

Where Admitted Students of Color Enroll in College

March 3, 2020

This analysis was produced by OPEIR in response to a request by Enrollment Management and Student Affairs. Results are not necessarily generalizable and attempts to use results outside the scope of this project should be avoided.

Key Findings

1. While students of color who are admitted enroll at UTC more often than non-students of color, 90% of the students who do not enroll here enroll in a more-preferred college choice. Across three fall admission cycles admitted students of all races and ethnicities enrolled in over 700 institutions nationwide.
2. Tennessee public universities enroll about half the students of color who enroll in college elsewhere, with UT Knoxville the top destination. MTSU is growing in its enrollment of students of color, particularly for students who identify as Black or African American.
3. Students of color are more likely to enroll in colleges as or more diverse than UTC than non-student of color peers. Student preferences for diversity include more diverse locally governed institutions (LGIs) like Austin Peay, MTSU, and University of Memphis. About 15% of Black or African American students who enroll anywhere opt for an array of HBCUs.
4. Tennessee public universities deploy institutional aid in different ways, with many institutions awarding greater aid amounts than UTC to fewer students. UT Knoxville and MTSU both have well-publicized scholarships available to underrepresented populations.
5. The majority of public Tennessee universities award at least some scholarships automatically when students apply for admission. This practice likely results in more aid going to underrepresented students.

Recommendations

Short term

1. More closely explore why MTSU is successfully enrolling increasing numbers of students of color who are admitted to UTC but enroll elsewhere.
2. Identify additional ways UTC can signal to applicants of color that they will be safe on campus and their experiences and perspectives are valued here.
3. Make scholarships for diverse students easier to find on the UTC website and ensure prospective students can easily evaluate if they would meet award criteria and how to apply.

4. Automatically consider students for some scholarships based on their admissions application.

Long term

Explore different strategies for institutional aid awards that may make UTC more competitive to applicants of color weighing multiple financial aid awards.

Introduction and Data Notes

This analysis seeks to understand college enrollment behaviors of students of color who are admitted to UTC but do not enroll here in the fall term for which they are admitted. This analysis focused on undergraduate students who applied for beginning freshmen or transfer admission and had an admission status of approved or exceptional admit. Three fall admission cycles were examined – 2017, 2018, and 2019.

For the purposes of this analysis, all students of color are examined as are students from racial and ethnic groups historically underrepresented in higher education: American Indian and Alaska Native, Black or African American, and Hispanic or Latinx students. The way students were assigned to these groups for this purposes of this analysis are described below. It is important to note that the way these groups were assigned means that students can be double-counted; for example, a student could identify as both American Indian and African American and that student would be included in findings for both groups. As a comparison point, enrollment behaviors of students who identified as white or whom had a race or ethnicity that is unknown were also examined and these students are referred to as non-students of color throughout this report.

For the purposes of this analysis, different student populations are defined in the following ways:

- Student of color: a student for which race/ethnicity data is available and the student is classified in any category other than white.
- American Indian or Alaska Native student: a student who has indicated American Indian or Alaska Native as their role or one of multiple races or ethnicities.
- Black or African American student: a student who has indicated Black or African American as their sole of one of multiple races or ethnicities.
- Hispanic or Latinx student: a student who has indicated Hispanic as their sole or one of multiple ethnicities.

One factor complicating this analysis is the relatively large proportion of applicants for whom race and ethnicity is unknown. Across all three cycles about 15% of all applicants did not disclose information on their race and ethnicity. While, for the purposes of comparison, these students are included with white students it is likely that some students for whom race and ethnicity is unknown are students of color.

Defining Applicant Characteristics

In each admission cycle studied, there were more applicants than for the previous cycle. Students of color who were admitted enrolled at UTC at higher rates than students who identified as White or for whom race and ethnicity is unknown as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1: UTC ENROLLMENT OUTCOMES OF ADMITTED STUDENTS FOR FALL TERM EXAMINED

	Students of Color		Students Identifying as White or Unknown		All Students	
	Accepted	Enrolled at UTC	Accepted	Enrolled at UTC	Accepted	Enrolled at UTC
Fall 2017	1,274	47% (605)	6,049	41% (2,459)	7,319	42% (3,064)
Fall 2018	1,493	45% (677)	6,589	38% (2,532)	8,082	40% (3,209)
Fall 2019	1,504	47% (712)	6,687	38% (2,552)	8,191	40% (3,264)

It appears that the Fall 2018 cycle saw a substantial increase in the number of students of color accepted for admission to UTC; stable yield rates mean this applicant pool also resulted in increased number of students enrolling at UTC. In 2019, there was a smaller increase in students of color accepted for admission and a corresponding smaller increase in students enrolling UTC.

Numbers of applicants from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups in each admissions cycle and for all three years combined are shown in Table 2. There are small overall number of students identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native.

TABLE 2: ADMITTED STUDENTS FOR FALL TERM EXAMINED BY UNDERREPRESENTED RACE/ETHNICITY

	Am. Indian/Alaska Native		Black/African American		Hispanic/Latinx	
	Enrolled at UTC	Enrolled Elsewhere	Enrolled at UTC	Enrolled Elsewhere	Enrolled at UTC	Enrolled Elsewhere
Fall 2017	32	10	347	331	166	173
Fall 2018	44	19	395	426	173	152
Fall 2019	21	19	381	342	222	214
All 3 Cycles	97	48	1,123	1,099	561	539

