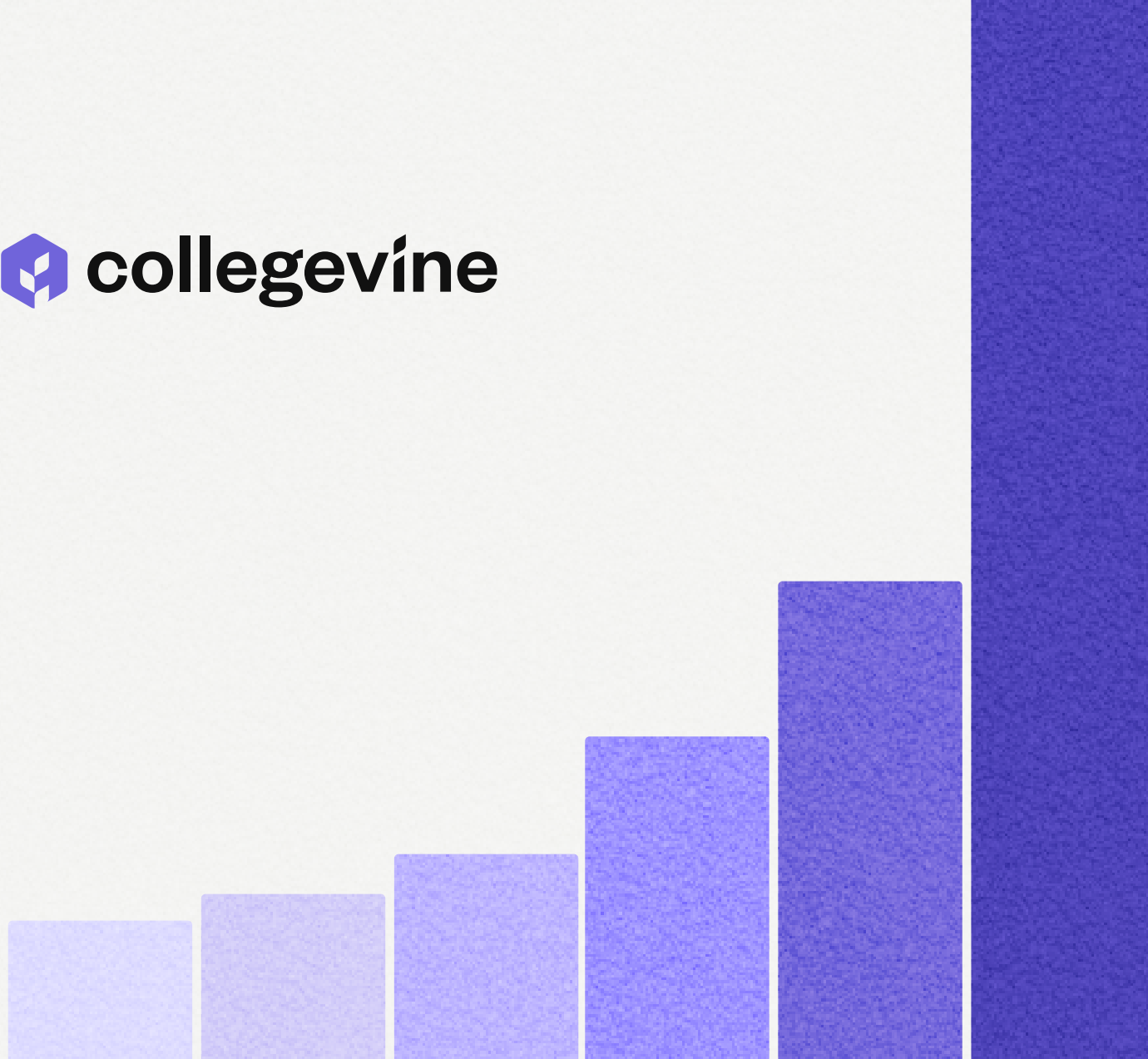




Generation AI

How 18,000+ high school students feel about AI in college admissions

And what universities should do about it

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in college admissions – and what universities
should do about it

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Contents

Introduction	4
Key findings	6
1. The age of personalization is here, and universities aren't delivering.	8
2. Digital-native students not only want, but also expect to use AI in admissions.	16
3. The right solution will gain student trust.	26
Conclusion	30
Appendix & methodology	32

Introduction

This generation of high school students has experienced a lot of firsts. They're the first to have grown up with digital technology from as early as elementary school, the first to experience social media as the primary mechanism for connecting with friends, and the first to expect highly personalized targeted advertising from every corporation vying for their attention.

That being said, they're still high school students: highly curious about their future, driven, and eager to change the status quo.

As universities begin to think about how artificial intelligence will fundamentally change how they recruit, teach, and foster the next generation, we stopped to ask the question: what do today's students think about AI?



18,022 students

18,022 high school students responded to our survey, making this the largest survey to date on the topic. This report explores our results in detail, identifying existing gaps in university recruitment practices and exploring how AI-driven approaches can enhance student engagement and the personalization of communication.

What we found was motivating: high school students' latent curiosity and openness extends to AI and its usage in the college search process.



Key findings

The majority of students surveyed indicated familiarity with generative AI, with **87.5% of students indicating that they've used AI at least once** in the past year and **58.2% indicating they use AI at least monthly**, far outpacing other generations' adoption of AI.

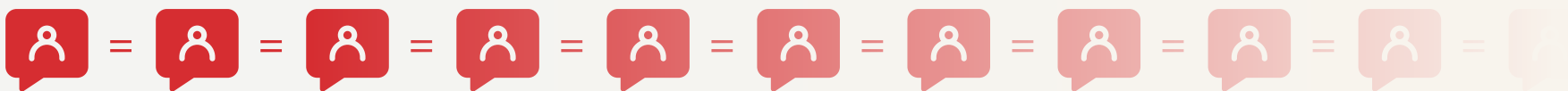
Conversely, **students are not interacting with human admissions officers**, with 46% stating they haven't talked to an admissions officer in the last year.

Students are generally **positive about the use of AI in admissions**, with particularly positive sentiment around the use of AI in the search process.



1.

