrollment Strategy
Director of Undergraduate Admission
Director of Undergraduate Admission and Enrollment
Director of Undergraduate Admissions
Director of Undergraduate Enrollment Management
Director of University Admissions
Director, Admissions–College of Nursing & Health Sciences
Director, Admissions, Records and Registration
Director, Enrollment Development and Admissions
Director, Recruitment & Retention
Director, Undergraduate Admissions
Director, Undergraduate Admissions & Recruitment
Enrollment Director
Executive Director–Undergraduate Admission
Executive Dean of Admissions, Enrollment and Completion
Executive Director
Executive Director of Admission
Executive Director of Admission & Enrollment Operations
Executive Director of Admissions
Executive Director of Admissions & Experiences
Executive Director of Enrollment Management
Executive Director of Graduate Admissions
Executive Director of Graduate Admissions and Marketing
Executive Director of University Admissions
Interim Assistant Vice President for Enrollment Management
Interim Associate Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Services
Interim Vice President for Enrollment Management
Interim Vice President, Enrollment Management & Student Success
Interim VP of Enrollment and Dean of Admission
Registrar & Director of Admissions

Senior Associate Vice President of Enrollment
Senior Associate Vice President for Outreach & Access
Senior Director of Admission
Senior Director of Enrollment Management College of Architecture, Art and Planning
Senior Director of Strategic Enrollment Management
Senior Director, Graduate and Professional Enrollment
Senior Vice President of Admissions
University Registrar and Executive Director of Records and Admissions
Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs
Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management
Vice Dean, Director of Admissions
Vice President–Enrollment Management & Student Success
Vice President and Dean of Admission and Student Financial Services
Vice President and Dean of Admissions
Vice President and Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid
Vice President Enrollment Management & Student Affairs
Vice President for Admission & Financial Aid
Vice President for Enrollment
Vice President for Enrollment and Academic Services
Vice President for Enrollment and External Affairs
Vice President for Enrollment & Marketing
Vice President for Enrollment & Student Affairs
Vice President for Enrollment and Student Success
Vice President for Enrollment Management
Vice President for Enrollment Management, Division of Enrollment Management
Vice President for Enrollment Services
Vice President for Enrollment/Dean of Admission
Vice President for Strategic Enrollment
Vice President for Strategic Enrollment Management
Vice President Marketing & Enrollment Management
Vice President of Enrollment
Vice President of Enrollment Management
Vice President of Enrollment Management + Marketing
Vice President of Enrollment Management and Partnerships
Vice President of Enrollment Management and Student Experience
Vice President of Enrollment Services
Vice President of Marketing & Enrollment Management
Vice President of Undergraduate Admissions

Vice President, Enrollment Management
Vice President, Strategic Enrollment Management
Vice President, Undergraduate Enrollment/Dean of Admission
Vice Provost & VP of Enrollment Management, Admissions, and Financial Aid
Vice Provost for Enrollment Management
VP for Admissions and Financial Aid
VP for Enrollment
VP for Enrollment Management/Registrar
VP of Enrollment Management
VP of Enrollment Management & Marketing
VP, Admissions and Outreach

Appendix B: Personal Essays

My Path to the CAdO Position

Ginger Fay
VP of Enrollment Management
Oglethorpe University, Brookhaven, Georgia

Do you remember what you wanted to be when you grew up? It was probably something like a doctor or a pilot or maybe a firefighter . . . something visually identifiable by the uniform these professionals wear. It's the kind of thing that makes for a good Halloween costume.

I was an aspiring ballerina/dentist as a preschooler. But by the time I was a senior in high school, I had my sights set on something different. Something most people didn't even know was a job. Believe it or not, I have wanted to work in college admissions since I was 17.

I have been in this field now for over 30 years, and I have yet to meet anyone else who could utter that sentence. But it's true. The summer after my junior year in high school, I went on the "College Trip" with my parents. We drove from our home in North Carolina to my cousin's wedding in New Hampshire and back. We stopped at every accredited 4-year institution any of us had heard of along the way. I came home without a real sense of where I wanted to go to college, but I did know that when I grew up, I wanted to be like those smart, interesting, fun admissions officers I met on the trip.

I believe part of it was I wanted to be as enthusiastic about my school as they were about theirs. But another part is that as a teenage Gen Xer, it felt like few people were listening to me, but I knew then what I have found to be true ever since. Young people have a particularly interesting perspective on the world.

The admissions officers I met on that trip were among the few adults who really listened to what I had to say. By the time we got back home, I decided that's what I wanted to be. An adult who listens to young people. And I still am.

