



Results of the October 2025 60-Second Survey

Office of Admissions Staffing

The State of Staffing, Skills Gaps and Succession Planning



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Contents

[What This Benchmark Reveals](#)

[Definition of Admissions in this Context](#)

[The Organizational Structure](#)

[The Scope of Admissions: What Offices Actually Do](#)

[The Staffing Numbers](#)

[The Workload Reality](#)

[Full-Time Staff Devoted to Undergraduate Admissions](#)

[Part-Time Staff in Undergraduate Admissions](#)

[Full-Time Staff Devoted to Graduate/Professional Admissions](#)

[Part-Time Staff in Graduate/Professional Admissions](#)

[Remote Work Options](#)

[Compensation](#)

[The Staffing Challenges](#)

[The Skills Gap](#)

[The Succession Planning Challenge](#)

[How AACRAO Can Help](#)

Admissions offices across higher education are navigating multiple simultaneous challenges. The demographic cliff, evolving technology demands and increasingly complex learner needs are reshaping the admissions landscape. At the same time, admissions leaders are having to address staffing needs, identify critical skill gaps and make succession plans.

In October 2025, a 60-second survey was sent to admissions professionals at higher education institutions in the United States. It asked these professionals to share information about their admissions staffing structures, responsibilities, current challenges and future concerns. We received 270 institutional responses. Among those, 158 serve undergraduate learners, 20 serve graduate and/or professional learners and 92 serve both populations. We intend to repeat this survey every three years to support the [Chief Admissions Officer Career-Profile Report](#).

What This Benchmark Reveals

This staffing benchmark reveals what appear to be systemic challenges in admissions staffing. Offices may manage a dozen or more processes with teams averaging 18 full-time staff members. Data also show that among more than half of respondents, the following are among the current staffing challenges: a limited budget for competitive salaries (65%), a lack of career laddering or promotion opportunities (56%), and staff burnout (54%). These top challenges are followed by concerns about high turnover rates (45%) and difficulty recruiting qualified candidates (42%).

In this environment, non-competitive salary structures likely contribute to turnover, turnover erodes institutional knowledge, knowledge loss likely increases workload on remaining staff and overwork contributes to burnout. Burnout may drive more turnover, which continues the cycle.

Meanwhile, among the 63% of institutions with concerns specifically about knowledge transfer and succession planning, respondents note that critical institutional knowledge exists in just a few individuals' heads at 81% of those institutions, 58% note a lack of process documentation and 48% have limited cross-training opportunities.

Definition of Admissions Unit and Functional Models

For the purposes of this report, an *admissions unit* is defined as “responsible for the functions necessary to process an application and admit a new learner.” Admissions functions are structured in three ways: centralized, decentralized, or a hybrid of the two.

- **Centralized**

A single unit is responsible for managing and coordinating all aspects of a function. The unit handles all technology management and data input and may gather information from other sources. Policy development related to the function also resides within this single unit.

- **Decentralized**

The function is distributed across all processes, including data entry, technology use and policy development. For example, different academic departments or colleges may make their own admissions decisions, with little to no input from other administrative or academic units.

- **Hybrid**

This model involves a combination of centralized and decentralized practices. Management of the function is shared between a central unit and various academic departments or colleges.

The Organizational Structure

In this sample, 59% of institutions serve undergraduate learners only, 7% serve graduate and/or professional learners only and 34% serve both learner populations.

Centralization is dominant for undergraduate-serving admissions; 80% of institutions serving this population use a single coordinated unit. In contrast, graduate and professional-serving admissions show greater variation; 54% use a hybrid model that shares management between central units and academic departments. This difference may reflect the more specialized nature of graduate and/or professional programs, in which academic departments need greater involvement in admissions decisions.

