

Public Engagement and College Choice: The 2017 College-Bound Questionnaire Report

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What is the College-Bound Questionnaire?

The CBQ was a pilot survey designed by Institutional Research and Planning and administered by Cornell's Survey Research Institute. First launched in 2010, subsequent CBQ surveys have been administered each year except 2013, when the College Board's Admitted Student Questionnaire (ASQ) was administered.

The survey was intended to be administered annually in off-years for the Admitted Student Questionnaire, and one goal was to substantially shorten the survey to improve response rates, which had been declining for the ASQ—particularly for non-enrolling students.

Since 2014, however, Cornell has exclusively deployed the CBQ rather than re-administering the College Board instrument.

How does it differ from the College Board's Admitted Student Questionnaire?

Design

In-house design and programming means that the survey can be fully customized—we have complete control over the questions asked, and we can direct students' responses. For example, we can ensure that a non-enrolling student compares the college she plans to attend with Cornell, rather than a third choice college. We can also adjust for changes in enrollment plans between the time we send out the initial survey invitation, and the time the student actually responds, giving us a more accurate estimate for enrolling and non-enrolling populations.

Programmed skips also help make the survey less tedious for respondents, because they are not asked questions that do not pertain to them.

The CBQ is slated for review in Fall 2018, so changes or additions to the current format and questions will be considered at that time.

Survey Population

All early-decision and regular-decision current-year freshman applicants who were admitted to Cornell are invited to participate in the CBQ. Students admitted in a prior year who defer matriculation are not re-surveyed. Also, because the survey is launched around the first week of May each year, students admitted from the waitlist are not included.

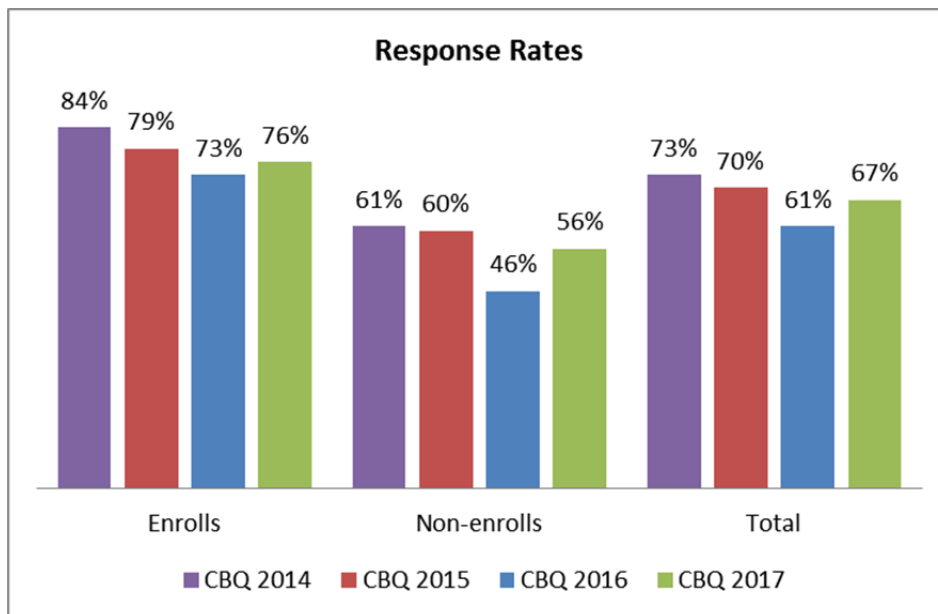
Based on a May 9 data extract, 5,833 current-year freshman admits were invited to participate in the 2017 CBQ.

Response Rates

Typically, non-enrolling students tend to respond to the survey at lower rates than students who expect to enroll at Cornell in the fall.

The overall response rate last year (61 percent) represented a sharp decrease in response to the 70 percent achieved by the 2015 CBQ. The 2017 CBQ rebounded to a 67 percent response rate, but still fell short of the high response rates of the prior two administrations.