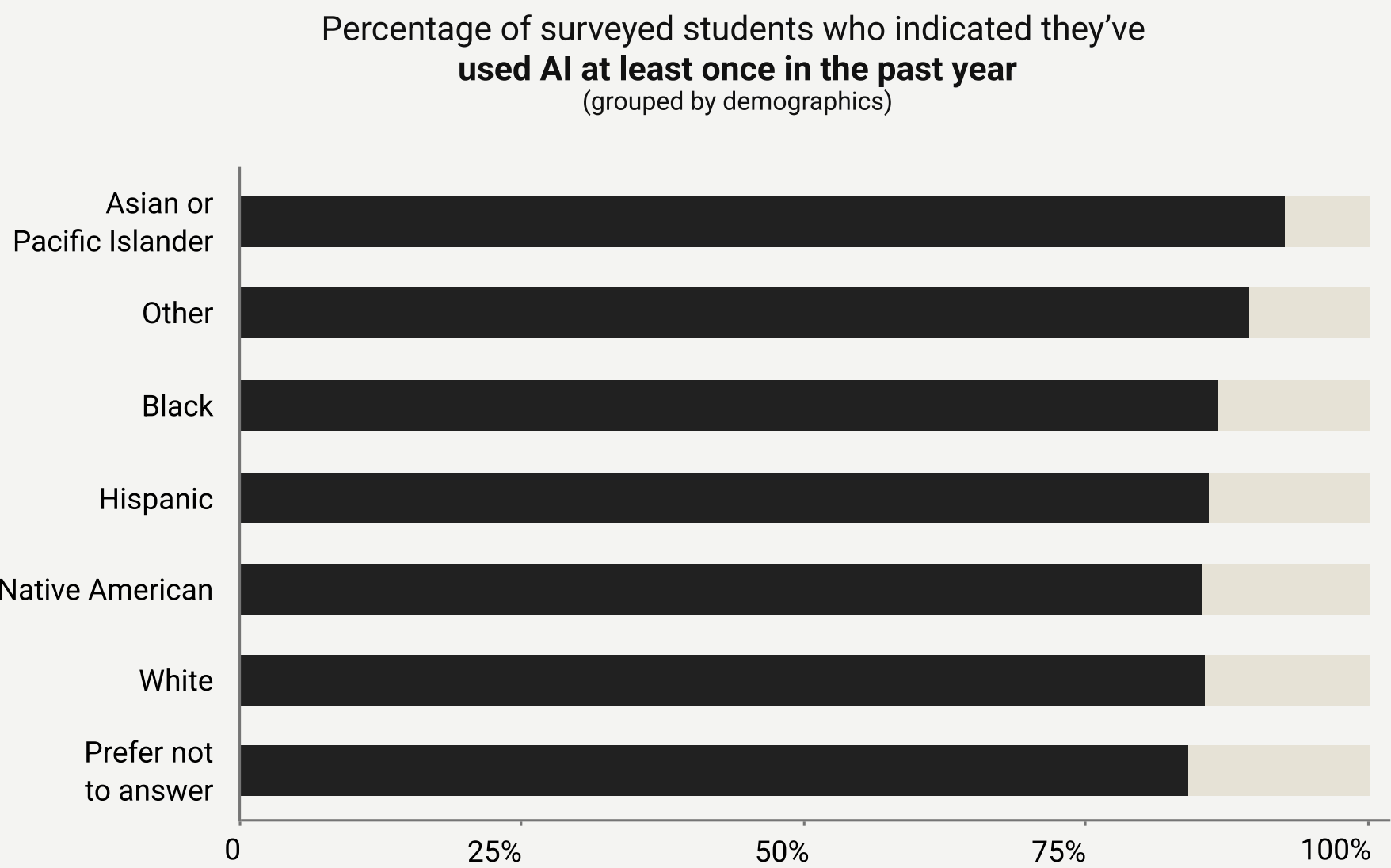
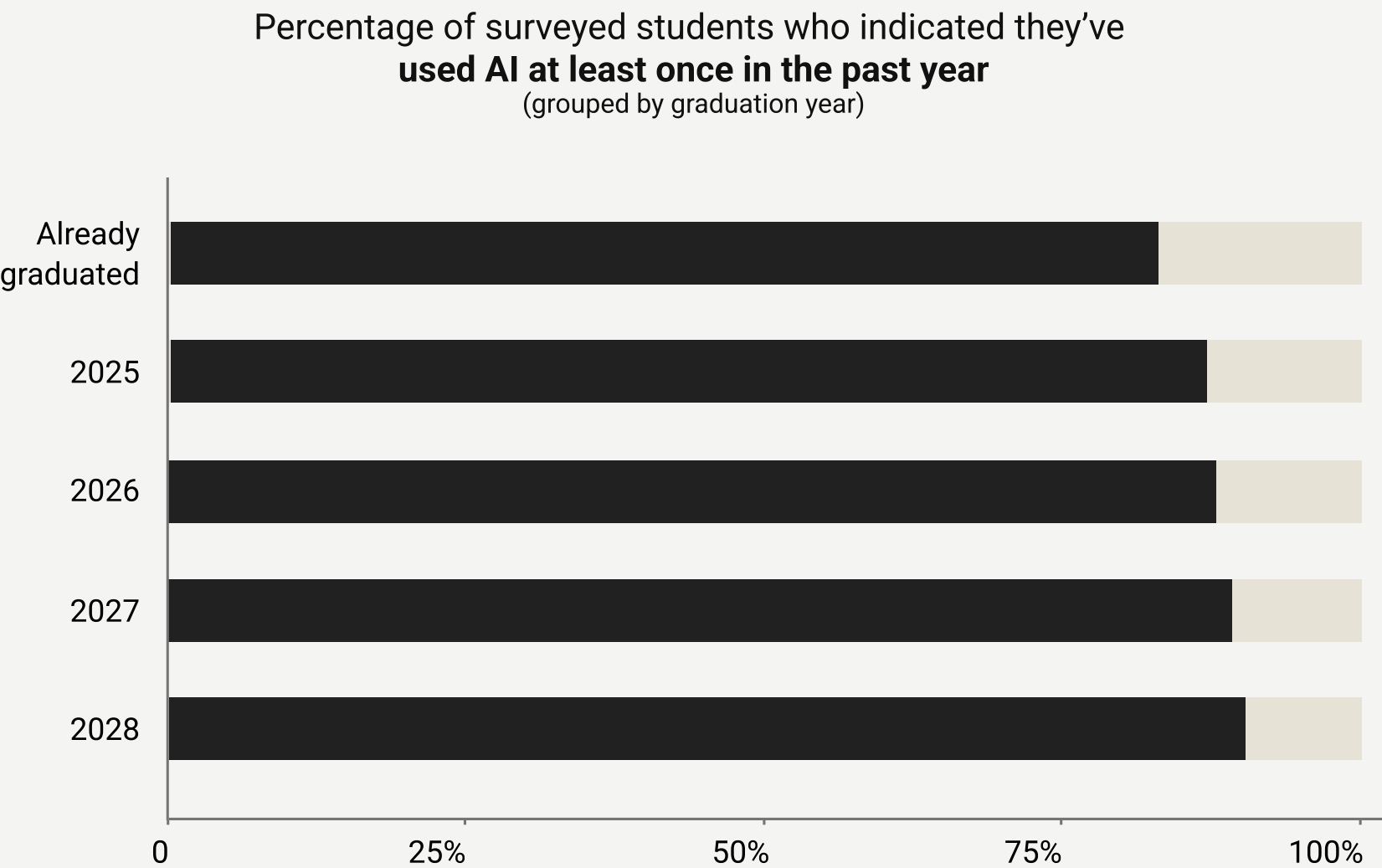
The age of personalization is here, and universities aren't delivering