Overall Enrollment Behaviors

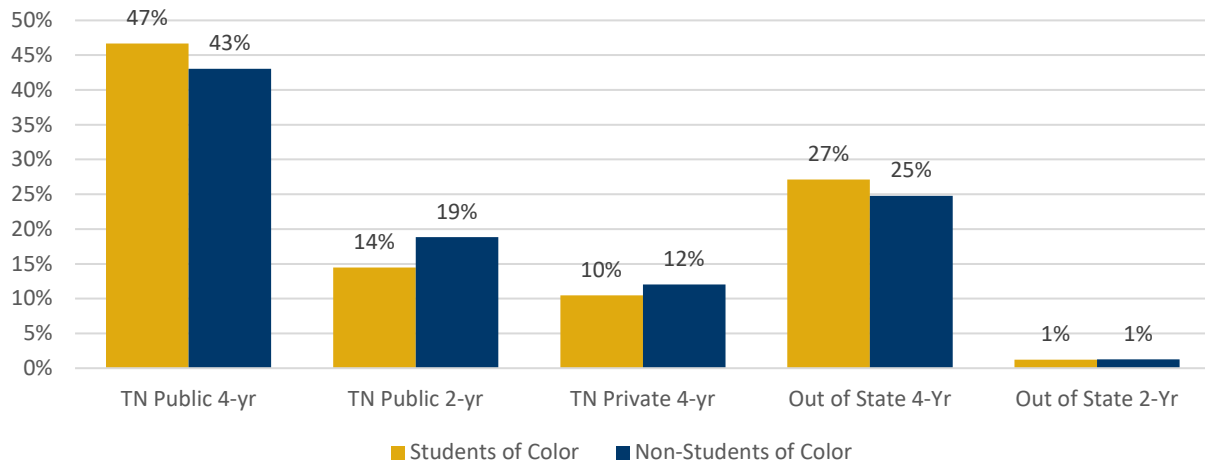
College Enrollment Anywhere

Overall about 90% of applicants who are admitted to UTC and do not enroll here choose to attend a different college for the fall term. Of the 11% of students who do not enroll in college for the fall term, 7% of those students subsequently enroll at UTC in a later term. This is true for students of color as well as for students who identify as white or have an unknown race/ethnicity. Essentially, the reason most students are not enrolling at UTC is because they are choosing a more-preferred college option.

College Enrollment by Type

About half of students of color who enroll in colleges other than UTC do so at other Tennessee public four-year institutions (47%), a proportion slightly higher than it is for non-students of color (43%) as shown in Figure 1. Non-students of color are more likely to enroll in Tennessee community colleges.

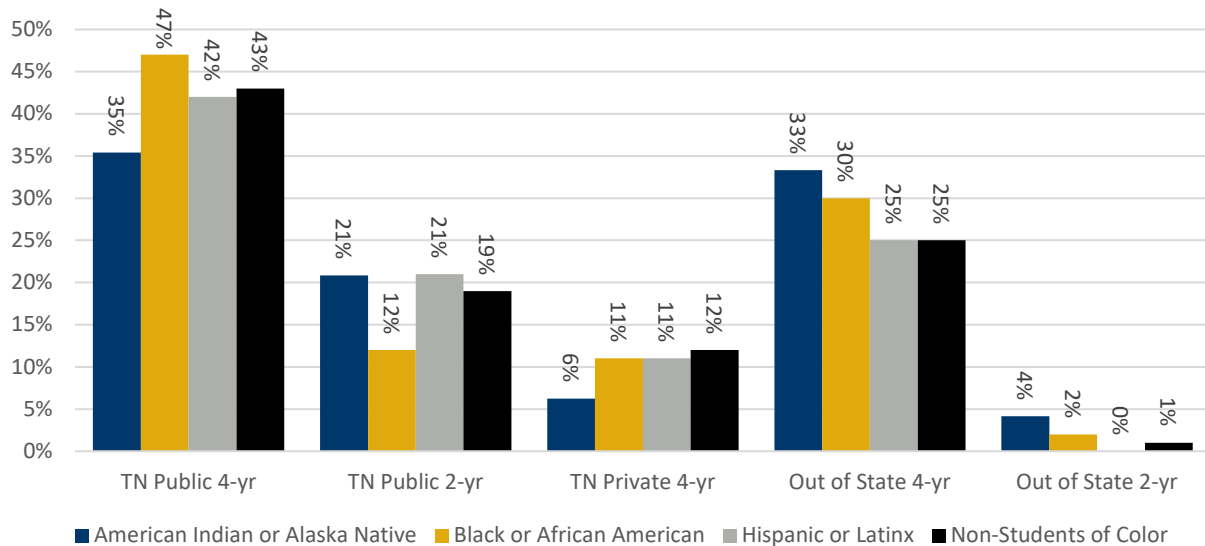
FIGURE 1: COLLEGE ENROLLMENT BY TYPE



Overall, students of color are primarily enrolling in four-year institutions (84%) at a slightly greater incidence than non-students of color (80%). Students of color also primarily attend college in Tennessee (72%) though do so slightly less than non-students of color (74%).

There are some differences in enrollment by sector for applicants from specific underrepresented racial and ethnic groups as shown in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2: UNDERREPRESENTED RACIAL AND ETHNIC GROUP COLLEGE ENROLLMENT BY TYPE



A few patterns emerge that are captured in Table 3. Both American Indian or Alaska Native and Black or African American students are more likely to attend college outside Tennessee. American Indian students are more likely to attend 2-year institutions (25%) while African American students are more likely to attend 4-year institutions (88%). Enrollment by sector for Hispanic and Latinx students closely mirrors enrollment by sector for non-students of color.

TABLE 3: IN-STATE AND 4-YEAR ENROLLMENT FOR STUDENTS FROM UNDERREPRESENTED RACIAL AND ETHNIC GROUPS

	Enrolled in Tennessee	Enrolled in Four-Year
American Indian or Alaska Native	63%	75%
Black or African American	70%	88%
Hispanic or Latinx	74%	78%
Non-Students of Color	74%	80%

Top Colleges Attended by Students Admitted to UTC who Enroll Elsewhere

Across these three cycles students of all races and ethnicities enrolled at a vast array of colleges across the nation with over 700 institutions represented. This section will explore the top colleges students select; later sections will explore different dimensions of college fit across all these colleges. The top ten colleges for admitted but not enrolled students of color and non-students of color is in Table 4.

TABLE 4: TOP TEN COLLEGES FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR AND NON-STUDENTS OF COLOR 2017-2019 FALL CYCLES

Students of Color	Non-Students of Color
1. UT Knoxville 17%	1. UT Knoxville 19%
2. MTSU 10%	2. MTSU 7%
3. University of Memphis 7%	3. Tennessee Tech 5%
4. Chattanooga State 4%	4. Chattanooga State 5%
5. Austin Peay 4%	5. ETSU 4%
6. ETSU 3%	6. University of Memphis 4%
7. Pellissippi State 2%	7. Pellissippi State 3%
8. Tennessee Tech 2%	8. Columbia State 2%
9. TSU 2%	9. Austin Peay 2%
10. Vol State 2%	10. Lee University 2%
Other 46%	Other 46%

The University of Tennessee in Knoxville is by far the top destination students choose in lieu of UTC with just under 20% of students who enroll in college anywhere choosing UTK as their option. This is true for both students of color and non-students of color although to a slightly lesser extent for students of color. The students who attend Pellissippi State may also intend to enroll at UT Knoxville after first completing the bridge program Pellissippi offers.

After UT Knoxville, the number two choice is MTSU. Over the three cycles studied, there are significant jumps in enrollment from students who are admitted to UTC who choose to enroll at MTSU. For example, in the 2017 cycle 8% of students of color who enrolled in another college enrolled at MTSU. By 2019, that proportion had increased to 13%. There were also increases among non-students of color choosing MTSU but these changes were not as dramatic.