For Undergraduate Admissions:

- **80%** use a centralized model
- **19%** use a hybrid model
- **1%** use a decentralized model

For Graduate and/or Professional Admissions:

- **54%** use a hybrid model
- **32%** use a centralized model
- **13%** use a decentralized model

The Scope of Admissions: What Offices Actually Do

We gave respondents a list of 24 functions and asked which ones their admissions teams are responsible for. The results reveal just how much responsibility is on the plates of many admissions professionals. See Table 1 on the next page.



Table 1: Scope of responsibilities by learner population served

Function	Undergraduate	Graduate and/or Professional
Application processing	95%	94%
New-learner recruitment	89%	76%
Campus visits (in-person and/or virtual)	85%	60%
Territory management	74%	36%
International admission	73%	57%
Yield management	72%	52%
Readmit processing	65%	58%
Target-market identification	61%	41%
Nondegree admission	60%	48%
Evaluation and analysis of marketing and recruitment effectiveness	59%	42%
Enrollment reporting	58%	57%
Managing technology solutions	58%	39%
Dual-enrollment admission	55%	10%
Ad-hoc reporting and research	51%	42%
Budget development	51%	30%
SEM plan development	48%	30%
Related website development and maintenance	48%	28%
Marketing and communications	46%	37%
Social-media posting and management	40%	24%
Transfer-credit evaluation	36%	25%
Residency determination	36%	28%
Orientation	24%	24%
Credit-for-prior-learning evaluation	13%	15%
Veterans' education certification and reporting	7%	7%
Other function(s)	7%	5%

The Blurred Lines

Some admissions offices also handle registration and registrar-related services in a dual role.

- **16%** of undergraduate admissions offices are also responsible for registration and registrar-related services
- **13%** of graduate/professional admissions offices are also responsible for registration and registrar-related services

The Staffing Numbers

When considering the scope of responsibilities against staffing levels, the workload picture becomes clearer—and concerning. The average undergraduate admissions office with 18 full-time staff is responsible for many functions, often simultaneously, as noted in Table 1. They manage these functions with teams that range from lean (averaging 8 staff at institutions with fewer than 1,000 learners) to more robust (averaging 38 staff at institutions with more than 20,000 learners). Graduate and/or professional admissions offices are leaner than undergraduate admissions offices, with an average of six full-time staff members.

There is a wide range in staffing (1 to 125 for undergraduate, 0 to 124 for graduate and/or professional). This range highlights that while some institutions have robust teams, others operate with lean staffing, often still responsible for the same breadth of functions.

Full-Time Staff Devoted to Undergraduate Admissions

Respondents were asked to indicate how many full-time employees, hourly or salaried, are primarily responsible for undergraduate-admissions functions. *Primarily responsible* was defined as “representing 50% or more of their time on an annual basis.” Tables 2 through 5 offer full-time staffing values by institutional characteristics.

Table 2: Full-time staff devoted to undergraduate admissions by institution size

Size	Mean	Range	Count
Under 1,000	8	1-70	24
1,000 to 4,999	12	1-31	103
5,000 to 9,999	16	5-50	50
10,000 to 19,999	25	6-80	38
20,000 or more	38	0-125	34

Table 3: Full-time staff devoted to undergraduate admissions by institution type

Type	Mean	Range	Count
2 years (lower division only)	9	1-70	51
4 years (undergraduate)	17	1-125	39
4+ years (undergrad and/or grad/prof)	21	0-103	157
2 years (upper division only)	7	n/a	1

Table 4: Full-time staff devoted to undergraduate admissions by institution control

Control	Mean	Range	Count
Public	18	1-103	147
Private, not-for-profit	16	1-80	99
Private, for-profit	36	0-125	4

Table 5: Full-time staff devoted to undergraduate admissions by learner population served

Control	Mean	Range	Count
Undergraduate only	17	1-94	158
Both learner populations	19	0-125	92

Part-Time Staff in Undergraduate Admissions

Among the 234 institutions reporting the number of part-time staff associated with undergraduate admissions, the average number of part-time staff is six, with a range of 0 to 200. The wide range and high standard deviation (17) reveal significant variation in how institutions use part-time staff.

