*student*POLL
MARKET INTELLIGENCE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION
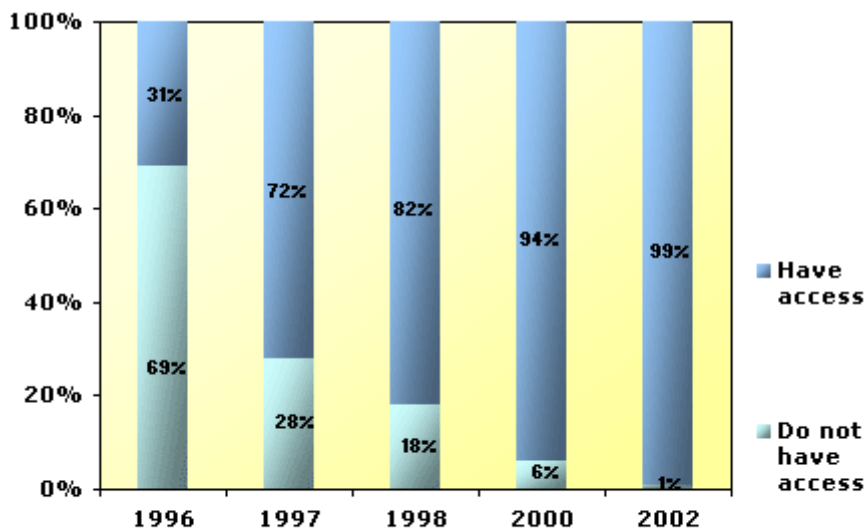PUBLISHED BY ART & SCIENCE GROUP

Technology Update: The Use of Technologies in College Choice

Q How has access to the Web changed since StudentPoll first began reporting its findings on the use of technologies by college-bound high school students?
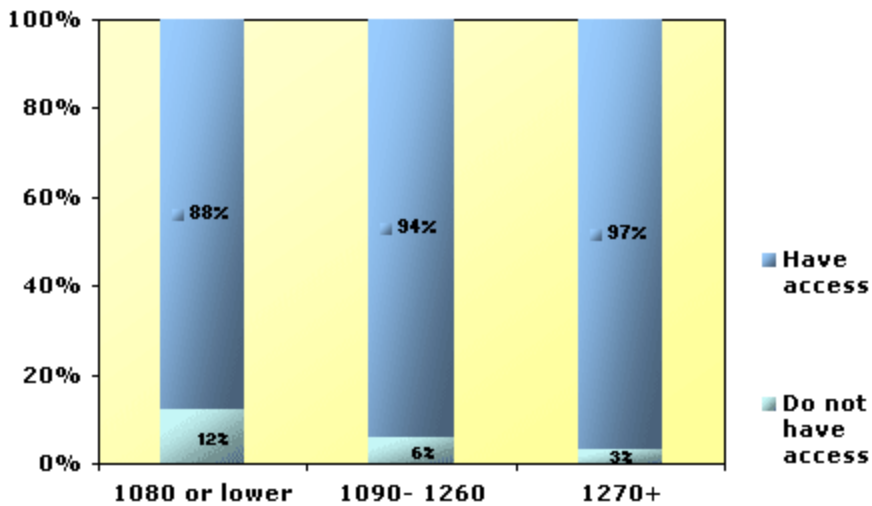
A In our premier issue on technology, published in 1996, 31 percent of the 500 prospective college students surveyed reported having access to the Internet at home or at school. Since then, Internet access has steadily increased, rising to 72 percent in 1997, 82 percent in 1998, 94 percent in 2000, and 99 percent today. Specifically, our study found that 94 percent have access to the Internet at home while 79 percent have Internet access at school.