So, I went to Duke University, an hour from home and did my best to create a "preadmissions officer" pathway for myself. At Duke, I majored in psychology with a focus on adolescent development. I volunteered as a tour guide and ran the learner portion of the orientation program that enabled me to bug the Dean of Admissions until he gave me a job, which he did. Thanks, Christoph Guttentag!

Landing my dream job at 22, I did all I could to develop myself professionally because limited funds were available for conferences in those days. I asked tons of questions of my colleagues on joint travel with other colleges. I think I can still do the presentations

for Harvard, Georgetown and Penn just as well as I ever did Duke's. I practiced being a manager on the learner volunteers who reported to me. I said yes to every high-school counselor who asked me to present at their school. (I was on repeat on cable news in the suburbs west of Chicago for the better part of a year.) I volunteered for travel outside of my market, which helped me land my first job on the high-school side, at Phillips Academy, in Andover, Massachusetts.

When I was offered the job at Andover, I was reluctant to leave Duke, where I had spent nearly a decade and earned two degrees. Laura Sellers, then the Senior Associate Director of Admissions, told me, "Christoph and I have taught you everything we can," so off I went.

Being on the faculty at Andover taught me more than I even knew I had to learn. At a boarding school, you get other jobs in addition to the one you thought you got hired for. Between living in a dorm, coaching the women's varsity swim team and shepherding 77 seniors through the process, I found myself with a much deeper understanding of adolescent development and the difference I was able to make in the life of a young person.

Having made the move from "receiving to shipping," I stayed on what we often call "the other side of the desk" for much of the next two decades, including stints at Sidwell Friends School, Atlanta International School and The New School, a start-up progressive high school in Atlanta.

I also built a successful independent college-counseling practice. Many admissions folks make the switch to college counseling. The pay is better, travel is minimal and the calendar is especially appealing for working parents like me. For 20 years, I was happy on the high-school side of things. But as my children embarked on their own college journeys, I knew I wanted to do something that doesn't happen as often as the admissions-to-counseling jump. I wanted to go back to the college side.

Despite years of advising young people on their academic and professional journeys, I wasn't sure how to make the return to my dream job a reality. Then my husband gave me the advice he often heard me doling out, "Why don't you go back to school?" So, I launched another college search, some 30+ years after my first one, and applied to the Executive Ed.D. program at the University of Georgia.

Being a learner again at midlife has required a lot of humility and compromise, but I have loved every minute. This included the ones in the middle of the night which often seemed to be the only time I could get the quiet I needed to complete my dissertation.

I have never been far from the college side of things, but studying at the McBee Institute of Higher Ed allowed me to put myself firmly back on the other side of the desk, intellectually and professionally. This gave me the expertise and confidence I needed to

land the job I now hold as Vice President of Enrollment Management at Oglethorpe University.

When I was a *green dean*, as new admissions officers are sometimes called, Duke sent me to Dry Run, a training program hosted by the Southern Association for College Admission Counseling (SACAC). That year, it was held at Oglethorpe, so returning here all these years later has been a full-circle moment for me. Oglethorpe is a special place for young people to learn and grow. I feel so fortunate to be able to share this opportunity with learners. Just the other day, I got to do something I never knew I would get to do. I signed the first letter of admission we issued for the Class of 2030.

There may not be a Halloween costume for this job, but it is a treat for sure.

From FAFSA Chaos to Record Enrollment: A Look at the CAdO Role at Belmont University

Chris Gage, Ph.D.

Vice President for Enrollment Services

Belmont University, Nashville, Tennessee

The quiet hum of Nashville's early hours sets the tone for my day. By the time I'm up, my high-school senior is already preparing to leave the house for early morning swim practice. As a former college swimmer, I know the grind well and rise early to show her my support. My younger daughter is a competitive dancer, having traded the pool for the dance studio some years ago. Her discipline is no less intense; she spends hours each week building her physical and emotional strength.

For years, I left handwritten quotes in hopes of inspiring them always to give the day their best. These days, with packed schedules, they get my "cheesy" messages as texts, instead. They sometimes laugh, but for me, the practice is intentional, a reminder to begin the day with purpose and gratitude.

Today, that same discipline shapes how I approach my professional life. Swimming taught me to live by the numbers: splits, intervals and times were always top of mind. Without the size advantage of many competitors, I relied on grit, focus and knowledge, discovering my true strength came from both individual effort and the support of my teammates.

Those lessons continue to guide me as Belmont's Vice President for Enrollment Services, where a critical 85% of the university's revenue depends on tuition. This reality sharpens every decision I make. I see each inquiry, application and deposit as a data point and a learner's story. We count every learner, and every learner counts. Most important, I continue to surround myself with good teammates who hold themselves to the highest standards of professionalism and who share a deep commitment to Belmont's mission.