Full-Time Staff Devoted to Graduate/Professional Admissions

Among institutions that serve graduate and/or professional learners, the mean number of full-time employees for admissions functions is six, with a range of 0 to 124 and a standard deviation of 13. Tables 6 through 9 offer details by institutional characteristics.

Table 6: Full-time staff devoted to graduate and/or professional admissions by institution size

Size	Mean	Range	Count
Under 1,000	3	1-8	19
1,000 to 4,999	5	1-26	52
5,000 to 9,999	5	0-15	15
10,000 to 19,999	5	0-31	16
20,000 or more	16	0-124	13

Table 7: Full-time staff devoted to graduate and/or professional admissions by institution type

Type	Mean	Range	Count
4+ years (undergrad and/or grad/prof)	6	0-124	95
1+ years (grad and/or prof only)	5	1-11	9

Table 8: Full-time staff devoted to graduate and/or professional admissions by institution control

Control	Mean	Range	Count
Public	4	0-22	45
Private, not-for-profit	6	1-31	57
Private, for-profit	36	0-124	4

Table 9: Full-time staff devoted to graduate and/or professional admissions by learner population served

Control	Mean	Range	Count
Graduate and/or professional only	5	1-20	20
Both learner populations	6	0-124	86

Part-Time Staff in Graduate/Professional Admissions

Among the 95 institutions reporting the number of part-time staff associated with graduate and/or professional admissions, the mean number of part-time staff is one, with a range of zero to six.

Remote-Work Options

The pandemic changed many things about work expectations, including remote-work options. Institutions reporting a centralized or hybrid functional model for admissions were asked to share remote-work options. Admissions offices have adapted with varying philosophies.

Remote-Work Options for Undergraduate Admissions

- **84%** of undergraduate admissions offices offer one or more remote-work options; 16% do not.

Note: Respondents could select multiple options; percentages reflect the proportion of institutions offering each type of arrangement among the 84% with remote-work options.

- **43%** occasional remote work (remote work available on an as-needed or limited basis)
- **36%** remote-work options vary by role
- **33%** hybrid remote work (combination of remote and in-office work, such as 2 to 3 days remote per week)
- **11%** full-time remote work (work from home/remote location 5 days per week)
- **4%** other arrangements

When respondents selected "other" to describe their remote-work arrangements, a more complex picture emerged. These customized arrangements include the following:

- one day per week remote work (often Fridays only)
- staggered Friday remote schedules across the team
- geographically distributed recruiters classified as "remote," but their primary work is in-person engagement in their territory
- regional representatives work full-time remote, while campus-based staff work on-site
- grandfathered arrangements for legacy employees while new hires have no remote-work options
- manager discretion for occasional remote work on a case-by-case basis
- hybrid models in which a subset of the team, such as seven of 25 staff, work fully remote, while others are fully on-campus
- "as schedule permits" flexibility without formal policies

Remote-Work Options for Graduate/Professional Admissions

- 84% of graduate and/or professional learner-serving institutions offer one or more remote-work options;16% do not.

Note: Respondents could select multiple options; percentages reflect the proportion of institutions offering each type of arrangement among the 84% with remote-work options.

- **34%** hybrid remote work (combination of remote and in-office work, such as 2 to 3 days remote per week)
- **21%** occasional remote work (remote work available on an as-needed or limited basis)
- **15%** remote-work options vary by role
- **13%** full-time remote work (work from home/remote location 5 days per week)
- **2%** other arrangements

Compensation

The salary picture is sobering:

- 48% of institutions report annual entry-level admissions salaries below \$45,000
- 10% pay less than \$35,000

Entry-Level Salary Ranges

- **10%** Under \$35,000
- **38%** \$35,000-\$44,999
- **31%** \$45,000-\$54,999
- **13%** \$55,000-\$64,999
- **5%** \$65,000-\$74,000
- **1%** \$75,000+
- **3%** Don't know/unsure

Institutions with low entry-level salaries may struggle to compete with corporate entry-level positions in similar fields, such as marketing, customer service and data analysis, especially in higher cost-of-living areas.