Although Internet access is largely universal and subgroup differences therefore inconsequential, minor differences exist on the basis of test scores, income, and geography:
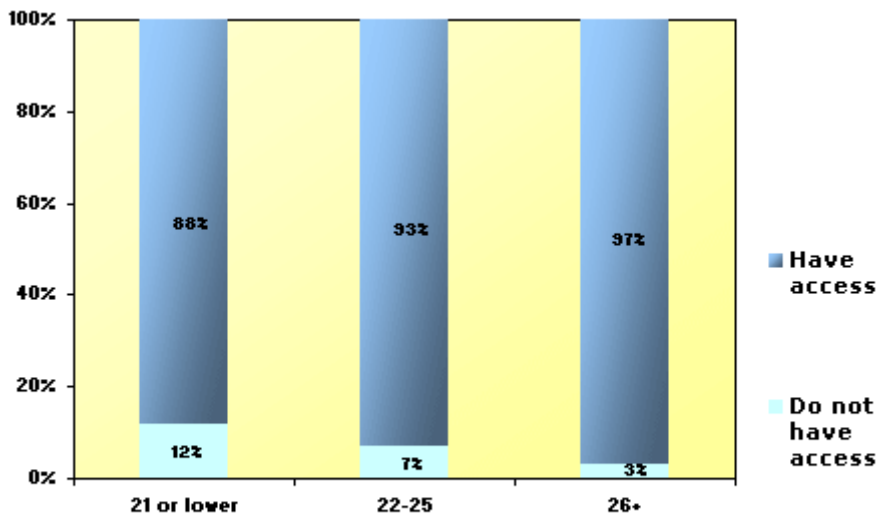
- Ninety-seven percent of students with SAT scores of 1270 and higher reported access to the Internet at home compared to 94 percent of those reporting scores of 1080 to 1260 and, 88 percent of those reporting scores of 1080 and below. This same pattern holds true for ACT scores: 97 percent of students with ACT scores of 26-plus have access to the Internet at home compared to 93 percent of those with scores in the 22-25 range and 88 percent with scores of 21 or lower.

- Eighty-four percent of students with family incomes of $75K and above said they had access to the Internet at school compared to 77 percent with incomes of $50K-$75K, and 74 percent of those reporting family incomes of $50K or lower.

- A higher percentage of students from the West reported access to the Internet at school (88 percent) compared to those from the South (76 percent) and those from the Northeast or New England (72 percent).

- A larger proportion of students who did not apply for financial aid in college also reported having access to the Internet at school (86 percent) compared to those applying for financial aid (78 percent).

Graph 1: Access to the Internet
(at home or school)

100%
80%
60% — 88% — 94% — 97%
Have access
40%
20%
Do not have access
12% — 6% — 3%
0%
1080 or lower — 1090– 1260 — 1270+

Graph 2: Internet Access at Home 2002
(by SAT score)

100%
80%
60% — 88% — 93% — 97%
Have access
40%
20%
Do not have access
12% — 7% — 3%
0%
21 or lower — 22-25 — 26+

Graph 3: Internet Access at Home 2002
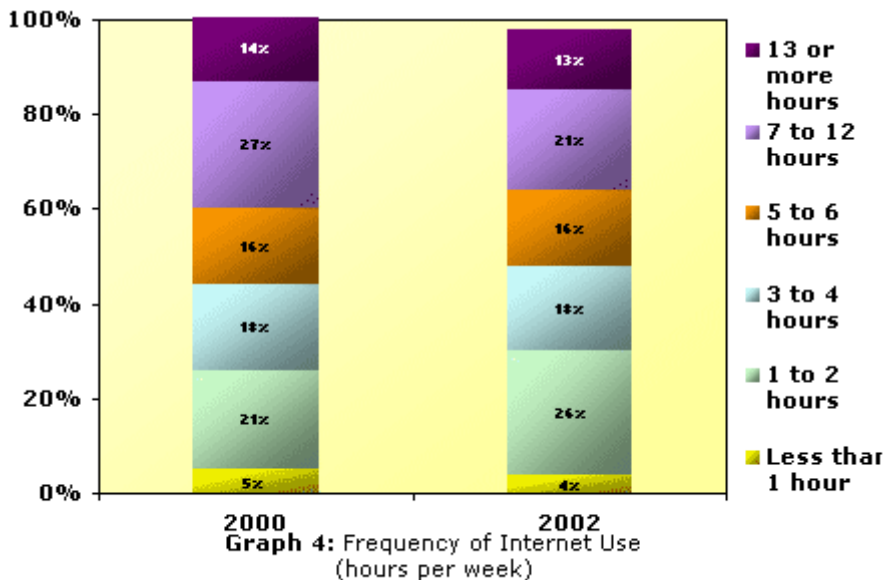(by ACT score)

Q Do students spend more time on the Internet today than they did a few years ago?