The rest of the top colleges are rounded out by a mix of primarily Locally Governed Institutions (LGIs) and Tennessee community colleges. However, the mix of LGIs in particular looks different for students of

color and non-students of color. This is a phenomenon that will be explored in more detail in the section on campus diversity.

Top Colleges for Students from Historically Underrepresented Racial and Ethnic Groups

There are slight variations in top colleges among racial and ethnic groups as shown in Table 5. Due to the small numbers overall of American Indian or Alaska Native students, only the top four colleges can be presented; all other colleges have single student enrollments.

TABLE 5: TOP TEN COLLEGES FOR STUDENTS FROM HISTORICALLY UNDERREPRESENTED RACIAL AND ETHNIC GROUPS

	American Indian or Alaska Native Students	Black or African American Students	Hispanic or Latinx Students
1	UT Knoxville 25%	UT Knoxville 14%	UT Knoxville 19%
2	Chattanooga State 8%	MTSU 11%	MTSU 7%
3	Pellissippi State 6%	University of Memphis 8%	University of Memphis 6%
4	Dickinson College/ Lipscomb University/ MTSU/ Northeast Alabama CC 4%	Austin Peay 6%	University of Memphis 6%
5		Chattanooga State 4%	Austin Peay 4%
6		TSU 3%	Pellissippi State 3%
7		ETSU 2%	Tennessee Tech 3%
8		UT Martin 2%	ETSU/ Vol State 3%
9		Pellissippi State/ Tennessee Tech 2%	Columbia State 2%
10		Christian Brothers/ Southwest Tennessee CC/ Western Kentucky 1%	Western Kentucky 2%
Other	44%	43%	42%

It is notable that Black or African American students are less likely to attend UT Knoxville than other students of color and non-students of color. In fact, MTSU is a much closer number two option for Black students than the second choice is for any of the other racial or ethnic groups examined. While Black students are most likely to attend another Tennessee public 4-year institution than the other groups analyzed, student preferences among UT and LGI options are much more evenly distributed among top choices rather than concentrated at UT Knoxville.

Overall, only about half of all students enroll in these top institutions. To gain a more nuanced version of college fit, we will examine the entire pool of other colleges students attend across aspects of college fit to college fit to explore key factors in decision-making.

Factors Influencing College Decision-Making

College Fit

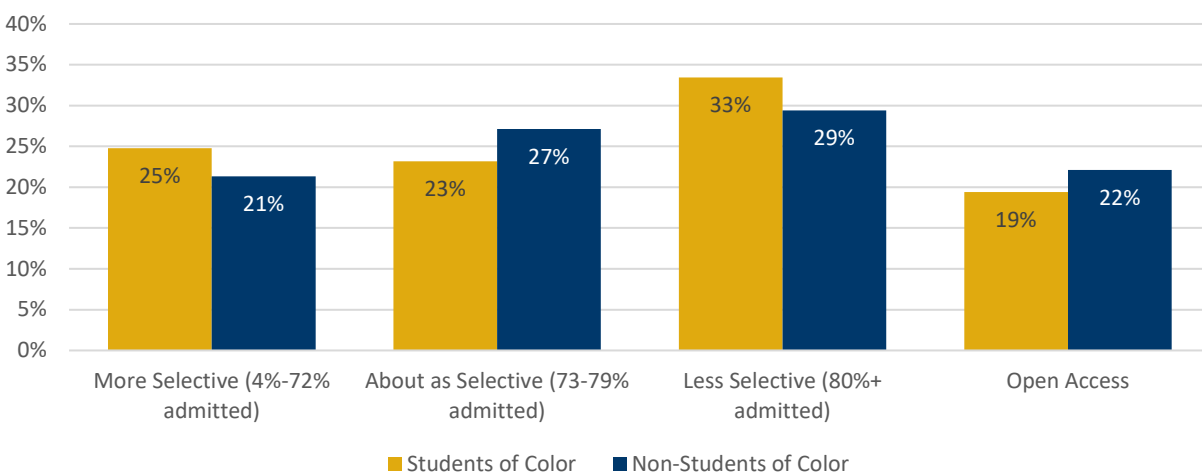
Students consider a many factors when choosing which college to attend across dimesnions of academic fit, social fit, and financial fit. Given the complexity and personal nature of college choice, it can be difficult to identify what students are paying attention to as part of the decision-making process. Using data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) allow us to gain a rudimentary understanding of how easily quantifiable factors compare across colleges. While these indicators are a starting point to understanding they are not meant to be comprehensive of the aspects of college fit students consider when selecting colleges.

The benefit of examining these indicators lies in the great array of colleges students ultimately attend. Across the three fall admissions cycles examined, students of all races and ethnicities ultimately enrolled in over 700 unique colleges spanning every U.S. state except North Dakota as well as colleges in the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the United Kingdom (this college is excluded from the analysis because IPEDS data is only available for U.S. institutions). Examining possible preferences across different indicators associated with academic, social, and financial fit may shed light on factors students consider especially important when selecting among colleges even across all the institutions in which they ultimately enroll.

Selectivity

Over the last decade, research has explored the relationship between institutional selectivity and student outcomes. Selectivity is also tied to perceptions of institutions as elite and selectivity is a component of college rankings systems. A basic measure of selectivity is the proportion of applicants an institution admits. Institutions which are open access, such as community colleges, admit virtually every applicant and do not report admission rates to IPEDS. On the other end of the spectrum, highly selective institutions admit fewer than 10% of applicants. In the Fall 2018 term, UTC admitted 76% of applicants. Figure 3 compares colleges at which students enroll to UTC's selectivity.

FIGURE 3: COLLEGE ENROLLMENT BY SELECTIVITY COMPARED TO UTC



Although about half (48%) of both groups of students enrolled in institutions which were more selective or about as selective as UTC, students of color chose more selective institutions than non-students of color. Students of color were also less likely to attend open access institutions. This is somewhat reflective of the top colleges students attend including Tennessee community colleges. For reference, selectivity of public four-year institutions in Tennessee is presented in Table 6.