The age of personalization has dawned, and universities are struggling to keep pace with the expectations of a new generation of students. As AI continues to reshape our world, the gulf between what students expect from targeted marketing and what higher education institutions deliver is widening at an alarming rate.

Today's high school students, Generations Z and Alpha (born after 2010), are at the forefront of AI adoption. 87.5% of surveyed students indicated that they've used AI at least once in the past year and 58.2% indicated they use AI at least monthly.

Across class years, the number of students who said they've used AI at least once in the past year uniformly increases with each successive year:

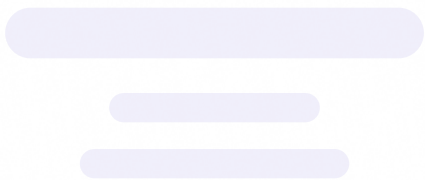


This stands in stark contrast to older generations, with AI adoption rates declining significantly among Millennials (51%), Generation X (33%), and Baby Boomers (24%). This generational divide in AI usage underscores the rapidly evolving technological land-scape that universities must navigate to remain relevant.

Personalized experiences are the default, not the exception.

Even before the rise of AI, Gen Z and the emerging Gen Alpha have been immersed in a digital world. A 2021 Pew Research Center study¹ found that 95% of teens have access to a smartphone, with 47% reporting being online "almost constantly". This digitally native generation spends significant time in highly personalized online environments — an average of 7 hours and 22 minutes daily on screen media for entertainment.²

This extensive digital engagement has coincided with the rise of sophisticated targeted advertising. A 2021 TELUS survey³ showed that **nearly 3 in 10 Gen Z (28%) say they would be much more likely to purchase** when provided a personalized experience, significantly more than Gen X (age 39–54) (19%) or Boomers (age 55–73) (14%).



This generation has grown accustomed to hyper-personalized experiences, from tailored content recommendations on streaming platforms to individualized learning apps and precisely targeted advertisements.

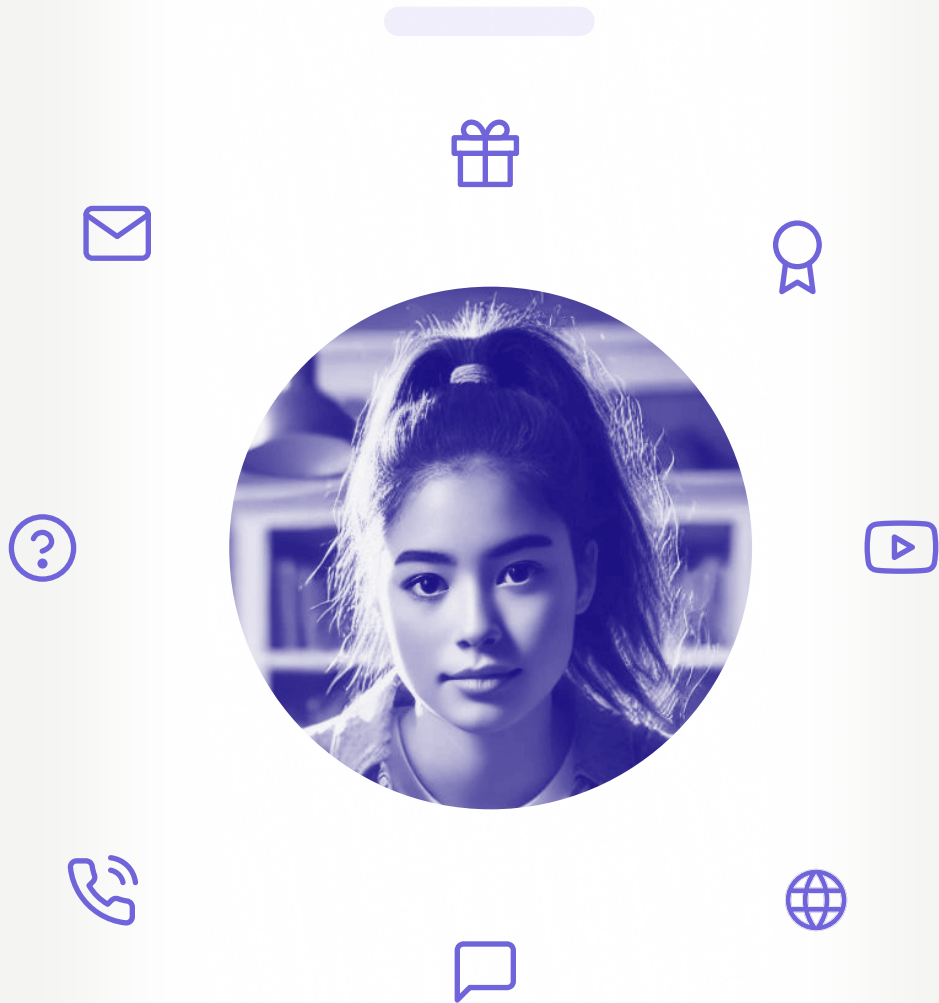
Their expectations for personalization in all aspects of life, including recruiting for colleges, are higher than any generation before.