Reading the Numbers

I start each morning with coffee and dashboard reports. Numbers are visual facts, clues to a larger puzzle. Applications, visits, deposits, FAFSA filers, scholarships, discounting, registrations—I study them all. Surprises are the enemy in enrollment work. While reports might seem routine, I find comfort in their predictability. Today's Early Action applications and visits are trending up, which is a relief. But feeder markets in California and Illinois are lagging, which I flag for later discussion with Belmont's Executive Director of Admissions.

Weathering the FAFSA Storm

Not every cycle is smooth. Last year's FAFSA crisis was a defining test. Federal delays and errors left families anxious and without answers. My inbox turned into a triage center as we rebuilt communication plans in real time. I explained the inexplicable, often to parents in tears. Our financial-services team worked late nights and weekends to test, package and release financial aid. In the end, we managed to reduce discounting and increase net tuition revenue, but with only 54% of admits filing FAFSA, down from a typical 70%, we missed on headcount. It was a year unlike any other.

Meetings, Missions and Momentum

By 9:00 a.m., I'm meeting with our enrollment leadership team, working through our transition to a two-tier Early Action model. It's more than a policy shift; it's a market signal that we are intentional and learner-focused.

Midmorning is dedicated to graduate enrollment and financial-aid strategy, where math meets mission. Every tenth of a percent in our discount rate carries weight. After a quick desk lunch and midday prayer at Gabhart Chapel, I shift to collaboration. I have a walking meeting with a colleague from Education Innovation on expanding online learning and a conversation with another colleague from Honors about evolving into a full college to strengthen recruitment power. These moments remind me that enrollment is the bridge between institutional vision and reality.

The afternoon brings strategy on international recruitment with faculty and staff who've traveled abroad, followed by a review of marketing campaigns. Belmont's Christ-centered mission and values of character, creativity and innovation, along with our investment in learner success, must come through clearly. In a crowded marketplace, standing out in ways that matter is essential.

Before heading home, I stop by our admissions welcome center to check on the day's tours. If families are still in the lobby, I make it a point to thank them personally for visiting Belmont. It's important that prospective families feel our genuine care and attention.

From Pressure to Payoff

This year, pressure has come with reward. We rebounded from the FAFSA chaos with record graduate enrollment, a 2% increase in total enrollment since fall 2024 and a 10% increase since 2020. This fall's census marks the largest enrollment in Belmont's history. Those numbers are more than statistics; they represent hundreds of learners who chose us and a promise fulfilled to the institution we serve.

As the workday ends, the drive home gives me time to reflect on the day's meetings and look forward to an evening spent catching up with my family. Soon enough, a new day

begins, another opportunity to rise early and send my daughters a reminder for us all to live our lives with purpose and gratitude.

My Path to the CAdO Position

Jeffrey E. Pierce, II
Director of Undergraduate Admissions & Recruitment
Florida A&M University, Tallahassee, Florida

When I think about my journey to becoming a chief admissions officer, I realize it has been anything but straightforward. It hasn't been a clean ladder of promotions or carefully mapped steps. Instead, it has been a winding path filled with unexpected turns, steep learning curves and lessons I often had to learn the hard way.

Shortly after graduating from college and a disappointing tryout that ended my dream of playing professional baseball, I found myself, somewhat ironically, selling used cars. It wasn't the path I wanted, but in the short time I worked as a salesman, I learned how to listen authentically, build trust and communicate value. These skills are essential to my work in higher education.

Four months later, my alma mater invited me to interview for an admissions-counselor position. On my lunch break, I printed my résumé and walked into the Director of Admissions' office, determined to change my story. By the following Monday, I had the job. On October 27, 2010, I entered a profession that would change my life.

The next 15 years was not an easy climb. I served as a counselor, director and later as an assistant vice president across both undergraduate and graduate admissions. I quickly learned that leadership in this field is rarely smooth. At almost every institution there came a moment, usually around the 6-month mark, when I wanted to leave. The challenges felt overwhelming: limited resources, broken processes and pressure to deliver results. In one role, I lost four recruiters in a single month. In another, I tried to push change too quickly and faced resistance. With little exposure to structured leadership models, I often learned on the fly. I stumbled, made mistakes and questioned whether I was truly cut out for this profession. Yet in each role, I learned lessons about resilience, patience and prioritization.