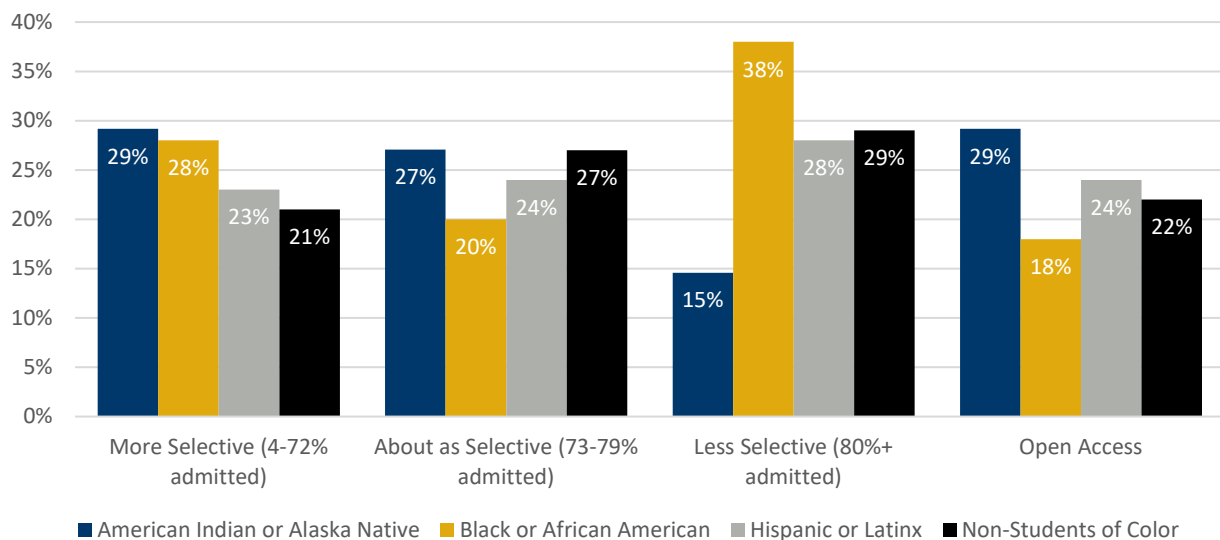
TABLE 6: SELECTIVITY OF TENNESSEE PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

Institution	2018 Admit Rate	How Classified for Figure 3
Austin Peay State University	94%	Less Selective
East Tennessee State University	87%	Less Selective
Middle Tennessee State University	94%	Less Selective
Tennessee State University	Open Access	Open Access
Tennessee Technological University	76%	About as Selective
The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga	76%	n/a
The University of Tennessee at Knoxville	78%	About as Selective
The University of Tennessee at Martin	69%	More Selective
University of Memphis	84%	Less Selective

This data suggests that the selectivity of the campus is not a primary factor driving student decision-making and this is probably largely due to how close Tennessee public universities are to one another when it comes to selectivity. If students were, for example, applying to UTC as a safety school in overwhelming numbers, we would expect to see very few students attending less selective or open access institutions but that is not the case. Instead, this data indicates that there are other factors that are more salient to students – there may be social or financial reasons why they enroll elsewhere.

Examining selectivity by students who identify as members of underrepresented racial and ethnic groups adds some complexity to the picture as shown in Figure 4.

FIGURE 4: COLLEGE ENROLLMENT BY SELECTIVITY AND RACE OR ETHNICITY COMPARED TO UTC



Overall Latinx students had enrollment closely aligned to non-students of color. American Indian or Alaska Native students skewed more selective than the other groups of students but had a relatively high proportion attending open access institutions. Black or African American students had a relatively high proportion attending institutions less selective than UTC but a small proportion attending open access institutions. All students in underrepresented racial and ethnic groups attended more selective institutions at higher rates than non-students of color as shown in Table 7.

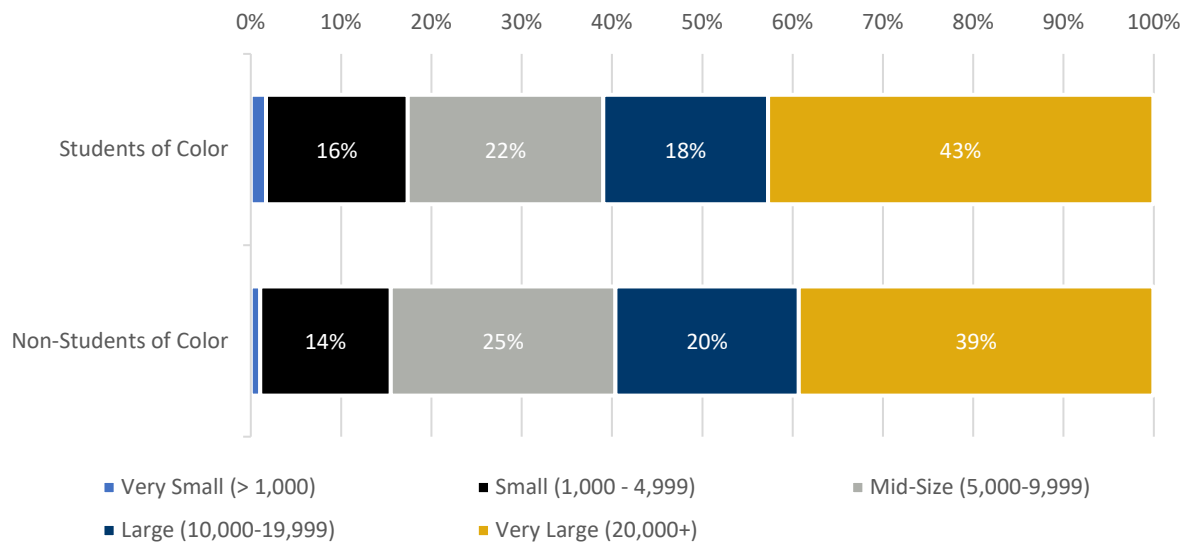
TABLE 7: RELATIVE SELECTIVITY BY RACE/ETHNICITY

Racial/Ethnic Group	% Attending Institutions As Selective or More Selective than UTC
American Indian or Alaska Native	56%
Black or African American	48%
Hispanic or Latinx	47%
Non-Students of Color	48%

Campus Size

Both students of color and non-students of color display preferences for very large institutions as shown in Figure 5.