However, universities are failing to meet these expectations. Our survey revealed a significant disconnect between students' desires for personalization and the reality of college recruitment efforts. When asked if "the information I receive from colleges is personalized to me," **64% of students disagreed**, reporting an average agreement score of just 4.62 out of 10 with the statement.

“The information I receive from colleges is personalized to me”



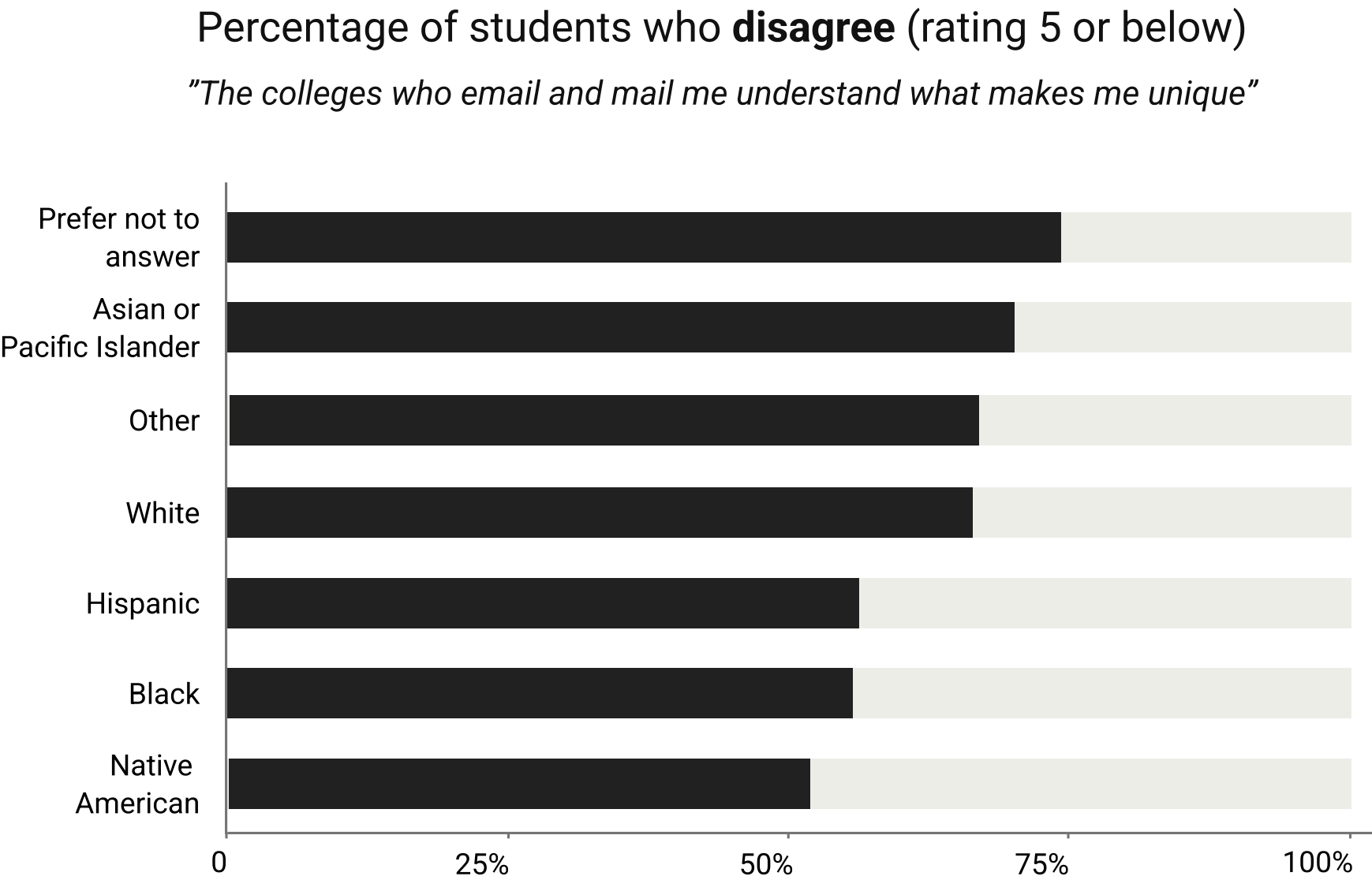
- Students who agreed: 36%
- Students who disagreed: 64%



Similarly, 63% of students disagreed with the statement "colleges who email and mail me understand what makes me unique," mustering a slightly higher, but still overall negative average agreement score of 4.9 out of 10.

These low scores are particularly concerning given that the median student surveyed received a staggering 1,300 emails and mailers from colleges in the last 12 months alone, according to our previously conducted survey of 3,000+ high school students.

Of note: white and AAPI students indicated the highest dissatisfaction with the level of personalization from the marketing they receive from colleges:



Saying more communicates less.

The disparity between the volume of communication and its perceived relevance highlights a critical issue in student recruitment. Universities are inundating prospective students with generic information rather than leveraging available technologies to provide tailored, meaningful engagement. As a generation raised on personalized digital experiences enters higher education, universities must adapt their approaches or risk alienating the very students they seek to attract. The age of personalization demands a fundamental shift in how universities connect with and cater to the unique needs and interests of each student.



2.

Digital-native
students not
only want but
expect to use AI
in admissions

Research indicates that students increasingly associate AI with personalization.