A No. Frequency of Internet use on a weekly basis does not seem to have changed much since the findings from our technology study were published back in 2000. In 2000, our study found that on average students spent around 7.3 hours a week on the Internet. In our most recent study, students spent, on average, 6.6 hours a week on the Internet for email and other purposes.

Individual use patterns also are amazingly consistent from 2000 to 2002. In 2002, 26 percent of students surveyed reported using the Internet 1 to 2 hours per week compared to 21 percent in 2000, 18 percent 3 to 4 hours in both 2002 and 2000, and 13 percent indicated using the Internet 13 or more hours in 2002 compared to 14 percent in 2000.

Interestingly, students with test scores in the middle range were more frequent users of the Internet than those with test scores in the highest and lowest ranges:

- A larger segment of students with SAT scores in the 1090 to 1260 range reported using the Internet 10 hours per week (17 percent) compared to students with SAT scores of 1080 or lower (7 percent) and those with SAT scores of 1270 and higher (2 percent).

- Similarly, a higher percentage of students with ACT scores of 22-25 reported using the Internet 10 hours per week (16 percent) compared to those with high ACT scores of 26 and above (7 percent).

Graph 4: Frequency of Internet Use
(hours per week)
base= those who have access to the internet at home or school

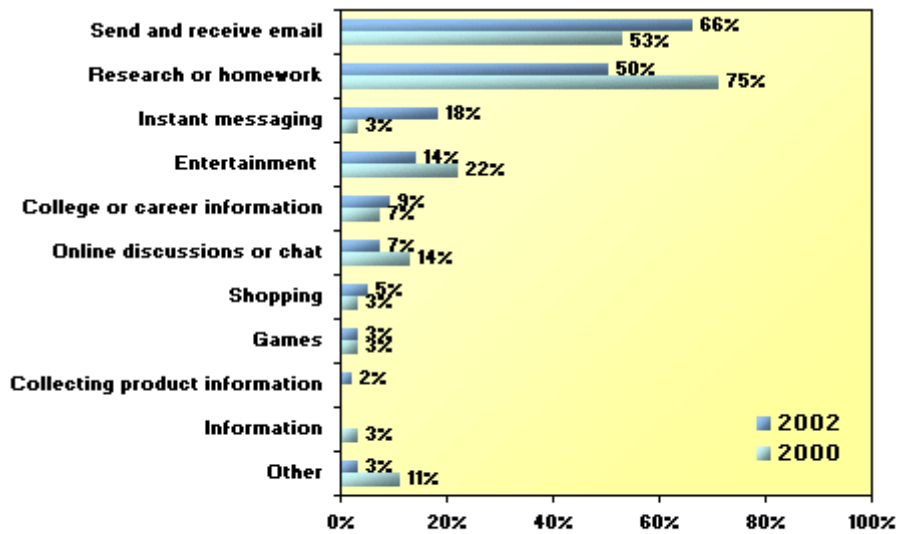**Q** What are the primary reasons students use the Internet? How has this changed?

A Sending and receiving email has supplanted research and homework as the primary reason students use the Internet in 2002 compared to our 2000 study.

In both studies, students were asked on an open-ended basis to describe their primary reasons for using the Internet and multiple answers were accepted.
Specifically, our most recent study found that the top three reasons students use the Internet is: to send or receive email (66 percent); for research or homework (50 percent); and for instant messaging (18 percent). By comparison, when we asked the same question in 2000, research and homework was the primary reason cited by 75 percent of respondents, email (53 percent), and entertainment or fun (22 percent). In both studies only 7-9 percent of respondents reported using the Internet to search for college or career information.

In the most recent study, a higher proportion of female students (72 percent) reported using the Internet to send or receive email compared to 56 percent of male students. Another interesting subgroup finding by gender: 20 percent of male students reported using the Internet for entertainment compared to 11 percent of females interviewed.

Other notable subgroup differences:

- Students intending to major in business were more likely to report using the Internet for college or career information compared to students planning to major in the social sciences, education, the humanities or the arts.

- Students from the Southwest were more likely to report that one of the major reasons they used the Internet was for college or career information compared to those from the Northeast, New England, and the Midwest.