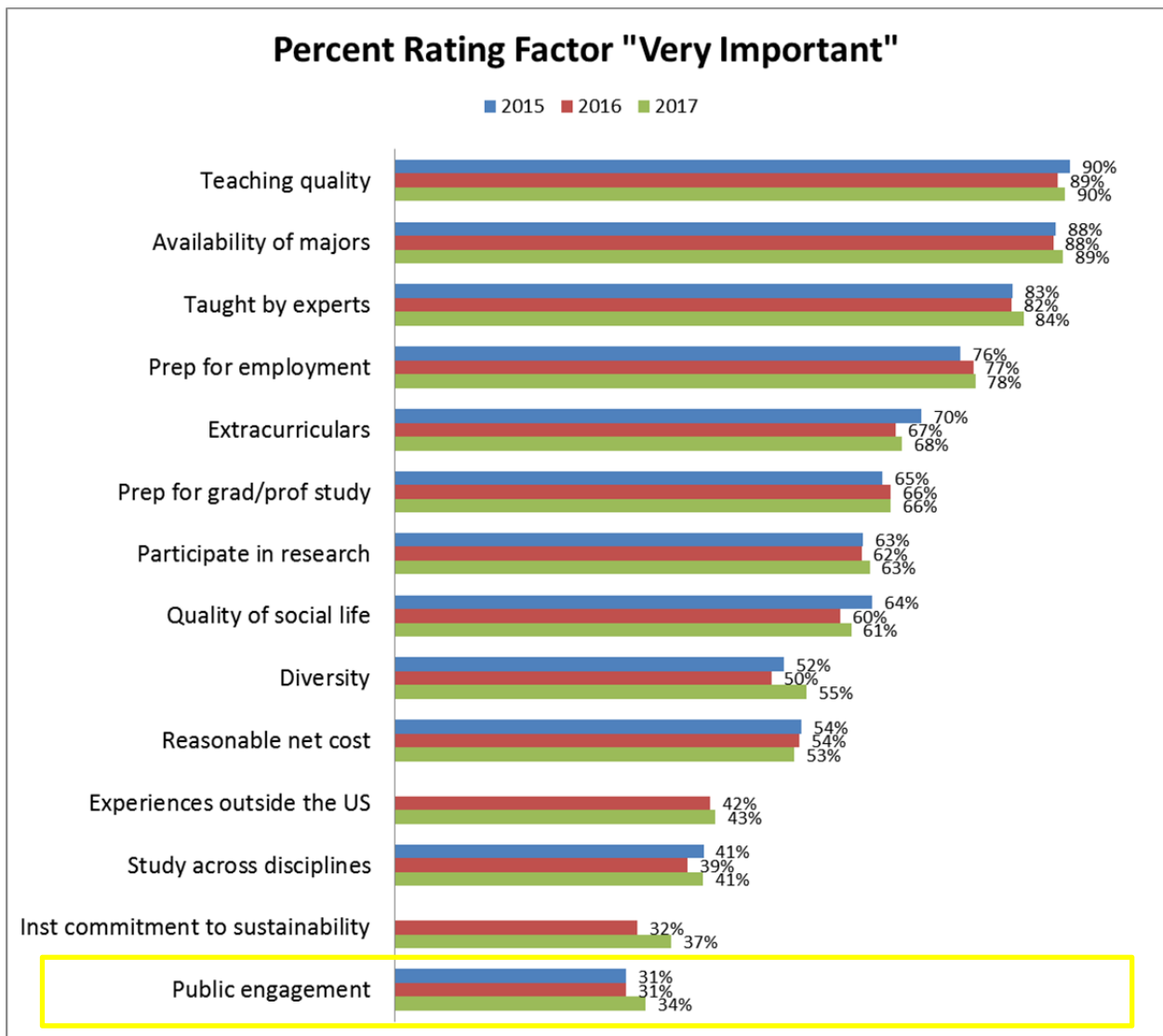
Of greatest concern are the response rates for non-enrolls, since that population is the basis for overlap analysis. Fortunately, the proportion of non-enrolling respondents was well over half for this year's administration, generating greater confidence in the utility of the results for non-enrolling admits.



Importance of Selected Factors: All Respondents

In addition to factors in common with many admitted student surveys, the CBQ includes factors from Cornell's strategic plan or current initiatives. In general, respondents as a group deemed "traditional" factors such as quality of teaching or available majors more important in their college choice decisions than those reflecting Cornell-specific priorities or initiatives, such as public engagement, institutional commitment to sustainability, or international experiences outside the US. (The latter two items were new in 2016.)

