

ApplyTexas Strategic Planning and Assessment Survey

Introduction

In partnership with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the ApplyTexas Advisory Committee has set a goal to strengthen and enhance the ApplyTexas application. The ApplyTexas Strategic Planning and Assessment Subcommittee devised a survey to gather feedback from various user groups to inform technological, structural, and operational modifications to the ApplyTexas application to assist this effort. The leadership and governing boards of ApplyTexas hope the survey results and forthcoming committee proposal will encourage more students to apply to higher education institutions and assist the high school counselors who work with them.

To complete the survey research, a random sample of recent applicants and their parents/guardians, along with Texas high school counselors and college and university representatives, were invited to offer feedback about the application and comparative systems, such as the Coalition and Common Applications. Dr. Ka'rin Thornburg, Research and Assessment Program Administrator in the Office of Admissions at The University of Texas at Austin conducted survey administration, data analysis, and created the enclosed report.

Executive Summary

Overall, student and parent/guardian responses closely aligned with one another across the board. As such, they are frequently reported together as a single subgroup. Key takeaways, as detailed in the report, show:

- The vast majority (75% or more) were neutral about the application's overall difficulty or believed it was easy to complete (Q3).
- Roughly 3/4 rated the time it takes to complete the application as "just right" (Q4).
- Students and parents/guardians (along with high school counselors) more frequently reported 1-3 hours as the completion time for the average student (Q5).
- The top three most challenging sections to complete were (in order) the long essay, resume activities, and institution-specific questions (Q6).

Additionally, more than 58% of students and their parents/guardians reported the student completed the application independently, followed by help from a family member at 24% (Q7).

Conversely, high school counselor and college/university subgroup responses often diverged from students, parents/guardians, and at times, from each other. For example, high school counselors and college/university representatives more frequently reported the ApplyTexas application was difficult (Q3), too long (Q4), and should take the average student less time to complete (Q5). Additionally, high school counselors and college/university representatives offered vastly different views regarding the most challenging aspects of the application; they more frequently reported the residency information and educational background sections than students and the parents/guardians (Q6).

Where the subgroups ratings converge relate to recommendations for enhanced ApplyTexas features. Those that fell within the highest "extremely" or "very important" ratings:

1. Auto-save feature
2. Easier to understand
3. More web accessible for students with disabilities

On the other hand, those with the highest "not at all important" rating include: (**denotes top three for students, parents/guardians, and college/university representatives only.*)

1. Available in multiple languages
2. Accessible via a smartphone app*
3. Mobile-friendly for smartphone browsers*

Qualitative or write-in responses from students regarding ApplyTexas feedback and their experience with other application systems are summarized on pages 12-13.

Population and Sample

The study's population is comprised of random sample of all Fall 2021 ApplyTexas applicants (324,351), their parents/guardians (if an email was provided), all Texas high school counselors in The University of Texas at Austin's CRM (Slate), and contact lists of two- and four-year college/university representatives. Additionally, the survey audience was expanded to the TACRAO listserve at the request of a TACRAO member. ApplyTexas staff provided a random sample of 20% of student applicants. Successful invitations were distributed as follows:

- Students: 61,411 (random sample)
- Parents/Guardians: 25,337
- High School Counselors: 2,771
- College and University Representatives: 134
 - Two-Year College Representative: 72
 - Four-Year College/University Representative: 62
 - TACRAO members: Unknown (used anonymous link through group listserve)

Respondents (usable surveys; includes partially completed submissions)