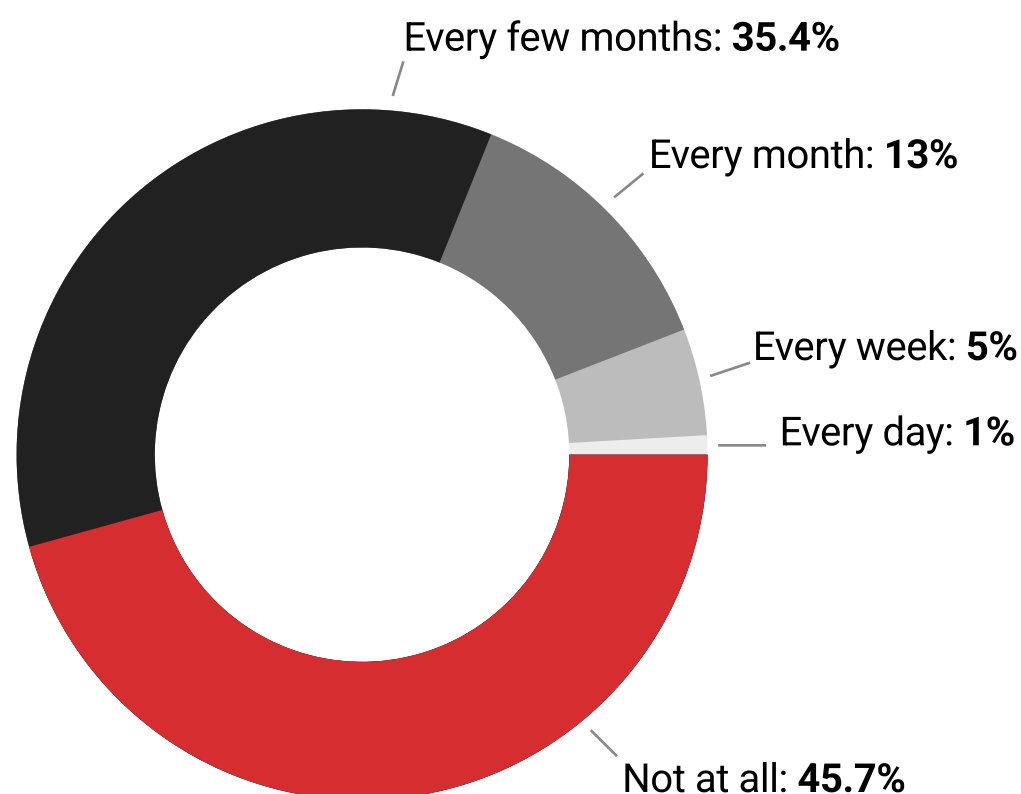
This association stems from their daily interactions with AI-powered platforms that offer personalized content, from music playlists to product recommendations.

As these students approach the college selection process, they bring with them an expectation for similarly customized experiences.

Despite this desire for personalized communication, there's a growing disconnect between students and admissions officers. Of the 18,022 students that we surveyed, **a staggering 8,227 students (46%) reported no interaction with admissions officers at all in the past year**, while those who did engage did so infrequently. This lack of communication is further compounded by students' preference for anonymity when asking questions, with 75% of students indicating they would ask more questions if they could do so anonymously.

Student responses to:

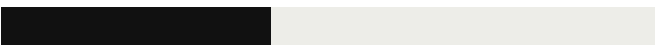
“In the past year, how frequently have you interacted with college admissions officers?”



This lack of communication isn't just about lack of access to admissions officers, although that plays a large part in their disengagement, but reflects a broader trend of social reticence among younger generations. According to a 2022 study by the American Psychological Association⁴, Gen Z reports higher levels of social anxiety and a preference for digital interactions over in-person ones.

This generation, while digitally savvy, may prefer to be guided rather than taking proactive steps, especially in unfamiliar domains like college admissions. Indeed, of the 54% of students that we surveyed who did talk to an admissions officer in the last year, the majority indicated it was over email vs. on a phone call or in-person.

Students' answers to
"Where do you interact with college admissions officers?"
 Students were encouraged to select all applicable options

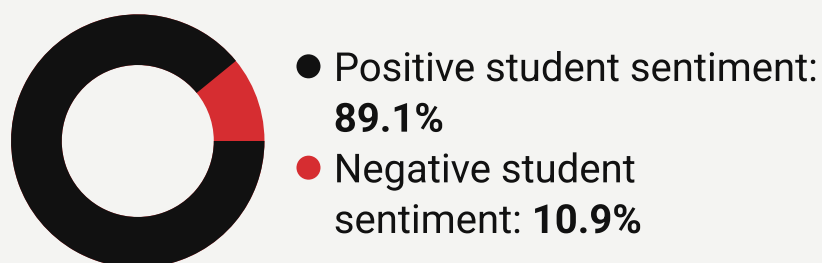
Selected answer	Number of students
 Email	66.1% 
 Campus visits / tours	52.3% 
 College fairs	41.4% 
 CollegeVine network	30.6% 
 Webinar	20.8% 
 Admissions interviews	12.9% 
 Phone call	12.5% 
 Other	8.0% 

With admissions offices suffering from high staff turnover, universities can no longer rely on their overburdened teams to deliver genuinely personalized engagements with students.

Will turning to AI to do the job have the same impact? Surveyed students seemed to say yes.

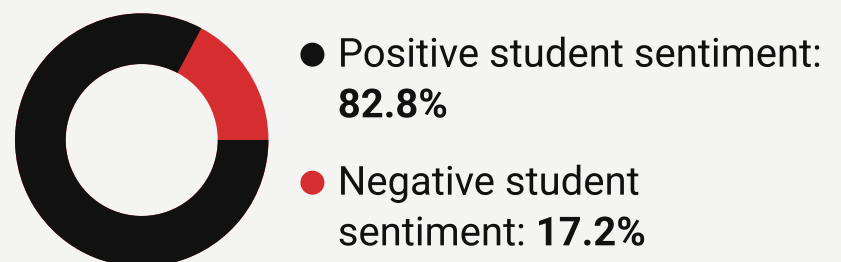
When surveyed broadly about their preferences regarding AI in college admissions, students' open-form responses varied but generally trended positive. Sentiment analysis of these responses reveals that **students see the most potential for AI in the information-gathering phase.** In this category, positive sentiments (1,102) significantly outweigh negative ones (135), indicating strong support for AI-assisted college exploration.

AI for information gathering



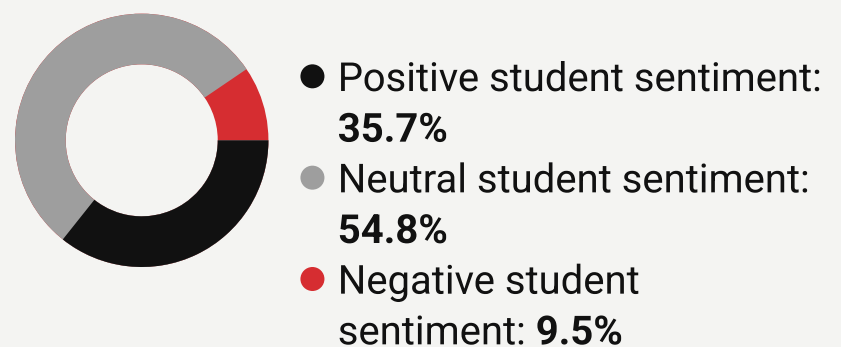
The "Application Process" category also showed a positive trend, with 2,491 positive sentiments compared to 519 negative ones.