KIPP Jacksonville Public Schools became a turning point in my career. Leading the KIPP Forward program stretched me in ways that permanently reshaped my leadership skills. I learned to slow down, focus on what mattered most and build momentum one step at a time. I came to understand that change management is less about speed and more about sequencing, communication and trust.

At KIPP, I developed the ability to think strategically, codify work streams and intentionally shape culture. Just as important, I gained a deeper understanding that learner success is not defined by admissions metrics alone but by persistence, access and the creation of systems of support. That base continues to serve as the foundation for my leadership.

Of course, none of this journey would have been possible without my family. This career demands time, travel and sacrifice. There were months when I lived apart from my wife and kids, relying on extended family for support. There were countless activities I missed—games, school events and dinners at home. To balance it, I've had to be intentional about family time, making breaks sacred and ensuring that when I am present, I am truly present. My family's sacrifices made my journey possible, and their support has been my anchor.

Just as my family sustained me personally, mentors sustained me professionally. Seasoned leaders invested in me by guiding, challenging and sharing wisdom to help me navigate difficult seasons and grow into leadership. They helped me slow down when I wanted to move too quickly, encouraged me to think strategically when I was caught in the weeds and reminded me to persist when doubt crept in. One mentor, in particular, taught me more in a single year than I had learned in the previous 10. Their influence steadied me in moments of doubt and modeled the kind of support I now aspire to provide to others.

Today, as I sit in the role of Director of Undergraduate Admissions & Recruitment at Florida A&M, a public land-grant HBCU with a national brand, I feel both prepared and humbled. The frustrations I once thought might break me—losing staff, building systems from scratch and facing resistance to change—have prepared me for this moment. I know now how to weather storms, how to keep learners at the center and how to build structures that last beyond a single recruitment cycle.

Much like the game of baseball I once dreamed of playing professionally, this work requires resilience, patience and strategy. Though my path has been unconventional, the lessons remain the same—stay grounded, trust the process and always keep your eye on the bigger picture.

My Journey in Admissions

Jennifer Sandoval

Vice President for Admission and Financial Aid

Claremont McKenna College, Claremont, California

My journey into the world of enrollment began when I was introduced to the profession by a sorority sister. Based on her experience as an admission officer, she felt it might be ideally suited to me. That conversation served as the springboard for me to pursue a career in the admissions profession, leading to my current role as Vice President of Admission and Financial Aid at Claremont McKenna College.

My first admission job was at the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California. I was hired as an admission office coordinator, which then led to five different admission positions at two schools before being appointed Vice President at Claremont McKenna College. My profession is a significant part of my life's purpose. As I reflect on what has made my professional match phenomenal, I believe three factors are critical to my sustained fulfillment.

- College transforms lives and those of future generations. My work centers on the critical point where it begins. The college search-and-admission process energizes me for the day and propels me forward, reinforcing that the challenges are worth addressing.
- My 25 years of experience in this profession empower me to distill a highly nuanced process and opaque, vast landscape to many, into a way constituents can begin to understand the more complex dynamics of the enrollment ecosystem.
- The challenges I face vacillate between momentary and monumental. The response mechanics are the same. A professional must understand how we arrived at this point, what needs to be solved or resolved and how we can move forward to implement a plan, program or policy that is thoughtful, intentional and sustainable that aligns with the institutional mission.

My journey here has been a blend of self-doubt and conviction in my work, along with the effort to be the best version of myself. I achieved all I wanted in life—parenting, professional and personal fulfillment—but it came with compromise at various turns and inflection points. However, it was what I wanted at the time, and I found purpose in each of those roles.

Through the years, I learned a great deal about myself and my profession. I have worked many long hours, had a lot of fun and have worked with teams of extraordinary colleagues and supporters.

When I began my professional career, few women at my level in the profession were also mothers. Several women have approached me and shared that they had seen me do it. Because of my achievements, they knew it was possible. I take pride in that.

Through years of hard work, I have come to understand the importance of being present in the room, speaking up, and ensuring others have the necessary information about my division to ask informed questions and collaborate on solving today's challenges while strategizing for the future. I have learned the importance of listening and leaning into bringing my personal and professional selves to my work, in comparison to siloing my professional self.

I have gleaned a few insights along the way.

- Take at least an annual opportunity to reflect, understand where you are, what got you there, where you want to go, and how you will get there. This principle applies to all areas of your life, including personal, professional, and financial aspects.
- Know who you are, beyond the title. I'm still working on this because my work has long been a stabilizing force in my life.
- Know your why, that you are a subject-matter expert. Let that knowledge drive you to meet your goals, serve your institution and constituents, and be relentless in solving challenges through collaboration.

Upward and onward. Another season awaits.