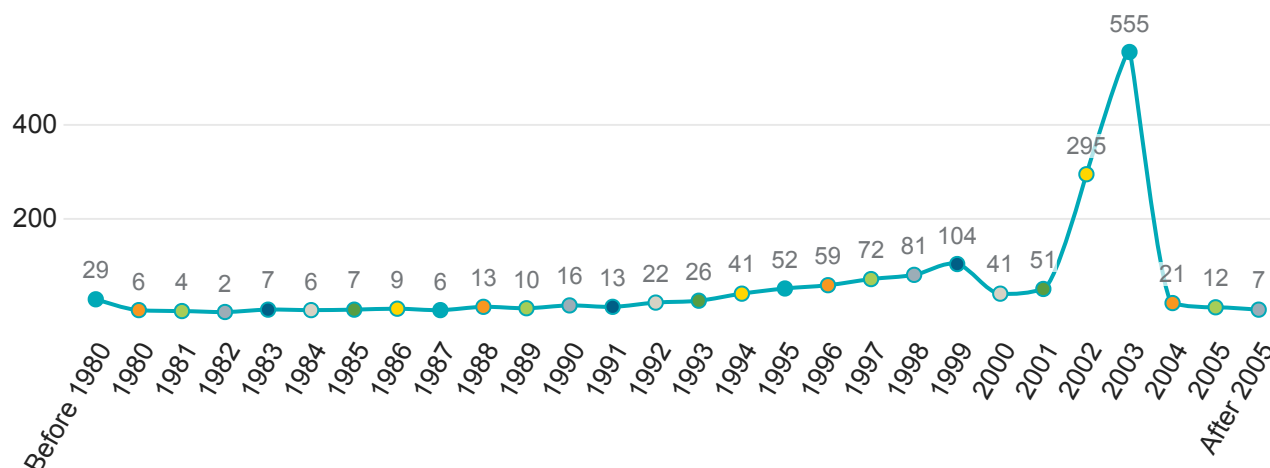
● Student [67%, 2099] ● Parent/Guardian [22%, 692] ● HS Counselor [8%, 243] ● College/Univ. Rep [2%, 76]

The student survey response rate of 3.4% **is statistically significant** at a 99% confidence level.

Students (Parents/Guardians)

Approximately 60% (1263) of student respondents applied to one institution. (Among parents/guardians, 39% (270) represent students who applied to one institution.) Student demographics are presented below:

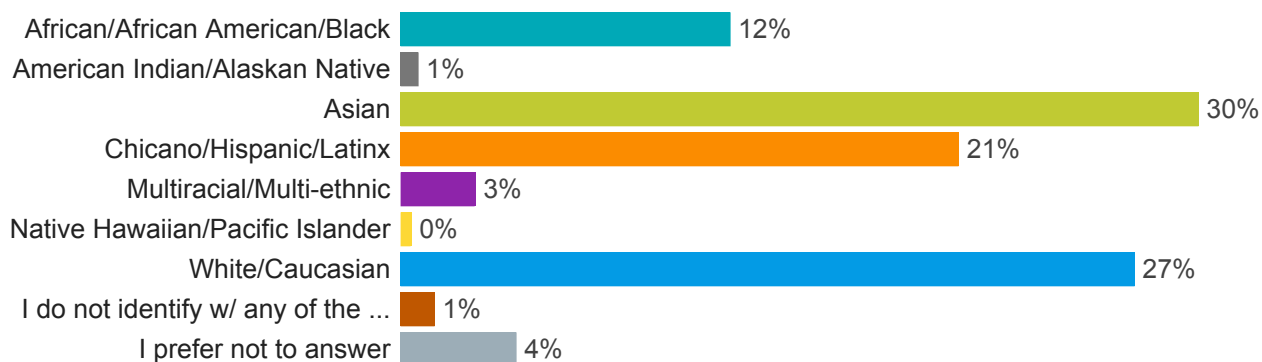
Count of Student Respondents by Birth Year



Gender

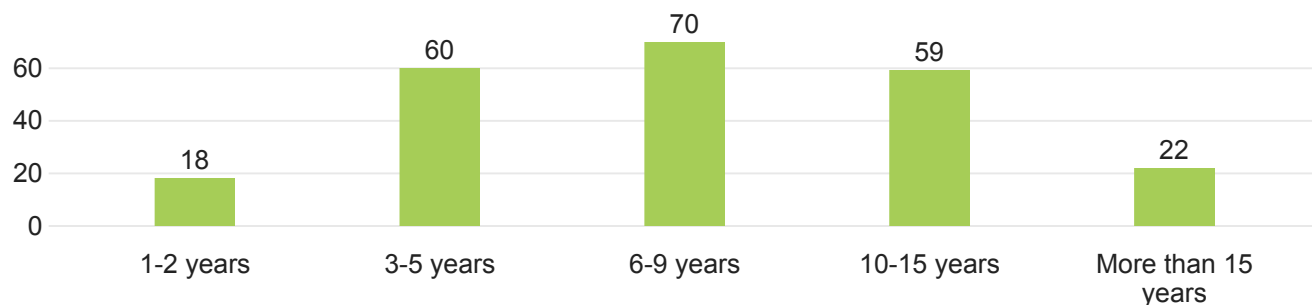
| Field | Choice Count |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| Female | 55% 995 |
| Male | 42% 750 |
| Non-binary or non-gender conforming | 1% 26 |
| I would rather not discuss my gender | 2% 35 |
| Total | 1806 |