AI in the application process



Even in "General AI Use," positive (4,021) and neutral (6,178) sentiments far outpaced negative ones (1,072).

AI for general use



These findings underscore **a growing acceptance and enthusiasm for AI integration in college admissions**, particularly in the early stages of the college selection process.

Select quotes from surveyed students on where they'd like to see AI used in college admissions:

I think AI can be implemented as assistance or an alternative to admissions officers. I believe AI should not have complete control over this process, but may be utilized to provide personalized recommendations.

Student graduating in 2026, Male, located in the Northeast

I think universities should use AI to sort the data of college applicants into groups such as majors, interests, and backgrounds so as to help colleges provide a tailored experience to each and every prospective student.

Student who has already graduated, Female, located in the South

I think ai could be used in the college admissions process to give students personalized information. It may be hard for ana admissions official to individually identify each students strengths and weaknesses.

Student graduating in 2025, Female, located in the South



I think that universities should use AI to personalize college admission experiences and answer questions. As an introvert, I would feel more comfortable talking to AI and asking questions anonymously through AI. I would also feel like I'd receive a quicker response.

Student graduating in 2025, Female, located in the South

I think colleges should implement AI into their college admission process. This can help those wanting to apply to just turn to the AI to ask for questions (if it doesn't help, they can turn to admission officers). There are quite a lot of people who feel hesitant or "shy" in trying to contact an admission officer for help. AI can go around that and directly help the students without them feeling nervous or hesitant.

Student graduating in 2025, Male, located in the South

Universities should use AI in the college admissions process when certain information that needs to be shared out is more general, recurring, and has more of a targeted audience. As a result, time is more conserved and used for more personalized and unique interactions and decisions.

Student graduating in 2025, Male, located in the West



AI should be used to review my academic profile and demographics in order to tailor their communications and offerings to my specific needs and interests. They could also include scholarship opportunities that are specific to my circumstances and qualifications. Right now I get bombarded with scholarships that I don't qualify for. It's a waste of time and AI could solve this problem.

Student graduating in 2027, Female, located in the Midwest



I would definitely suggest the usage of AI specifically during the application progress. Perhaps there are questions [you] are too embarrassed to ask. Maybe questions that are more common than we think but are often just asked during interviews. Some could be surrounding the financial aid process, there seems to be a lot of panic and issues surrounding that every time it rolls around. Additionally, it would be nice to ask any questions towards an AI to at least receive quick responses at the moment, especially because a lot of times we know some students are applying towards the dates where the application must be submitted or at night, and AI would be great for receiving [the information] needed at the moment.

Student graduating in 2026, Female, Hispanic, located in the Northeast



I think that it could be used to better personalize emails and mail sent out to potential students. Let's say a student fills out an interest form on the college website and can type in what kind of things interest them. With this information, the AI could be used to take these interests and match them with different programs/ majors that the college offers. This would help make the emails and letters in the mail a lot more personalized.

Personally, I would feel more inclined to have interest in a college that knows what I am interested in and being able to know what is available for me helps a lot too.

Student graduating in 2026, Male, White, located in the Northeast



Universities should use AI to make more personalized messages because students are receiving hundreds of emails from colleges a week and we typically do not look at any of them especially since the emails are being sent out to every student and aren't actually interesting.

[...] if there was some way for AI to connect the student to college admissions in a way that would make it feel more personalized then that would be very helpful. However, too much AI can detach the student from the university if used too much so it definitely should be maintained at a good level.

Student graduating in 2026, Male, White, located in the Northeast

I think that universities should develop specialized AIs for their institutions to aid students in the application process while not being too general that it is ineffective.

This would be beneficial because I wouldn't have to go through the hassle of finding an admissions rep to answer specific questions + this is very beneficial to those with social anxiety. [...]

Student graduating in 2025, Female, Asian or Pacific Islander, located in the West



I definitely think AI could be used in the basics of applying to a specific or what happens after doing so. Many times while filling out an application or just looking at different colleges, students have questions that need to be answered.

They either have to call an admissions office and be on hold for an hour or email and never get a response. With AI students can ask all their questions and get responses instantly.

This use of AI would help colleges as well because when students get all the information they require to consider your college, they're more like to choose it over one they don't know as much about.

Male Black student graduating in 2025
located in the South

I think they should have personalized AI that allows students to learn more about their campus And their university. This would allow students to get a better understanding of why they're applying to this specific university and how this university will fit into their career goals. Additionally, having an AI chat readily available will also be very beneficial as it will allow students to properly get their questions answered quickly.

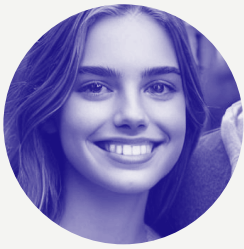
Female Asian or Pacific Islander student
graduating in 2025 located in the South

I think universities should use AI by creating more user-friendly and personalized experiences for its students, yet should be mindful about the amount of AI they use because social interaction can be more meaningful and better for a student than a computer.

Female White student graduating in 2026
located in the Northeast

I believe that colleges should use AI to help students figure out where they fit in at a college. [...]

Non-binary White student graduating in 2025
located in the South



I believe they should use them to craft more personalized content and descriptions of majors.

As someone who wants to go into the field of journalism and communications, AI seems very useful and I wholeheartedly believe it's what will help us move forward in society!

Female White student graduating in 2026
located in the Northeast

Use of AI to highlight different parts of a university to incoming/applying students based on certain aspects of their own life, such as having someone fill out a form with their favorite activities which then points out similar activities that take place on campus.

Non-binary White student graduating in 2025
located in the Midwest

Universities could use AI in the college admissions process by providing students with a "personal helper" of sorts where students could use an in-app/website to ask questions. This "AI helper" could provide students with quick and easy answers to general questions.

Female White student graduating in 2025
located in the South

I think universities should use AI in a way that meets what they stand for. For many colleges, AI could be used to answer questions, similar to how many search engines are beginning to use AI. I also think that unique uses of AI may help draw in students.

Female White student graduating in 2027
located in the Midwest

It should just be used for questions that some people don't want to ask a real person.

Male White student graduating in 2026
located in the South

3.