The Staffing Challenges

We asked admissions leaders to identify current staffing challenges. Results paint a picture of an industry under stress; 95% report one or more staffing challenges.

The top three challenges—limited budget for competitive salaries (65%), lack of career laddering (56%) and staff burnout (54%)—reveal a systemic problem. These are not isolated issues; they're interconnected. Low salaries make recruitment difficult and turnover inevitable. Lack of career advancement means talented staff leave or stagnate. Burnout results when overworked teams lack resources and see no path forward.

Top Staffing Challenges

- **65%** limited budget for competitive salaries
- **56%** lack of career laddering or promotion opportunities
- **54%** staff burnout
- **45%** high turnover rates
- **42%** difficulty recruiting qualified candidates
- **25%** seasonal workload management
- **19%** inability to offer remote or flexible/hybrid work options
- **7%** other challenges

Five percent of respondents selected "none of the above," which reveals 95% of admissions offices face at least one staffing challenge. The prevalence of burnout (54%) is particularly concerning for both service quality and staff well-being.

Other challenges reported by respondents reveal context-specific barriers that standard surveys do not capture, such as geographic isolation, institutional-budget volatility, internal campus competition for talent, the accelerated pace of change in enrollment management and lack of motivated staff.

The Skills Gap

Today's admissions professionals need to be customer service experts, data analysts, digital marketers, technology experts and learner counselors—often simultaneously. We asked respondents to identify their three most critical skill gaps. Only 7% report no critical skills gaps, meaning 93% of admissions offices recognize meaningful skills gaps in their team's capabilities.

The 93% with recognized skills gaps picked the following three from a list of 12 as their most pressing skills needs.

- **47%** advanced data analytics
- **33%** process improvement/efficiency
- **27%** strategic planning

In an era in which enrollment management increasingly depends on predictive modeling, yield analysis and data-driven decision making, nearly half of admissions teams lack the analytic skills to do this work effectively.

The following skills gaps have also been identified.

- **26%** AI literacy and implementation
- **23%** technology proficiency
- **23%** staff supervision/team leadership
- **18%** communication/presentation skills
- **17%** digital-marketing expertise
- **16%** project management
- **12%** familiarity with an institution's curricular offerings
- **10%** learner counseling/advising
- **6%** other

“Other” responses reveal gaps in technical and interpersonal skills. These include implementation fluency with newer CRM systems, critical thinking outside provided guidelines, basic professionalism and work ethic, reliability, and willingness to engage with prospective learners via phone or in person.

The Challenge of Succession Planning

Perhaps the most existential question facing admissions offices is: ***What happens when experienced staff leave?***

Are You Concerned about Succession Planning?

As noted earlier, 63% of admissions leaders are concerned about succession planning, and their specific concerns reveal why. The overwhelming issue is critical knowledge held by few individuals, as expressed by 81% of those concerned. This means the expertise needed to run admissions effectively exists in just one or two people's heads. When they leave—whether through retirement, resignation or promotion—that knowledge walks out the door.

- **63%** Yes, we're concerned about succession planning
- **37%** No, we're not concerned

The Primary Concerns

Twenty-three percent cite key staff nearing retirement as a primary concern. However, for 81% of respondents, the more pressing concern is knowledge concentration. It's not just about aging workforce demographics. It's about how knowledge is currently managed (or not managed). The combination of knowledge concentration (81%), lack of documentation (58%) and limited cross-training (48%), creates a succession-planning failure point waiting to happen. In addition, limited cross-training opportunities at 48% of the institutions in this sample mean many staff do not learn adjacent roles or backup responsibilities.