Chief Admissions Officer – From Listening to Action

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“Thank you for your time today and especially for listening to me about my situation,” the visitor stated, as she began to leave our office. As I opened the door, I let her know my appreciation for considering our institution for her graduate studies. As she walked out of the office, she looked at me and made a final statement with a smile, “I’m going to apply tonight.”

I bounded back upstairs to my office, lightened and exhilarated with the knowledge I truly helped someone today. It all began with an intentional action on my part 30 minutes earlier—listening. This is often an overlooked skillset in our industry. We are constantly hammered with questions from prospective learners, families, faculty, staff and counselors who all need us to articulate a “features and benefits” pitch as to why someone should attend our university. We often minimize the importance of first knowing our audience and actively listening to their questions and/or concerns before verbalizing our response.

Recruitment in the higher-education industry is littered with counselors having prescribed responses or elevator speeches that can be delivered to a prospective learner or group about what makes their school stand out. But in the process, we’re missing the entire point of what is foundational to an admissions office—building a trusting relationship with a prospective learner. This can only stem from exhibiting active listening skills and personalizing our approach, based upon the concerns expressed and information given.

As a kid, I remember my mom asking me, “I know you hear me, but are you listening?” What she was really asking me was if I was paying attention to what mattered and not daydreaming about going out with my friends or racing my BMX bike.

In over 25 years of experience in enrollment management, it is this concept I evangelize to our new admission counselors to ensure that before they speak with a prospective learner and their family, they take the time to listen. And not simply hearing, but maintaining eye contact, a slight nod of the head in understanding, standing or sitting attentively to show we are interested in hearing about their concerns. Then—and only then—can we tailor a response to address their questions and build a foundation of trust, which is foundational to a healthy, future relationship.

We live in a culture of TikTok, Instagram and Reelz using algorithms that give us curated content of what we want to see or hear. But if we are going to cultivate relationships with prospective learners and their families, we have to be able to empathize with them. We must listen to issues or concerns that push us in ways to become better servants. This starts with listening.

So how do we cultivate these types of relationships with prospective learners and families in a way that helps us empathize and create trust? Below are some starting points.

Be intentional—Maintain eye contact, and sit attentively. Smile! You never know what kind of day someone is having. By being friendly, you may earn another friend.

Practice, practice, practice—Go home and practice active listening skills with your spouse or kids. Careful on the latter because you may receive unfiltered, honest feedback.

Ditch the technology—Don't glance at your phone or computer when interacting with someone. People want authenticity when speaking with you. Nothing says "I'm not interested" or "I'm bored" more than glancing at your phone or smartwatch.

Here's my challenge to admissions professionals. Ask yourself daily if you are simply hearing or are you truly listening? This applies to your team members, too. This first act can help create empathy leading to trust, enabling us to better serve each other.

Ab audiendo, ad serviendum—From listening to serving.

The Most Rewarding Part of My Job as a CAdO

Luis Caloca

Dean, learner Access

College of Western Idaho, Nampa, Idaho

The most rewarding part of my job is having the influence and authority to design processes and procedures that benefit both learners and staff. I applied to college very late in the year, and if individuals had not intervened on my behalf, I may not have started college at all. That experience taught me how easy it is for someone to fall through the cracks. Because of that, I deeply value our focus on improving the learner experience. That's how I lead my teams.

I have been with my institution going on 17 years, nearly since its inception. During my time here, to help improve a learner's experience, I have:

- cofounded a statewide healthcare and technology careers conference to encourage learners to pursue careers in these fields
- implemented learner-feeder pipelines through community organizations and businesses to facilitate learner access
- implemented a customer-relationship management system to streamline the admissions experience
- supported a team in creating the Latinx Scholars Program, which served as a pilot for institutionwide learner-success initiatives
- mentored and supported countless staff members in developing their skills and advancing into other roles across the institution
- built multiple admissions applications, each more refined than the last
- secured consistent, regularly scheduled weekly training time
- developed a rubric to include GED scores in our scholarship-awarding process
- assisted a team in developing a process to award credit to GED Honors learners
- created Spanish-language materials and incorporated translation services at commencement
- helped integrate Basic Skills and ESL learners into our student information system to provide access to bus passes and other benefits
- designed and supported programming to help learners progress through the admissions funnel

I'm proud of the many efforts I have been a part of. One added benefit of this work is collaborating with staff who, like me, have been here for many years. There has never been a dull moment as we have worked together to tackle emerging issues. For those

who value the transformative power of higher education, serving as Chief Admissions Officer is not only a challenge, but an incredibly rewarding opportunity.