Racial or ethnic identity (reported as percentage of choices)



High School Counselors

Count of Counselors with "x" Years of Experience using ApplyTexas



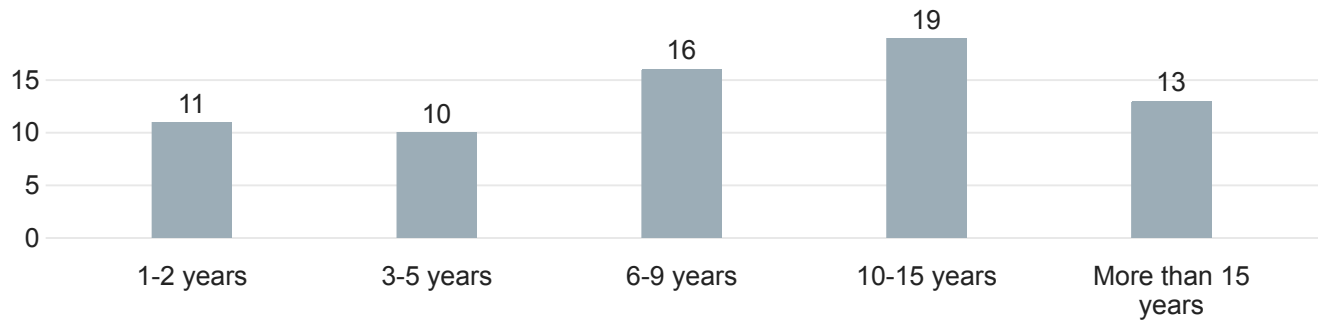
College and University Representatives

Of the 76 respondents who self-identified as a college or university representative,

- approximately 28% (21) are from the Two-Year College representative invite list
- approximately 30% (23) are from the Four-Year College/University representative invite list
- approximately 21% (16) are from the student invite list
-

- approximately 21% (16) are unidentified (accessed through anonymous survey link)

Count of College/Univ. Representatives with "x" Years Experience Using ApplyTexas



Data Analysis

The following survey data reflect the respondents' impressions and feedback regarding the usability, structure, content, time/method of completion, and advancements related to the ApplyTexas application. Data analysis includes all respondents or respondent subgroups, as specified. As students are the primary users and audience of ApplyTexas, the emphasis is placed on their responses, along with their parents/guardians, given they may have direct knowledge regarding their students' experiences.

Q3 - How easy/difficult is it to complete the ApplyTexas application?

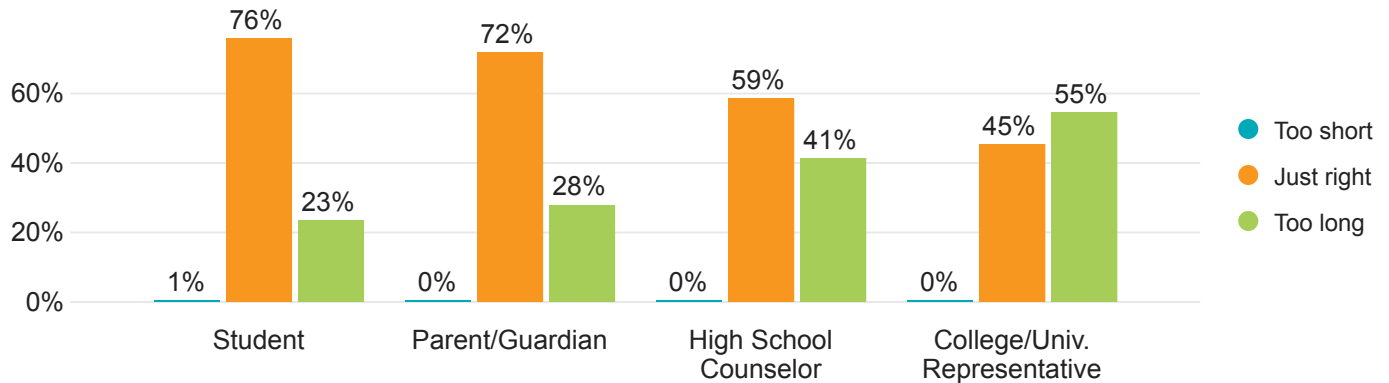
| Rating | Student | Parent/Guardian | HS Counselor | College/Univ. Rep. |
|----------------------------|---------|-----------------|--------------|--------------------|
| Extremely easy | 10% 219 | 13% 89 | 5% 11 | 7% 5 |
| Moderately easy | 30% 628 | 32% 219 | 28% 68 | 24% 18 |
| Slightly easy | 15% 317 | 13% 88 | 15% 37 | 12% 9 |
| Neither easy nor difficult | 20% 423 | 19% 127 | 15% 37 | 13% 10 |
| Slightly difficult | 16% 338 | 15% 100 | 23% 55 | 24% 18 |
| Moderately difficult | 6% 130 | 6% 44 | 12% 30 | 16% 12 |
| Extremely difficult | 2% 41 | 3% 18 | 2% 4 | 4% 3 |
| Total | 2096 | 685 | 242 | 75 |