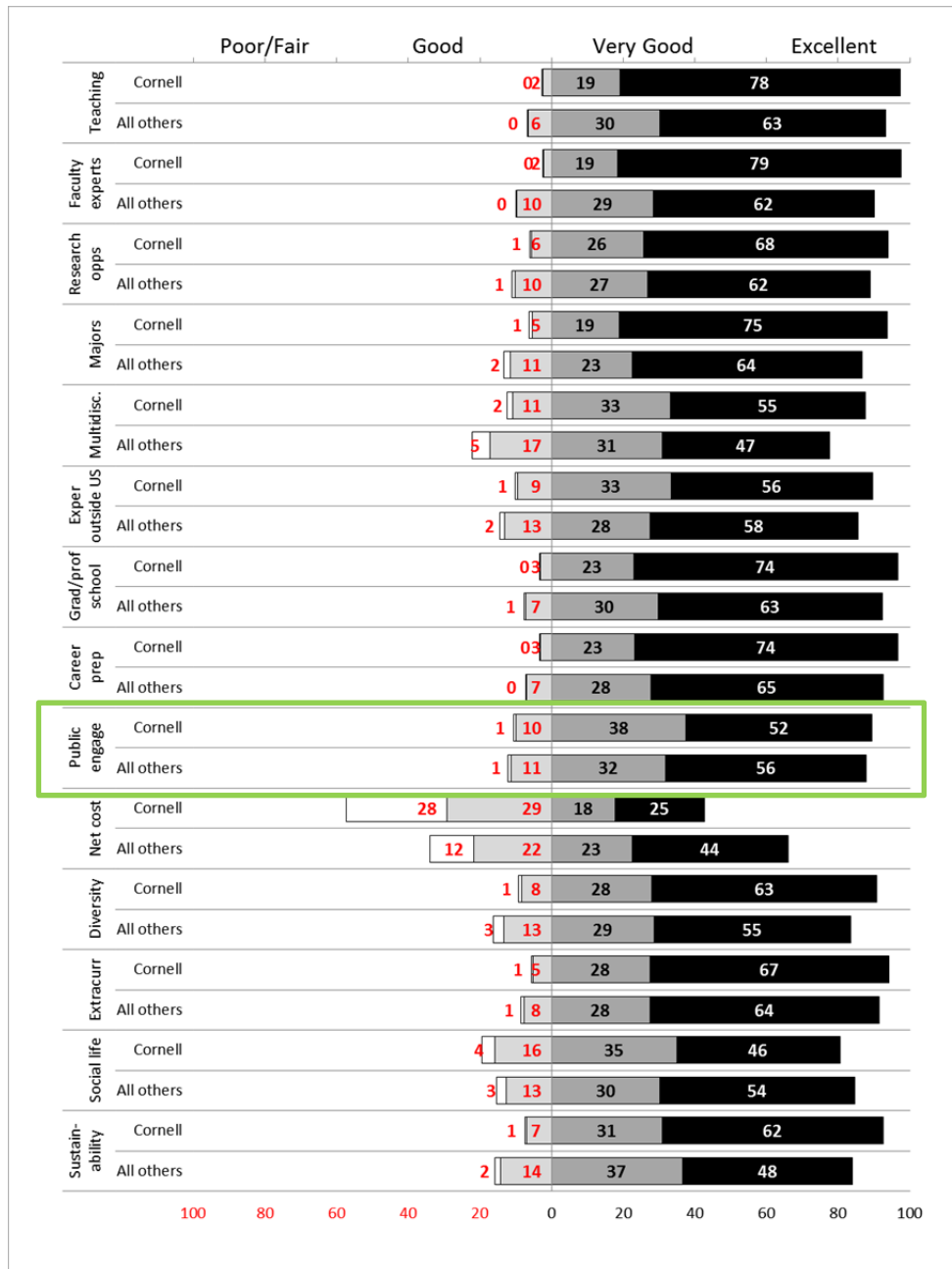
Overall, ratings of importance remained relatively stable over time, but the 2017 CBQ cohort considered opportunities for public engagement more important than the two prior groups, although the absolute proportion remains relatively small. (See the last item in the table below.)