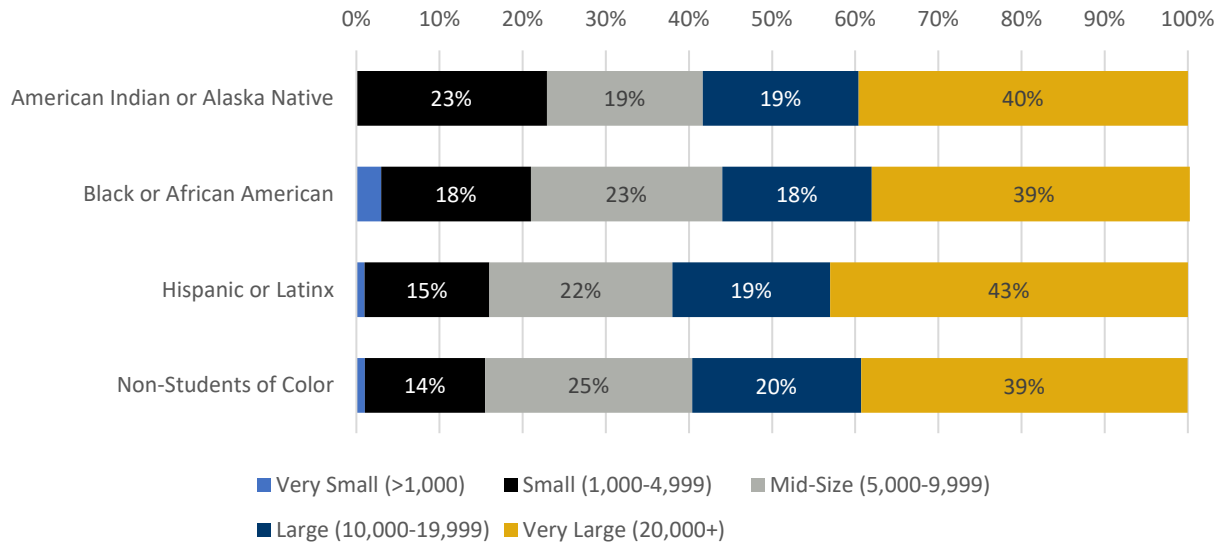
FIGURE 5: COLLEGE ENROLLMENT BY SIZE CATEGORY



This is unsurprising given that the among top choices students select, UT Knoxville, MTSU, and the University of Memphis are in the very large category. UTC is categorized as large as are Austin Peay, ETSU, and Tennessee Tech while TSU and UT Martin are categorized as mid-size. The wide array of colleges students attend are almost 40% in the small category, so it appears as though each of these institutions is capturing a small number of UTC’s applicants.

Examining size categories for students who identify as members of underrepresented racial and ethnic groups reveals that size breakdowns are overall similar as shown in Figure 6.

FIGURE 6: COLLEGE ENROLLMENT BY SIZE CATEGORY

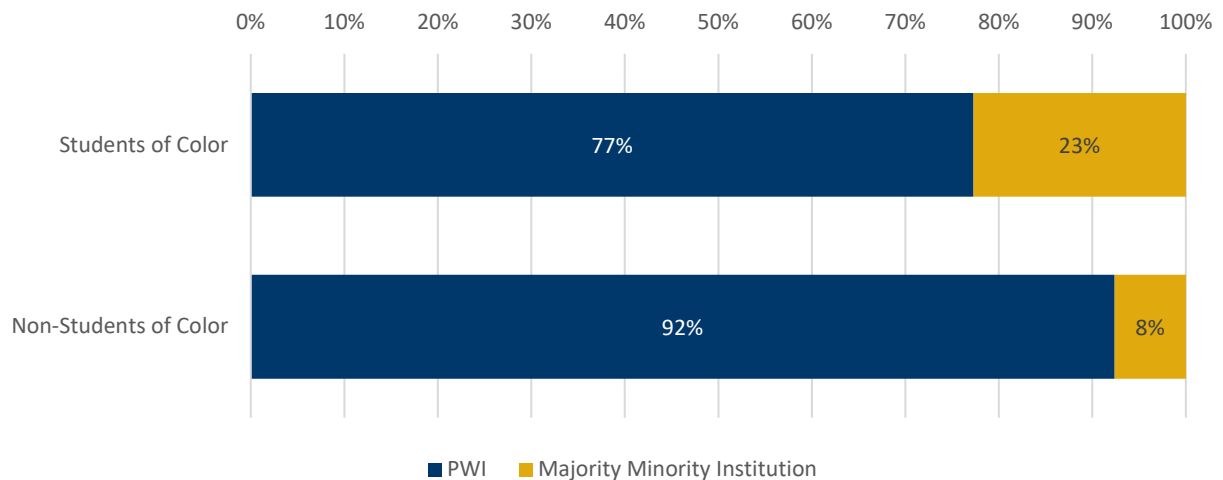


Latinx students are most closely aligned to non-students of color but are slightly more likely to attend very large institutions. American Indian or Alaska Native and Black or African American students are slightly more likely to enroll in small institutions.

Campus Diversity and Predominantly White Institutions

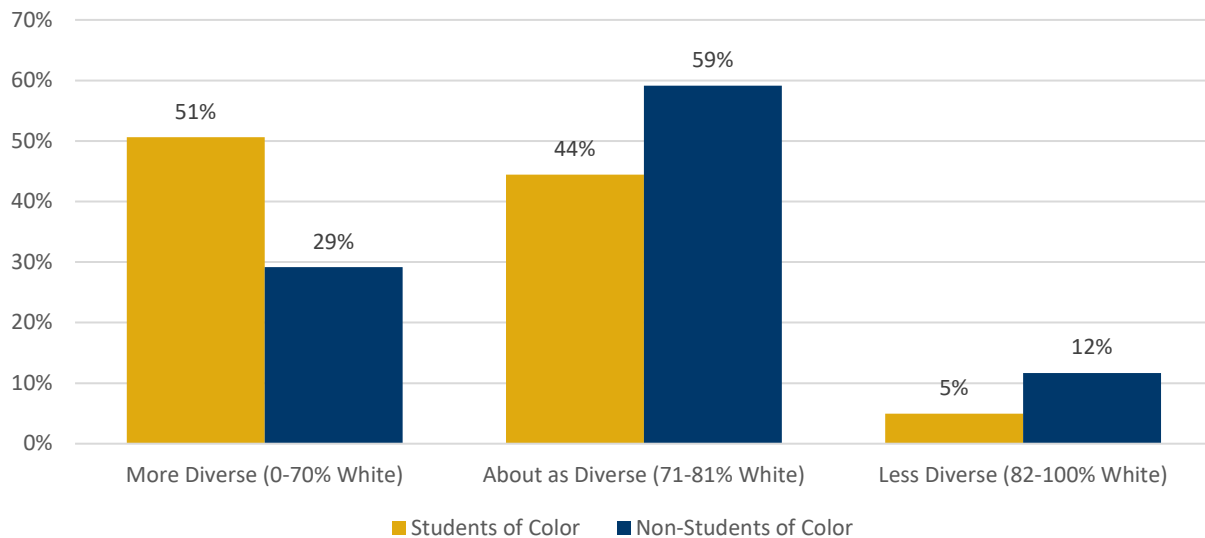
One aspect of social fit students may consider is the racial and ethnic diversity of the student body. Increased focus on adverse experiences that racially and ethnically diverse students experience at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and increased enrollment at institutions like Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) indicate this a national trend. In Figure 7 we examine to count an institution as a PWI if it has a student body that is 50% or more white.

FIGURE 7: ENROLLMENT AT PWIS AND MAJORITY MINORITY INSTITUTIONS



Preference for racial and ethnic diversity appears to be a significant divergence for students of color from their peers. About one in four students of color attends a majority minority institution while only about one in ten non-students of color can say the same. If we examine campus diversity as a point of comparison to UTC, this is more evident as shown in Figure 8. UTC’s undergrad population is 76% white.