Key takeaway: Generally speaking, the vast majority of students (75%) and parents/guardians (77%) believed the application was easy to complete or were neutral regarding the overall difficulty level.

Approximately 55% of student and 58% of parent/guardian respondents reported the ApplyTexas application was "easy" compared to 24% of students and 24% of parents who found the application "difficult."

Among school administrators, 48% of high school counselors and 43% of college/university representatives reported the application was "easy" and compared to "difficult" ratings of 37% and 44%.

Q4 - In your estimation, the time it takes to complete the ApplyTexas application (start to finish) is:



Key takeaway: The vast majority of students and parents/guardians (upwards of 3/4 of respondents) rated the time to completion as favorable or "just right."

Among students and parents/guardians, approximately 1/4 of respondents reported the time to complete the application was "too long," and fewer than 1% reported it as "too short."

School administrators were more divided with a moderate-to-slim majority (59%) of high school counselors reporting the time to complete was "just right," and 55% of college/university representatives reporting it was "too long." No school administrators reported the time to complete as "too short."

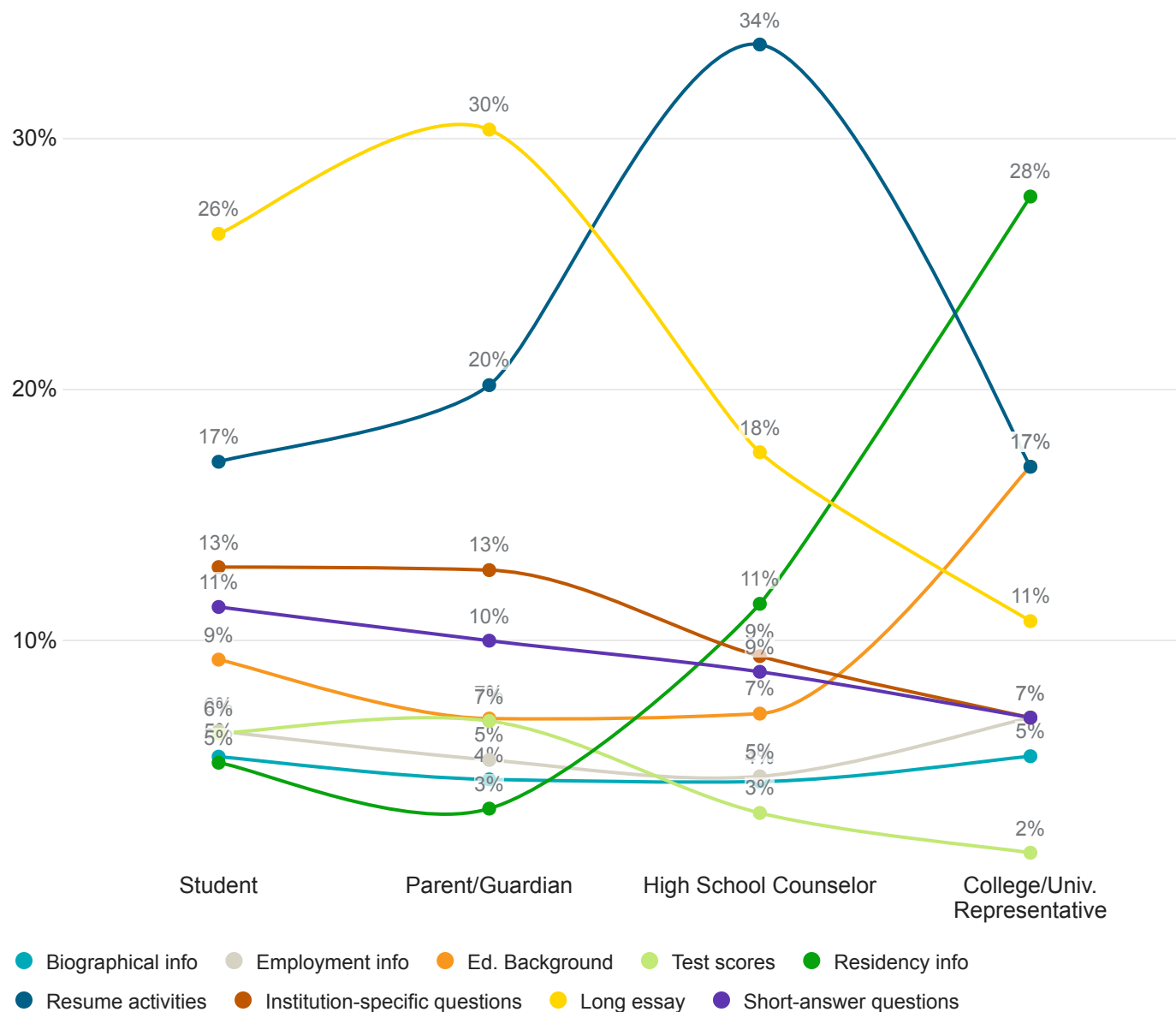
Q5 - How long do you think it should take the average student to complete the ApplyTexas application?