2017 Ratings of Selected Factors: All respondents, Cornell v. All Competitors

The CBQ allows us to exert some control over which competitor was compared to Cornell. For non-enrolls who indicated where they planned to enroll, the competitor was the chosen school. Otherwise, it was the highest-preference school to which the student was admitted.

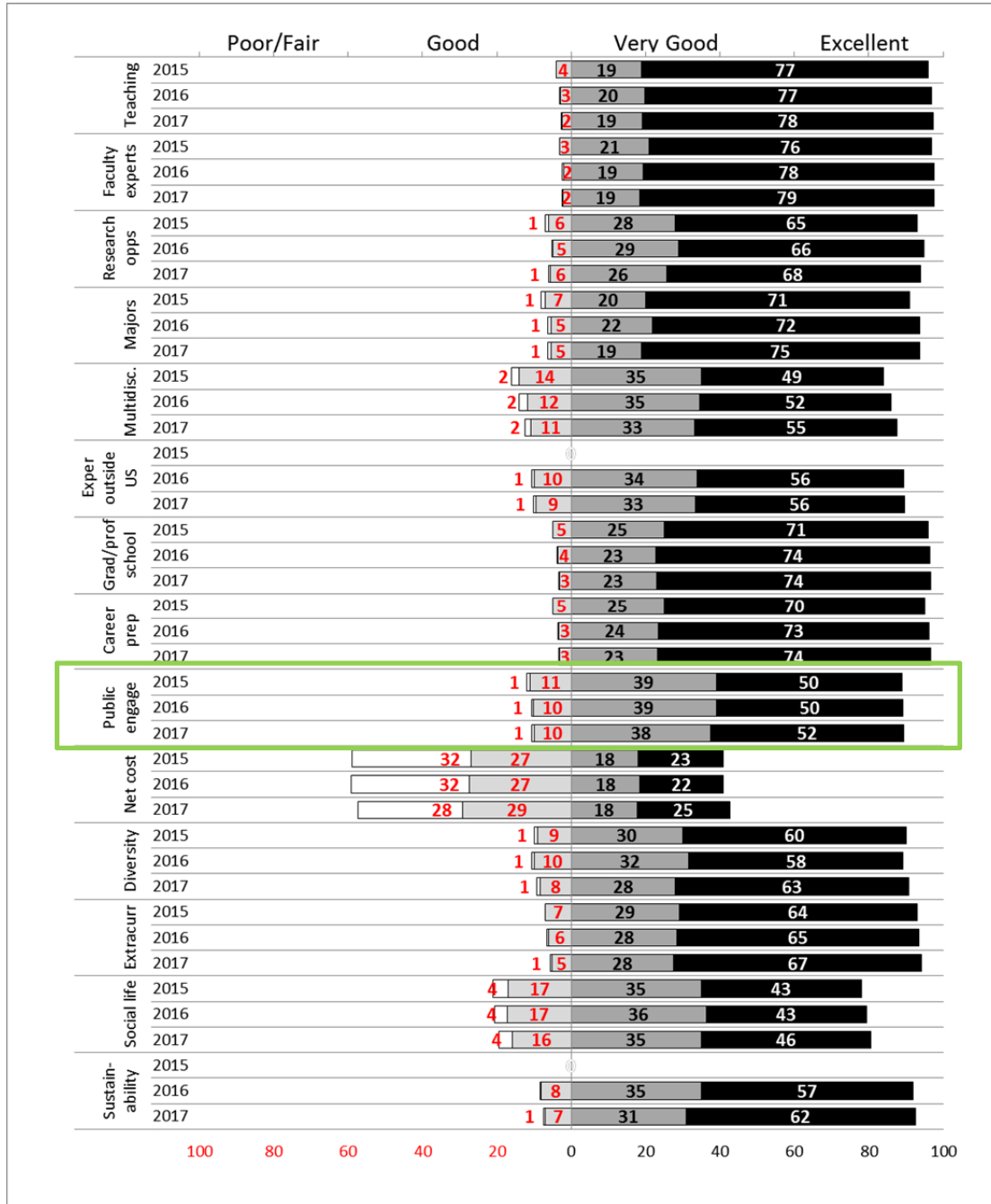
For public engagement (roughly halfway down the list below), Cornell rated slightly lower than our competitors as a group. In good news, over half (52 percent) of all respondents rated Cornell “excellent” with regard to public engagement opportunities, but 56 percent of this same group rated competitors “excellent.” Very few respondents rated either Cornell or other institutions as “good” or “poor/fair” on public engagement opportunities.