FIGURE 8: COLLEGE ENROLLMENT BY DIVERSITY COMPARED TO UTC



Students of color have a clear preference for more diverse campuses and this preference may partially explain why some LGIs rank higher for students of color than non-student of color peers as shown in Table 8. The most striking example of this are the two LGIs that occupy the third-ranked preference of students. For students of color, the third top institution is the University of Memphis, a majority minority institution. For non-students of color the third top choice is Tennessee Tech, the public university in Tennessee with the largest proportion of White students.

TABLE 8: UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT DIVERSITY AT TENNESSEE PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

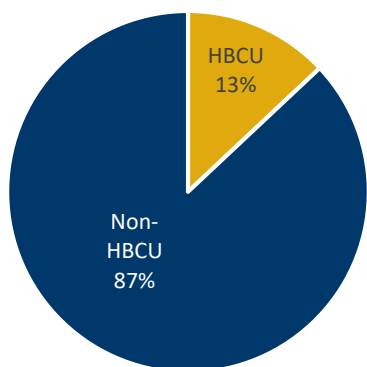
	Percent White	Rank for Students of Color	Rank for Non-Students of Color
Austin Peay State University	59%	4	9
East Tennessee State University	81%	6	5
Middle Tennessee State University	64%	2	2
Tennessee State University	12%	9	68
Tennessee Technological University	84%	8	3
The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga	76%	n/a	n/a
The University of Tennessee at Knoxville	78%	1	1
The University of Tennessee at Martin	79%	11	11
University of Memphis	48%	3	6

MTSU is an interesting case study here. MTSU enrolls a relatively large number of students of color and is increasingly enrolling students of color admitted to UTC over time. In particular, Black or African American students are almost as likely to enroll at MTSU as UT Knoxville. Yet the institution, while more diverse than UTC, is still almost two thirds white. MTSU is also located in Murfreesboro, a community that is not particularly diverse. Despite the relative lack of diversity at MTSU and its surrounding community, the institution is nonetheless able to effectively communicate to students of color that they will be safe and able to thrive on campus. MTSU may be an instructive model for UTC in this regard.

Minority Serving Institutions

Enrollment in minority-serving institutions (MSIs) was also analyzed; three different types of MSIs were examined: Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). No students went on to enroll in TCUs and HSI enrollment was limited but HBCU enrollment was significant for students who identify as Black or African American. This may be due to geography; while Tennessee and the Southeast has many HBCUs most HSIs and TCUs are located in other parts of the United States.

Figure 9: HBCU Enrollment by Black or African American Students



Across three admission cycles, 13% of African American students attended an HBCU, about the same proportion that attend UT Knoxville, the top college choice. Enrollment at HBCUs is spread among many institutions in a number of states; the institution enrolling the most students is TSU (3%). In contrast, only 2% of Hispanic or Latinx students attend HSIs. As noted earlier, HBCUs are experiencing high enrollment nationally¹ and are a top destination

for African American students admitted to UTC but opting for a different institution.

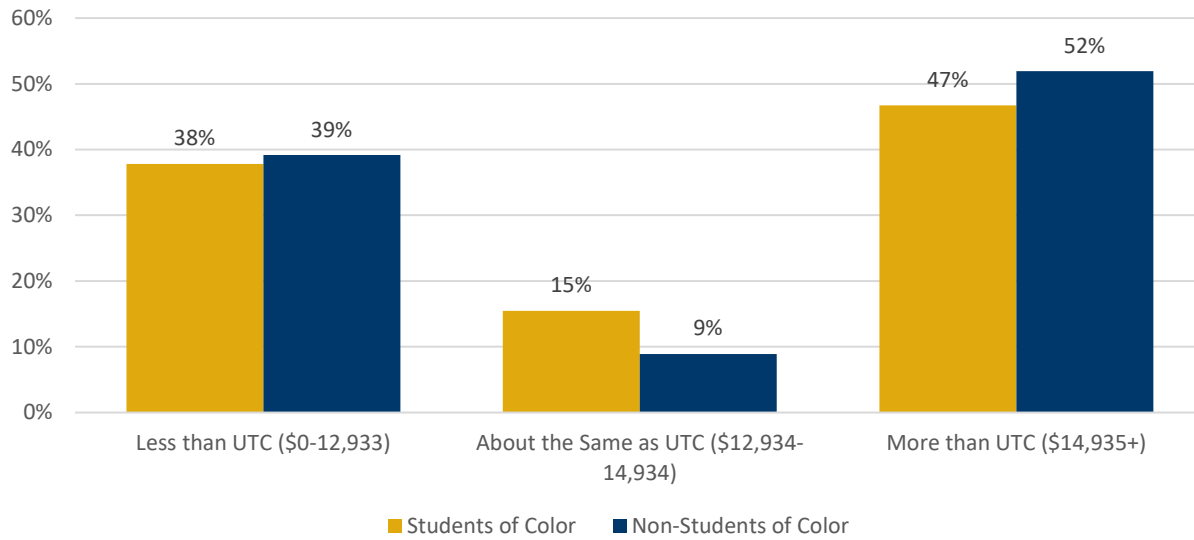
College Costs and Availability of Financial Aid

Average Net Price

Average Net Price (ANP) represents costs the student must cover, including indirect costs such as room and board, after grant and scholarship aid. ANP represents the amount a student and their family must pay out of pocket or borrow in student loans. ANP information in IPEDS for public institutions only presents information for in-state students. While limiting, the data in IPEDS is probably close to reality even for out of state students due to the availability of discounted tuition for nearby counties in neighboring states that public institutions employ. Average net price information by its nature obscures financial aid packages to individual students so individual students weighing actual aid awards may be looking at something quite different.