| Field | Student | Parent/Guardian | High School Counselor | College/Univ. Rep. |
|---------------------------|---------|-----------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Less than 1 hour | 25% 525 | 30% 203 | 40% 97 | 72% 53 |
| 1 to 3 hours | 41% 868 | 42% 291 | 44% 107 | 26% 19 |
| 4 to 6 hours (Half a day) | 14% 300 | 14% 94 | 8% 19 | 0% 0 |
| 8 to 12 hours (1 day) | 7% 150 | 5% 35 | 5% 11 | 1% 1 |
| 1.5 to 2 days | 5% 100 | 5% 32 | 0% 1 | 0% 0 |
| 2.5 to 3 days | 5% 105 | 3% 18 | 2% 4 | 0% 0 |
| More than 3 days | 2% 44 | 2% 12 | 1% 3 | 1% 1 |
| Total | 2092 | 685 | 242 | 74 |

Key takeaway: The majority of students (41%), parents/guardians (42%), and high school counselors (44%) reported 1-3 hours as the completion time for the average student.

Among college/university respondents, the majority (72%) reported less than 1 hour for the average student.

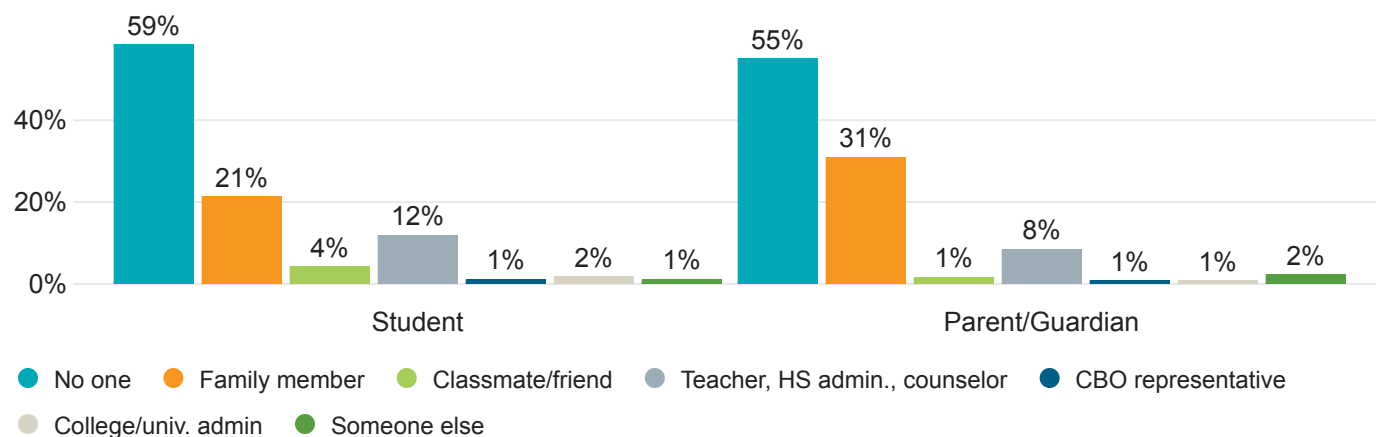
Q6 - What is the most challenging section to complete on the ApplyTexas application? (select all that apply)