The right solution will gain student trust

In the past year, applications of AI continue to spring forward — and our survey shows that student openness toward AI is likely to increase over time vs. decrease. The right AI solution has the power to not only meet student expectations but also gain their trust and advocacy, creating a ripple effect of positive sentiment across an applicant pool.

Students' endorsement of AI use in college admissions:



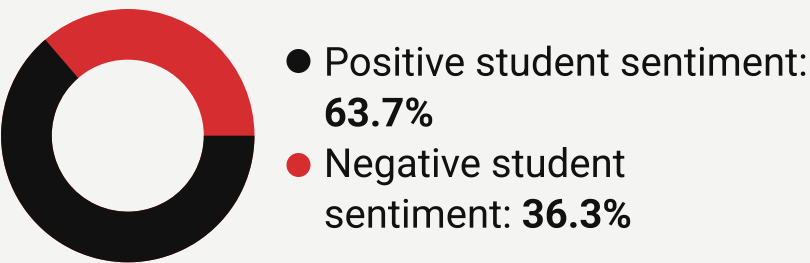
- Willing to endorse AI use: **58.2%**
- Not willing to endorse AI use: **41.8%**

Our research demonstrates a strong inclination to recommend AI in college admissions, contingent upon positive initial experiences. Overall, 58.2% of students expressed willingness to endorse AI use to their peers.

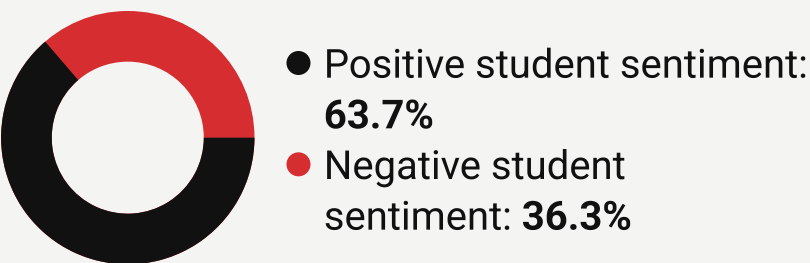
In the context of college admissions, this majority of potential "promoters"* suggests:

a well-implemented AI solution could significantly amplify its own adoption through peer-to-peer recommendations.

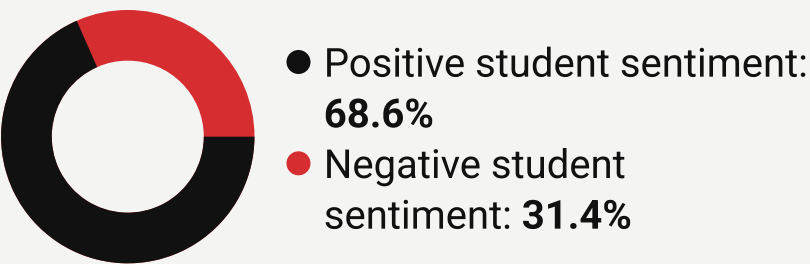
Students' endorsement of AI:
Male students



Students' endorsement of AI:
Asian or Pacific Islander students



Students' endorsement of AI:
International students



This propensity to recommend varies across demographics, with Male students (63.7%) and Asian or Pacific Islander students (63.7%) showing the highest likelihood of advocacy. International students stand out with a high 68.6% recommendation rate, indicating a particularly strong opportunity for AI adoption in global recruitment strategies.

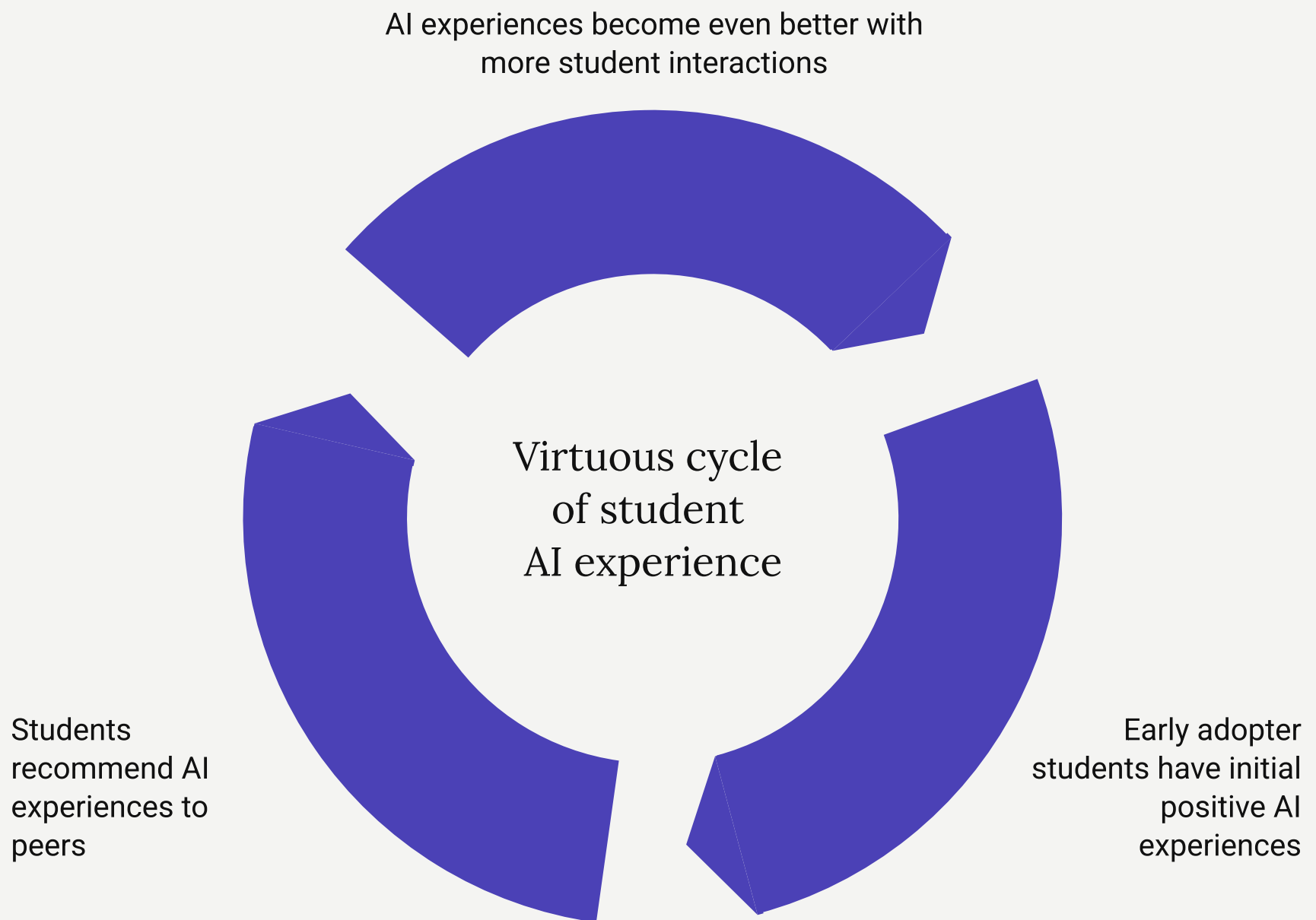
*
"Promoters" are commonly heralded as a key marketing performance indicator and refers to highly satisfied customers who are likely to recommend a product, service, or company to others. Promoters are important to any brand, including universities, because they trigger word-of-mouth marketing growth loops, referral growth loops, and provide positive social proof to their peers.