Ratings of Cornell only: All respondents, multi-year results

Over time, the Cornell ratings from all respondents have remained relatively stable, but with the exception of international experiences, the 2017 cohort was more likely to award ratings of “excellent” than the prior cohorts.

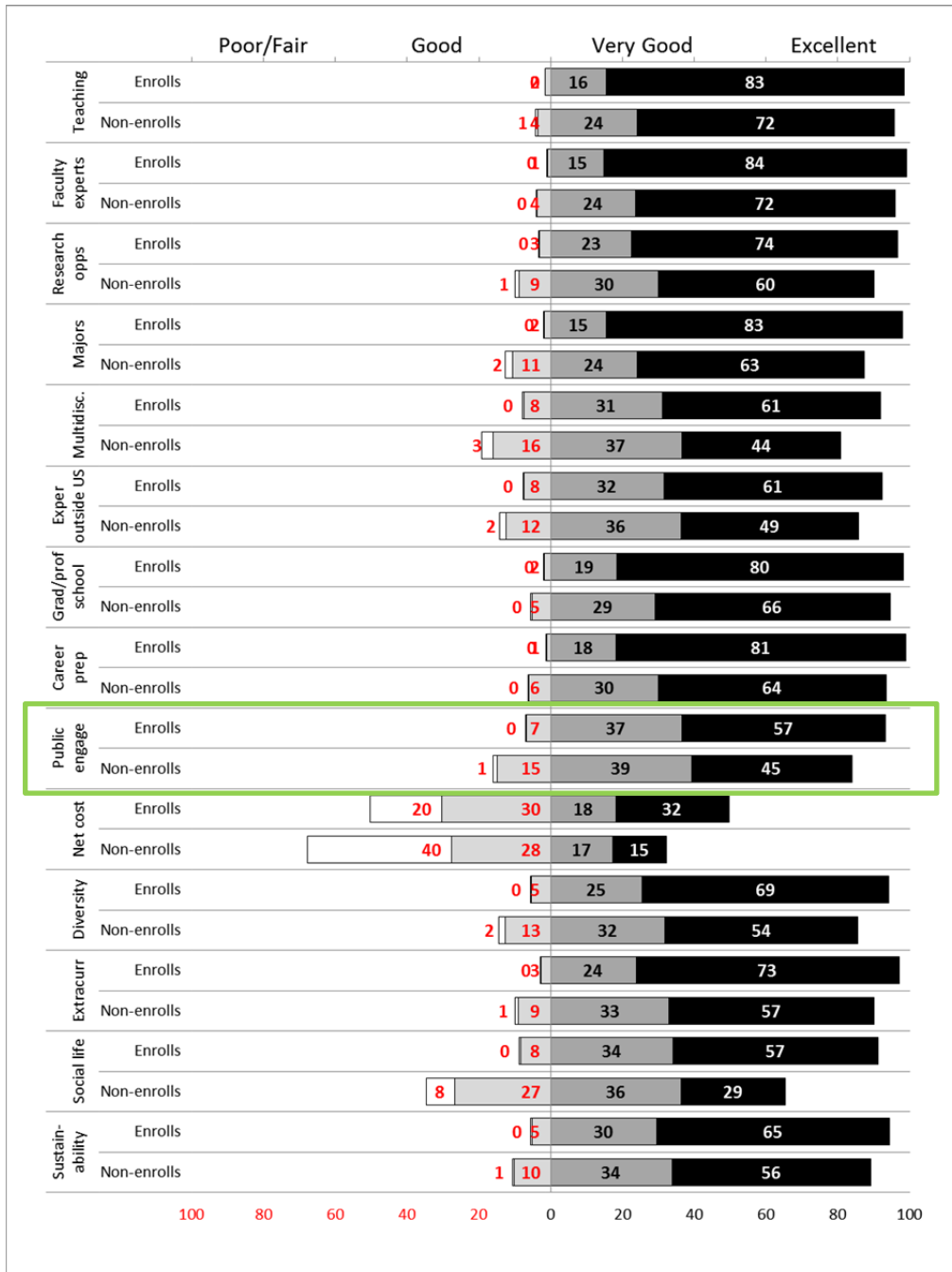
For public engagement, only half of the 2015 and 2016 cohorts rated Cornell “excellent,” compared to 52 percent in 2017.