Key takeaway: Students' and parents'/guardians' ratings of the most challenging ApplyTexas sections closely mirrored one another across all answer choices. The subgroups' top three include the long essay (26%, 30%), resume activities (17%, 20%), and institution-specific questions (13%).

Within the high school counselor subgroup, the top three most challenging sections were rated as resume activities (34%), the long essay (18%), and residency information (11%). Conversely, college/university representatives reported the top three as residency information (28%), resume activities (17%), and educational background (17%).

Q7 - Who assisted you (or your student) in completing the ApplyTexas application? (check all that apply):



Key takeaway: More than half of students (59%) and parents/guardians (55%) reported the student received no assistance in completing the ApplyTexas application.

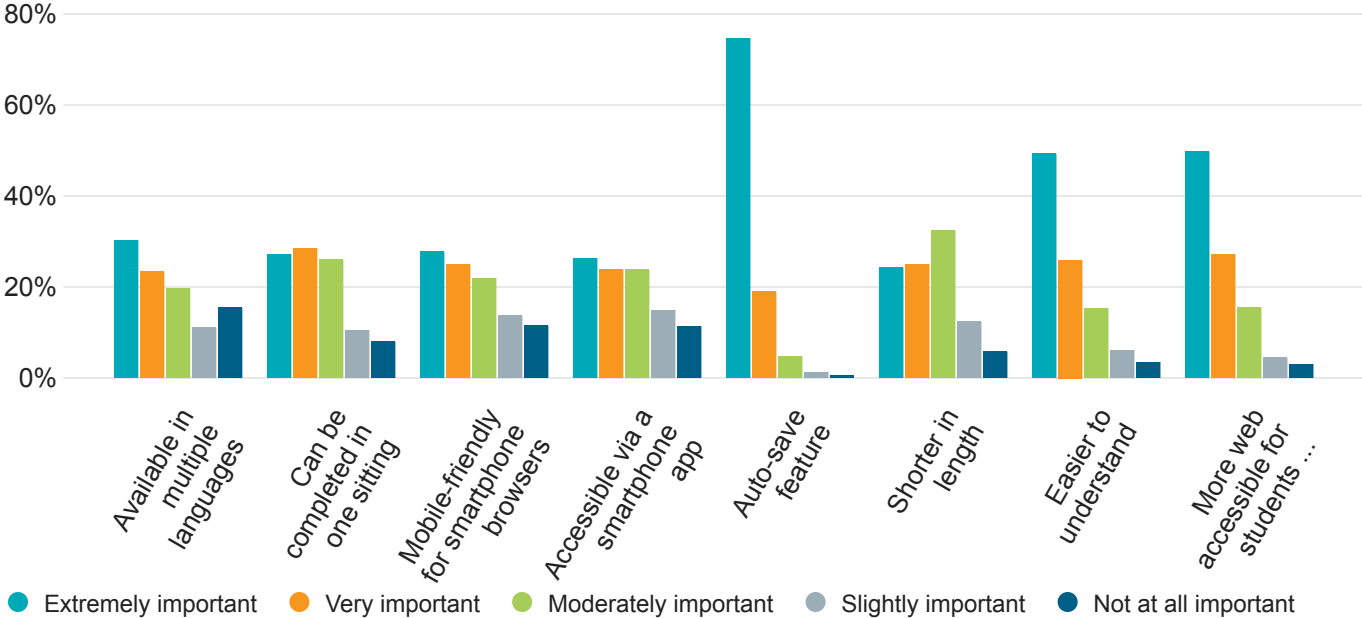
Approximately 21% of students and 31% of parents/guardians reported receiving assistance from a family member; 12% of students and 8% of parents/guardians reported they (or their student) received assistance from a teacher, high school administrator, or counselor.