Concerns related to succession planning

- **81%** critical knowledge held by few individuals
- **58%** lack of documentation of processes
- **48%** limited cross-training opportunities
- **23%** key staff nearing retirement
- **7%** other concerns

The 7% of respondents who shared "other" concerns reveal succession planning is not only about documenting processes or cross-training for known retirements. It may be further complicated by staff disengagement, inadequate leadership development, constant turnover creating frequent transitions and a rapidly evolving regulatory environment.

How AACRAO Can Help

We asked respondents how AACRAO can assist with admissions-staffing challenges. Their responses reveal what professionals need most.

Professional Development

The most frequently mentioned need is professional-development opportunities, with specific requests for the following:

- skills-based training in data analytics, AI implementation and technology proficiency (addressing the top skill gaps identified)
- leadership development and supervision training for staff moving into management roles
- career-progression guidance for admissions counselors 3 to 5 years into their roles
- training on admissions-specific challenges and best practices
- affordable or low-cost options that do not require extensive travel
- remote and accessible learning opportunities

Research and Benchmarking

Respondents want data to inform decisions and make the case to leadership. They seek:

- salary benchmarking data broken down by region, institution type and cost of living¹
- staffing ratios and workload benchmarking
- best-practices research on admissions operations

¹ Note: [CUPAHR](#) collects salary data on a regular basis and AACRAO defers to their analyses on this topic.

- recommendations for learner-to-staff ratios (similar to financial-aid standards)
- access to survey results and comparative data

Resources and Tools

Practical tools and templates are sought. Respondents want details on:

- standard operating procedure (SOP) documentation templates
- job-description and duty templates
- competency matrices showing skills needed for various position levels
- cross-training structure recommendations
- succession-planning frameworks
- process-documentation guides

Networking and Community

Professionals want connection with peers. They request facts about:

- opportunities to share challenges anonymously and to receive feedback
- networking events specifically for newer professionals
- fireside chats and informal knowledge sharing
- communities of practice focused on specific challenges
- mentorship opportunities

Advocacy

Multiple respondents requested AACRAO's voice in:

- advocating for reform and deeper respect for the complexity of admissions work
- helping educate senior leadership about staffing needs and challenges
- marketing the admissions profession to attract talent
- creating national recognition, such as certification programs, for admissions expertise

Currently Available AACRAO Resources

Professional Development

Need to build critical skills your team is missing?

Explore [AACRAO's professional development programs](#), including courses on data analytics for enrollment management, technology implementation and leadership development for admissions professionals.

- [Core Concepts of SEM \(on-demand\)](#)
- [Managing and Leading an Admissions Office \(on-demand\)](#)
- [Admissions Counselor/Recruiter \(online faculty-led\)](#)

Ready to build strategic enrollment management expertise?

Consider [AACRAO's Strategic Enrollment Management Endorsement Program](#), designed for practitioners seeking to enhance their strategic planning capabilities.

Consulting and Strategic Support

Need help addressing staffing challenges or building sustainable structures?

[AACRAO Consulting](#) works with institutions to develop competitive-compensation structures, improve operational efficiency and create succession planning frameworks. Contact consulting@aacrao.org.

Research and Benchmarking

Looking for benchmark data to support your case to leadership?

Access previous [AACRAO research reports](#), including career-profile reports.

Community and Networking

Want to connect with peers facing similar challenges?

Join conversations in the [AACRAO Exchange Community](#) at exchange.aacrao.org. Share what's working at your institution, and learn from colleagues nationwide.

AACRAO Publications

Check [AACRAO's publications](#) for practical tools and best practices.

Higher Ed Policy Central

Want to compare your admissions policies with other institutions?

The Higher Ed Policy Central sponsored by CollegeSource and currently hosted on the AACRAO website, enables you to explore the policies at over a thousand institutions.²

Questions?

Contact Wendy Kilgore, AACRAO Senior Director of Research: wendyk@aacrao.org

² *Note: Access to this resource is currently free for AACRAO members but will transition to a paid subscription service hosted by College Source in the near future.*