Ratings of Cornell: 2017 Enrolling v. Non-enrolling Respondents

Respondents' ratings of Cornell provide some insight into discrepancies of opinion between those students who expected to enroll and those who did not. Not surprisingly, enrolls tended to give higher ratings than non-enrolls on all factors.

For public engagement, only 45 percent of non-enrolls found Cornell's opportunities "excellent," while 57 percent of respondents who planned to enroll at Cornell awarded top marks. At the lower end of the scale, non-enrolls were more than twice as likely to rate Cornell's public service opportunities as merely "good."



Selected Factors: Intersection of Importance and Ratings

Factors considered “less important” are those rated very important by fewer than half of all respondents; “more important” factors received a very important rating from 50 percent or more. Comparative ratings (higher or lower) are based on the mean rating of each factor for Cornell compared to the rating for all competing institutions *as a group*.

Items within each quadrant are listed in decreasing order of difference between the mean rating for Cornell and the mean rating of all competitors—items at the top of each list have the largest discrepancies in mean ratings.

The gray box represents the areas of greatest concern for Cornell—in general, large proportions of students find net cost and social life to be very important, and we continue to rate lower than competitors overall.

In the bottom left quadrant, Cornell’s average ratings for these factors—which include public engagement opportunities for all three cohorts—were lower than those of competitors, but fewer than half of all respondents cited this factor as “very important” in their final choice.

Less important and Cornell rated higher			<u>Very important and Cornell rated higher</u>		
2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017
Multidisc.	Sustainability	Sustainability	Faculty experts	Faculty experts	Faculty experts
	Multidisc.	Multidisc.	Quality teaching	Quality teaching	Quality teaching
	Intl experience*	Intl experience*	Career prep	Grad/Prof prep	Majors
			Grad/Prof prep	Majors	Diversity
			Majors	Research opps	Grad/Prof prep
			Diversity	Diversity	Career prep
			Research opps	Career prep	Research opps
			Extracurriculars	Extracurriculars	Extracurriculars
Less important and Cornell rated lower			<u>Very important and Cornell rated lower</u>		
2015	2016	2017	2015	2016	2017
Public engagement	Public engagement	Public engagement	Net cost	Net cost	Net cost
Core curriculum*			Social life	Social life	Social life

*In 2016, “Core curriculum” was replaced by “Experiences outside the US,” which is shortened to “Intl experiences” in this table. “Sustainability” was also added in 2016.

Top 12 Institutions Chosen by Non-enrolls

For the 2017 CBQ cohort, regular decision non-enrolls *who rated public engagement opportunities “very important” and rated their chosen institution “excellent” on that factor* most frequently reported plans to attend these institutions:

Regular Decision Non-enrolls Valuing Public Engagement Opportunities Chose¹:	Percent of group
Yale University	8%
University of Pennsylvania	6%
Brown University Duke University Princeton University Stanford University	5%
Johns Hopkins University Harvard College Massachusetts Institute of Technology	4%
Georgetown University University of Chicago University of Notre Dame	3%

This table does not suggest that satisfaction with public engagement opportunities was the primary reason for choosing these institutions. In fact, it is not uncommon for students to rate their chosen institution very highly across the full range of factors. Still, there are some differences in the choices of those who valued public engagement highly compared to the regular decision non-enrolls as a group. The top choices for the entire regular decision non-enroll cohort include:

All Regular Decision Non-enrolls Chose:	Percent of group
University of Pennsylvania Princeton University Massachusetts Institute of Technology Yale University	5%
Brown University University of California, Berkeley Stanford University	4%
Duke University Columbia University (excl. engineering) Harvard College Johns Hopkins University University of Chicago Dartmouth College	3%

¹ Respondents in both tables have been weighted to represent the actual number of non-enrolling regular decision admits for Fall 2017 (2,545). The weighted count of those “valuing public engagement” is 559, roughly 22 percent of all regular decision non-enrolls.