Q8 - In your estimation, approximately what percentage (1-100) of students complete the ApplyTexas application with one of the following individuals (if you are unsure or don't know, enter "0"): (high school counselors and college representatives only)

| Field | Min | Max | Mean | Median | Standard Deviation | Responses |
|---|------|--------|-------|--------|--------------------|-----------|
| - No one (they complete it alone) | 0.00 | 100.00 | 24.38 | 15.00 | 26.94 | 302 |
| - A family member | 0.00 | 90.00 | 15.70 | 10.00 | 19.44 | 302 |
| - A classmate/friend | 0.00 | 100.00 | 6.27 | 0.00 | 11.88 | 302 |
| - A teacher, high school administrator or counselor | 0.00 | 100.00 | 30.01 | 20.00 | 30.11 | 302 |
| - A community-based organization representative | 0.00 | 100.00 | 3.46 | 0.00 | 9.31 | 301 |
| - A college or university administrator | 0.00 | 100.00 | 4.08 | 0.00 | 12.52 | 302 |
| - Someone else (please specify in the text box): | 0.00 | 100.00 | 2.33 | 0.00 | 10.53 | 300 |

Key takeaway: High school counselors and college/university representatives reported, on average, 30% of students sought assistance from a teacher, high school administrator, or counselor; 24% completed it alone; 15% were assisted by a family member.

Q10 - How important are the following to the ApplyTexas application: *(displaying students and parents/guardians respondents only)*



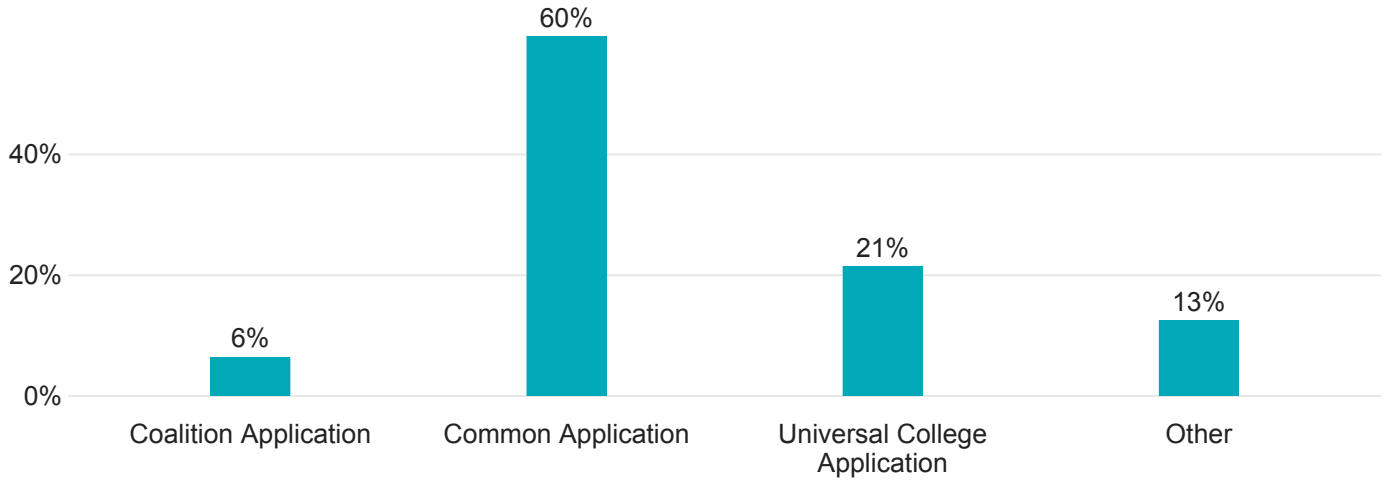
Key takeaway: Nearly 94% of students and parents/guardians, 99.6% of high school counselors, and 97% of college/university representatives rated an auto-save feature as "extremely/very important."

Among students and parents/guardians, making the application easier to understand and more web accessible for students with disabilities was rated "extremely" or "very important" by 75% and 77%, respectively. Those most rated as "not at all important" include available in multiple languages (15.5%), mobile-friendly for smartphone browsers (11.5%), and accessible via a smartphone app (11%).