Student experience with AI	Willingness to endorse
Low familiarity with AI	41.3% 
High familiarity with AI	63.8% 
Frequent AI users	69.3% 

The data further reveals a correlation between familiarity with AI and the likelihood of recommendation. Students with high familiarity are significantly more likely to recommend AI (63.8%) compared to those with low familiarity (41.3%). This trend is even more pronounced when considering usage levels, with frequent AI users showing a 69.3% recommendation rate.

These findings suggest a virtuous cycle: as students gain more exposure to AI in admissions processes, their comfort and appreciation for these tools grow, leading to increased advocacy and, subsequently, wider adoption. This cycle presents a compelling argument for universities to prioritize early implementation of high-quality AI solutions that can provide positive first impressions and sustained value throughout the admissions journey.

However, it's crucial to note that not all AI solutions are created equal. Disjointed chatbots and impersonal phone-tree calls could lead to frustration and disengagement among applicants. Many solutions in the market are narrowly applied, creating fragmented AI interactions across platforms. Colleges must therefore be discerning in their selection of AI tools, prioritizing solutions that offer seamless experiences across multiple modalities.



The imperative for universities is clear: investing in sophisticated, user-centric AI solutions for admissions is not just a technological upgrade — ***it's a strategic necessity***, and a timely one at that.

As AI adoption grows and positive experiences accumulate, we can expect to see an acceleration in openness and acceptance among prospective students.

This positive feedback loop presents an unprecedented opportunity for institutions to transform their admissions processes, enhance student engagement, and ultimately attract a more diverse and well-matched cohort of applicants.

Conclusion

The landscape of college admissions is on the cusp of a profound transformation, driven by the expectations and technological fluency of today's digital-native students. Our survey of over 18,022 high school students reveals a generation primed for AI-enhanced admissions processes, yet currently underserved by traditional recruitment methods.

The data paints a clear picture: students are not only familiar with AI but are increasingly reliant on it in their daily lives. **This familiarity translates into a willingness to engage with AI in the college admissions process,** particularly for personalized information gathering and initial research.

The stark contrast between students' digital expectations and the current state of university outreach highlights a critical gap that institutions must address to remain competitive and relevant.

Moreover, the survey underscores a significant opportunity for universities to leverage AI as a trust-building tool. With the majority of students indicating they would recommend AI in admissions based on positive experiences, institutions have a unique chance to create a virtuous cycle of adoption and advocacy. This is particularly crucial given the current disconnect between students and admissions officers, exacerbated by high staff turnover, limited capacity, and students' preference for digital, often anonymous, interactions.

However, the implementation of AI in admissions is not without challenges. Universities must be discerning in their choice of AI solutions, prioritizing seamless, multi-modal experiences that can provide genuinely personalized interactions at scale. The goal should be to complement, not replace, human admissions staff, creating a synergy that enhances the overall applicant experience.

As we look to the future, it's clear that **AI in college admissions is not just an option but an imperative.** Universities that embrace this shift thoughtfully and strategically will be better positioned to connect with, engage, and ultimately enroll the diverse, tech-savvy students of tomorrow. The age of AI-enhanced admissions is here, and with it comes the opportunity to reimagine the entire recruitment and application process for the benefit of both institutions and students alike.

Appendix

A total of **18,022 high school students** participated in and completed the survey — the survey was delivered by CollegeVine, to active CollegeVine students.

Survey participants

The breakdown of participants by gender, ethnicity, and geographical location is provided below:

Gender:

- Female: 11,871 participants
- Male: 5,221 participants
- Non-binary: 353 participants
- Other: 62 participants
- Prefer not to answer: 301 participants
- Transgender: 214 participants

Ethnicity:

- White: 6,783 participants
- Asian or Pacific Islander: 4,072 participants
- Hispanic: 2,901 participants
- Black: 2,746 participants
- Other: 921 participants
- Prefer not to answer: 470 participants
- Native American: 129 participants

Geographical Location:

- US - Northeast: 5,050 participants
- US - South: 4,966 participants
- US - West: 3,477 participants
- US - Midwest: 3,329 participants
- International: 1,146 participants
- Puerto Rico / US Territory: 54 participants

Sentiment Analysis Methodology

Sentiment analysis was conducted to gauge students' attitudes towards the use of AI in college admissions. We followed the steps below to complete our analysis:

Data Collection:

- Survey responses were collected anonymously from high school students across various demographics.
- The survey included both quantitative and qualitative questions to capture students' familiarity, usage, and sentiment towards AI.

Data Cleaning and Preparation:

- Responses were reviewed for completeness and accuracy.
- Any missing or incomplete data entries were handled appropriately to ensure the validity of the analysis.

Quantitative Analysis:

- Responses to quantitative questions were analyzed to determine the overall recommendation rate of AI.
- Data was segmented based on various demographics (gender, race, geography) to identify trends and patterns.
- Recommendation percentages were calculated for each segment.

Threshold Setting:

- A threshold was set to define positive agreement. Students who scored 6 or above on a 0-10 scale were considered as agreement.

Sentiment Categorization:

- Sentiment scores were used to categorize qualitative responses into positive, neutral, and negative.
- Recommendations were then analyzed within these categories to understand how students feel about AI in college admissions.

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Image use

We care about preserving the privacy of students who have participated in our survey. All images of students used in this report have been generated using AI, and do not represent real students.