¹ Harris, A. (2018) "Black College Renaissance: Students are once again flocking to HBCUs." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Why-Many-Black-Colleges-Are/242671>

FIGURE 10: STUDENT ENROLLMENT BY AVERAGE NET PRICE RELATIVE TO UTC



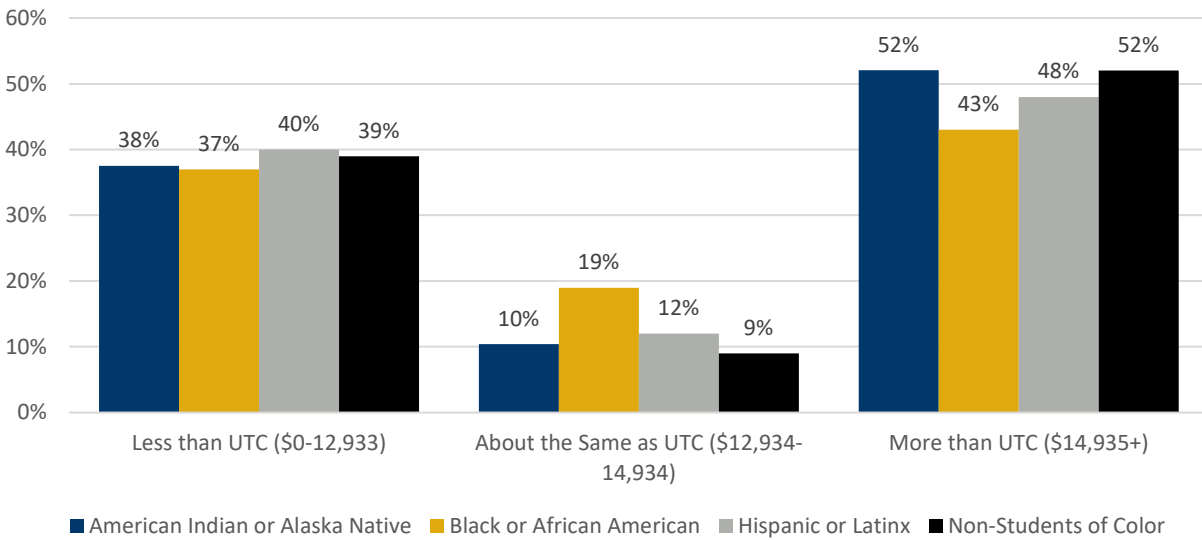
While overall close, students of color are slightly more likely to select institutions that have an average net price that is lower than or similar to UTC’s when compared with non-students of color. Information on average net price for public Tennessee universities is in Table 9.

TABLE 9: AVERAGE NET PRICE OF TENNESSEE PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

	Average Net Price 17-18	Classification for Figure X
Austin Peay State University	\$13,331	About the Same
East Tennessee State University	\$11,062	Less than UTC
Middle Tennessee State University	\$12,294	Less than UTC
Tennessee State University	\$8,347	Less than UTC
Tennessee Technological University	\$16,891	More than UTC
The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga	\$13,934	n/a
The University of Tennessee at Knoxville	\$21,091	More than UTC
The University of Tennessee at Martin	\$10,731	Less than UTC
University of Memphis	\$13,174	About the Same

Average net price preferences for students from racial and ethnic groups historically underrepresented in higher education are similar to those for non-students of color as shown in Figure 11.

FIGURE 11: STUDENT ENROLLMENT BY AVERAGE NET PRICE RELATIVE TO UTC AND RACE/ETHNICITY



Black or African American students seem to be less likely to opt for institutions with an average net price higher than UTC’s than students from other groups.

Institutional Aid

This analysis also examines average institutional aid awarded to first time freshmen. Since about half of students enrolled elsewhere do so at Tennessee public universities which have similar tuition and identical state aid available as UTC, institutional aid as shown in Table 10 is likely a key differentiator in student costs.

TABLE 10: INSTITUTIONAL AID AT TENNESSEE PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES 2017-2018

	% of First Time Freshmen Awarded Institutional Aid	Average Institutional Aid Award	In-State Tuition and Fees
Austin Peay State University	22%	\$5,951	\$7,913
East Tennessee State University	37%	\$8,225	\$8,679
Middle Tennessee State University	31%	\$5,266	\$8,612
Tennessee State University	34%	\$8,347	\$7,776
Tennessee Technological University	47%	\$4,828	\$8,513
The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga	48%	\$3,919	\$8,664
The University of Tennessee at Knoxville	53%	\$7,210	\$12,970
The University of Tennessee at Martin	81%	\$3,368	\$9,236
University of Memphis	76%	\$3,507	\$9,317

Tennessee public universities clearly deploy institutional aid resources in different ways. While every institution shown except UT Knoxville is within \$1,000 of UTC’s tuition and fees, many LGIs award larger sums of aid to fewer students. Austin Peay, ETSU, MTSU, and TSU are all employing this strategy and

their average awards are in some cases double those of UTC. Tennessee Tech awards aid to about the same proportion of students as UTC but the average award is almost \$1,000 greater. UT Martin and University of Memphis award institutional aid to the majority of first time freshmen and do so at levels slightly less than UTC does.

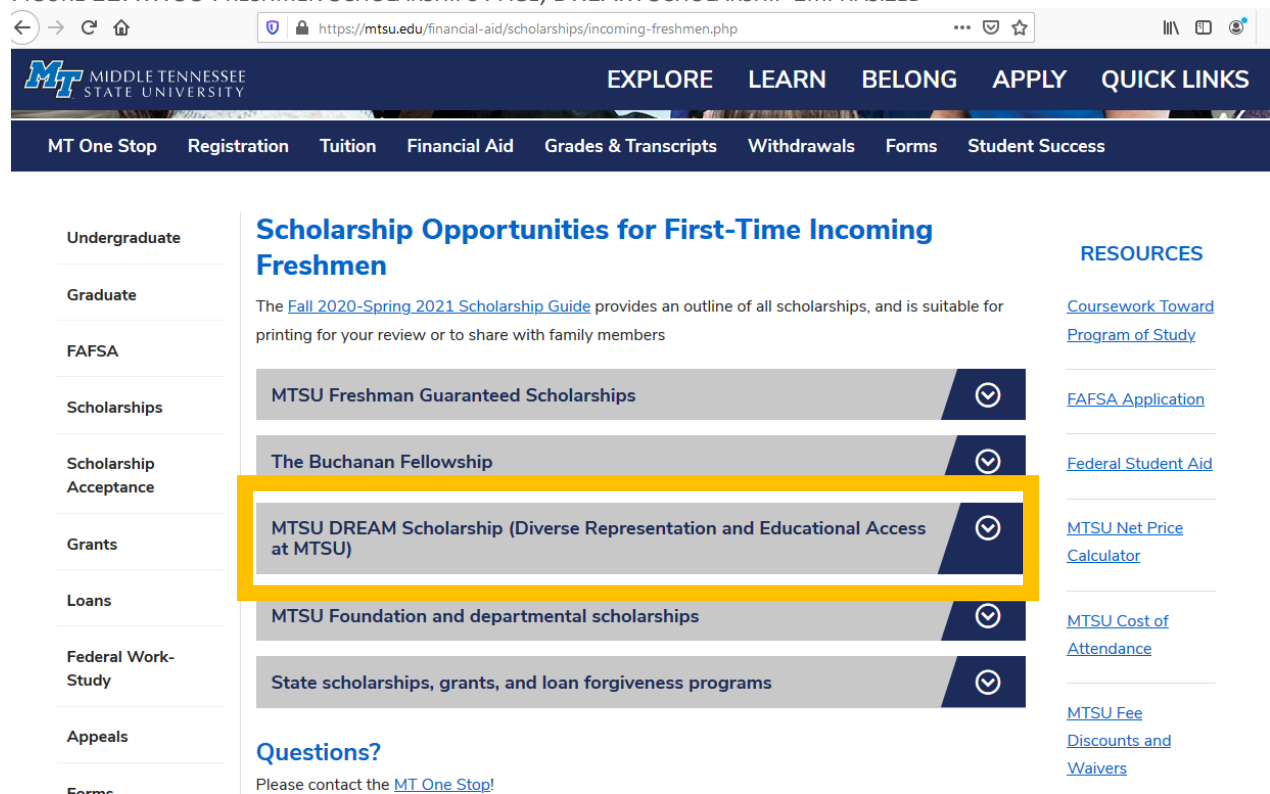
How might this affect student decision-making? If students admitted to multiple of these institutions are all awarded institutional aid, then UTC would appear as a more expensive option when comparing aid awards against all institutions except other UT campuses and University of Memphis. Additionally, dedicated scholarships and automatic scholarship consideration probably help ensure more institutional aid goes to students of color.