Additional "extremely/very important" ratings within the high school counselor subgroup include making the application easier to understand (78%), more web accessible for students with disabilities (76.5%), and mobile-friendly for smartphone browsers (74%). In contrast, available in multiple languages, shorter in length, and can be completed in one sitting had the most "not important at all" ratings at 6.3%, 6%, and 4%.

Finally, the vast majority of college and university representatives rated making the application easier to understand (89%), can be completed in one sitting (86%), and more web accessible for students with disabilities (83%) as "extremely/very important." Conversely, those most rated as "not at all important" include available in multiple languages (10%), accessible via a smartphone app (7%), and mobile-friendly for smartphone browsers (4.3%).

Q12 - What other applications have you completed? (check all that apply): *(students only)*



Key takeaway: Student respondents most frequently had current or prior experience with the Common Application.

Additionally, the majority of applications listed under "other" included institution-specific applications for graduate or professional programs.

ApplyTexas and Comparative Application Feedback

The following analysis summarizes respondents' impressions and feedback regarding comparative application systems and qualitative feedback regarding ApplyTexas.

Q13-15 - What feedback can you provide regarding your experience using:

The Coalition Application

Students who offered positive feedback most commonly referenced ease of use, navigation, visualization, organization, and transferability to other applications. Those who said the application was "OK" stated it was somewhat confusing, but it did not detract from the overall experience. Students who offered negative feedback often said the application was tedious and time-consuming, particularly the requirement to enter all course information and the inability to navigate to other sections before the current section is complete.

The Common Application

Positive feedback for the Common Application included a modern look and feel, ease of use, transferability of information to other institutions, auto-saving, integration with other systems (e.g., Naviance), and special features like confetti upon completion. They also discussed the organization of the application itself and the ability to freely navigate through the application as needed. Those who said the application was "OK" shared that it was relatively easy but time-consuming. Some were also less impressed with the aesthetics. Finally, negative feedback included longer than expected completion time, entering all course information, and not necessarily intuitive. While most students concentrated their frustrations on the length, several stated it was tolerable given most of the information was transferable to other institutions and only needed to be entered once.

The University College Application

Lastly, students who offered positive feedback for the Universal College Application said it was clear, easy to use and understand, and took little time to complete. Those who had a negative or challenging experience generally said it was confusing or discussed difficulty with attachments. Specifically, some had problems uploading or updating previously uploaded documents.

Q17 - What are the positive aspects of the ApplyTexas application (please be specific):

Students who identified positive aspects referenced the simplicity of the platform (e.g., to the point and easy to understand), checking for completion errors before submission, ease in changing previously entered information, and adequate IT support. One respondent specifically mentioned that ApplyTexas "doesn't involve politics." They lamented communication from the Common Application that referenced the events at the U.S. Capitol on January 6 and felt strongly that "Educational organizations and schools should provide a

fair platform for people to think and talk freely, not inject their own political ideology."

Q18 - What are the areas for improvement on the ApplyTexas application (please be specific):

Areas for improvement, as noted by respondents, include the user-interface (more aesthetically pleasing, better site organization/navigation, readability/larger font size, and save features), the desire for more detailed guidance (e.g., chatbox, tips/hints pop-ups, and more detailed but easy to understand directions for complicated sections), and shorter in length.

Additionally, some students expressly mentioned limitations with respect to the name, scholarship, awards, resume, essays, test scores (including international scores), and letters of recommendation sections. While most were not detailed in how they would like these areas improved, a few suggested removing character limits (name), adding an "other" category with write-in options (resume: level of activities), the ability to directly upload files in lieu of a text box (essays, LORs), and the ability to upload attachments more quickly and change or update them as needed. A few students also mentioned the application itself is slow, not accessible for students with disabilities, takes too long to receive confirmation from institutions of receipt, asks for too much parental information (which can be difficult to compile), and lacks an efficient auto-save feature. Also, a few students mentioned the initial institution search in the college selection drop-down menu is too long and confusing.

Q19 - How does the ApplyTexas application compare to other application systems you have experienced:

Many respondents said ApplyTexas was the only application they used and therefore could not offer a comparison. Respondents who did have experience with other applications offered a full-range of opinions. Those who preferred ApplyTexas reiterated that it was simple, relatively user-friendly, and easy to understand. Many said it balanced out or was similar to other applications with respect to difficulty and time to complete. Respondents who expressed ApplyTexas was the lesser application often said it was outdated, unattractive, uninviting, clunky, and at times, confusing.

End.