Dedicated Scholarships

It is likely that every Tennessee public university has at least some scholarship funding dedicated to students of color, but some institutions make this information easier to access than others. As a case study, let's compare the MTSU DREAM Scholarship to UTC's Dr. Littleton Mason Memorial Scholarship.

The Diverse Representation and Educational Access at MTSU (DREAM) Scholarship appears prominently on the homepage of scholarship information for first-time freshmen with the acronym fully spelled out as shown in Figure 12. Diversity is broadly defined and includes race and ethnicity. The award amount is clearly stated and renewable up to four years; application procedures are clearly defined. There are additional criteria around Estimated Family Contribution, HOPE eligibility, and full-time enrollment.

FIGURE 12: MTSU FRESHMEN SCHOLARSHIPS PAGE, DREAM SCHOLARSHIP EMPHASIZED



The UTC Littleton H. Mason Scholarship can only be located by searching “Black” or “African American” in the UTC scholarship search; searches for things like “diversity” or “multicultural” do not return any results, nor do the search terms “Hispanic” or “Native American.” The other way students can locate this opportunity is by scrolling through a list of 364 scholarships until it appears alphabetically. Clicking on the link to the scholarship opens a page that emphasizes in bold that the scholarship is open to all applicants regardless of race or color; unbolded text states that preference is given to minority students from low-income families. Neither minority nor low-income is defined. No information about award amount, whether or not the award is renewable, or how to apply is provided; applicants are directed to call a phone number.

A student of color researching scholarships at both MTSU and UTC is receiving very different messages about the extent to which diversity is literally and figuratively valued. Making information about the award criteria explicit and prominently placing scholarship information where students will likely encounter it sends a clear message about inclusion and makes sure students can access the funding without jumping through additional hoops.

The only other public university in Tennessee that prominently features a first-time freshmen scholarship opportunity targeted to historically underrepresented students outside a large scholarship database is UT Knoxville. The Flagship Scholarship (formerly Promise scholarship) is awarded to graduates of 32 identified Tennessee high schools that serve a student population that is low-income and often racially diverse. While the 32 schools have not changed in at least ten years even as population shifts have occurred, this scholarship, which covers last-dollar tuition and fees for four years after other aid is applied, is a mechanism by which institutional aid is prioritized to underrepresented students. Four high schools in Chattanooga are eligible: Brainerd High School, East Ridge High School, The Howard School, and Tyner Academy.

Scholarships for underrepresented student populations at MTSU and UT Knoxville are prominently featured, clear on eligibility criteria, and multi-year awards. It is perhaps not coincidental that these are the top two schools in which students of color enroll.

Policies to Facilitate Institutional Aid

In addition to the availability of scholarships specifically targeting underrepresented populations, most public Tennessee universities have made it easier to students to apply for at least some scholarships by allowing students who apply by a certain date to be automatically considered for and awarded institutional scholarships as shown in Table 11.

TABLE 11: AUTOMATIC SCHOLARSHIP CONSIDERATION AT TENNESSEE PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

	Automatic Consideration for at Least Some Scholarships
Austin Peay State University	Yes
East Tennessee State University	Yes
Middle Tennessee State University	Yes
Tennessee State University	Unclear
Tennessee Technological University	No
The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga	No
The University of Tennessee at Knoxville	Yes
The University of Tennessee at Martin	Yes
University of Memphis	Yes

While benefitting all applicants, creating ease of access to scholarship dollars likely has a disproportionate positive effect on students with less access to high-quality college counseling. Systemic under-resourcing of high schools serving large populations of American Indian and Alaska Native, Black or African American, and Hispanic or Latinx students means these students are more likely to be among those without high-quality college counseling who benefit from automatic awards. Rather than relying on students to know that they need to locate scholarship information and submit multiple applications, automatic awards increase the chances that institutional aid goes to students from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups.

Conclusion

The decision of where to attend college is complex and students consider multiple interconnected factors when making their final college choice. Although students of color who are admitted are more likely to enroll at UTC than peers who are white or whose race or ethnicity are unknown, about 40% of admitted applicants choose to attend college somewhere else.

About half of students who enroll elsewhere do so at other Tennessee public universities. UT Knoxville is the top destination but students of color, particularly African American students, are increasingly opting to attend MTSU as well. A closer examination of how MTSU is successfully attracting students of color would be a worthwhile undertaking.

Campus diversity appears to be a salient factor in college choice even among Tennessee public university options. UTC should consider ways to signal that it is a racially diverse and inclusive climate where students of color will be safe and their experiences and perspectives are valued. Again, MTSU may be a model here as another public institution in a majority-white community with a majority-white student body.

One such mechanism is the way scholarships for diverse students are publicized, criteria is made explicit for the applicant, and the application is readily available. The prominence of these scholarship opportunities and what they signal to applicants is important as is increasing the number of students who can access this type of aid.

Another mechanism that may help ensure more scholarship dollars go to students from underrepresented populations would be automating at least some scholarship awards, which appears to

be the norm at other Tennessee public universities. Removing barriers to access for all students would likely have a disproportional benefit for students who are less likely to be aware of scholarship application procedures, such as students whose parents did not attend college and students without access to high-quality college counseling.

In the longer term it may behoove UTC to more broadly consider its overall priorities in awarding institutional aid. Developing an institutional award for diversity modeled on MTSU's DREAM Scholarship, or directing greater resources to fewer students are both options that would make a comparison of aid awards for students of color more competitive with other Tennessee public institutions