Graph 5: Primary Reasons for Using the Internet

Send and receive email — 66% / 53%
Research or homework — 50% / 75%
Instant messaging — 18% / 3%
Entertainment — 14% / 22%
College or career information — 9% / 7%
Online discussions or chat — 7% / 14%
Shopping — 5% / 3%
Games — 3% / 3%
Collecting product information — 2%
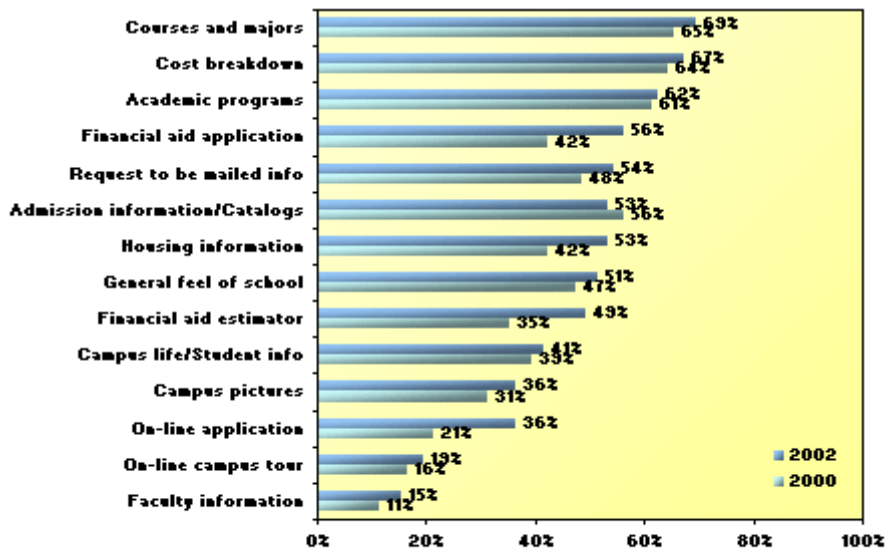Information — 3%
Other — 3% / 11%

■ 2002
■ 2000

Q What sections or features on college web sites were most valuable to students in the college decision-making process? Has this changed any since it was first explored?

A Academic content and cost-related information remain the most important kinds of information students seek on college web sites. When StudentPoll surveyed prospective college students in 2000 (the first time we asked this question), 60 percent rated academic content — information on courses and majors and academic programs — as very important in their college decisions. This holds true today. In our latest study, 69 percent of those who indicated they had visited college web sites reported that information on courses or majors and academic programs (69 and 62 percent respectively) were very important to them.

In the current study, a slightly higher proportion of students rated information that provides a breakdown of such costs as tuition and fees as very important (67 percent) compared to information on academic programs (62 percent). In our previous study, information on courses, and majors, and academic programs were the top two mentions among students in terms of the importance they gave this information on college web sites.

Perhaps it's a sign of tougher economic times that a higher proportion of students rated financial aid information very important compared to the findings from our study in 2000. Another finding supports this assumption: in our current study, 56 percent of students rated the financial aid application as very important and 49 percent gave the same rating to the online estimator of financial aid. In 2000, those numbers were 41 percent and 31 percent respectively.

Of least importance to students is information on faculty, a finding consistent with our last study. This time around only 15 percent of students rated faculty information as very important to them compared to 11 percent in 2000. It is also worth noting that an online application on a college's web site is information rated of high importance to 36 percent of students using college web sites compared to 21 percent of students who rated this very important in 2000.

Graph 6: Specific Information on College Web Sites Very Important to Students base= those who visited college web sites


Q Is the online application now preferred by most students? When they applied to colleges, did students use a paper, online or some other application? How has application use and preference changed over time?

A While student preference for online applications has increased dramatically since 1996, in the last two years this predilection has remained virtually unchanged. To provide some perspective, in 1996, 11 percent of students surveyed by StudentPoll reported a preference for an online application. By 2000, that figure had climbed to 43 percent of students, yet remained virtually unchanged in 2002 at 45 percent.

What is even more interesting is that while preference for online applications has steadily increased among college-bound high school students, the method used most often remains paper. In 1998, 95 percent of students reported actually using paper applications when they applied to college, 18 percent online applications, and 6 percent applications mailed back to institutions on disk. In 2000, 92 percent used paper applications and 38 percent indicated they had used online applications (multiple responses were accepted). In the most recent study, 89 percent of students applied to college via paper applications and 34 percent online. This represents no growth in the use of online applications over a two-year period.
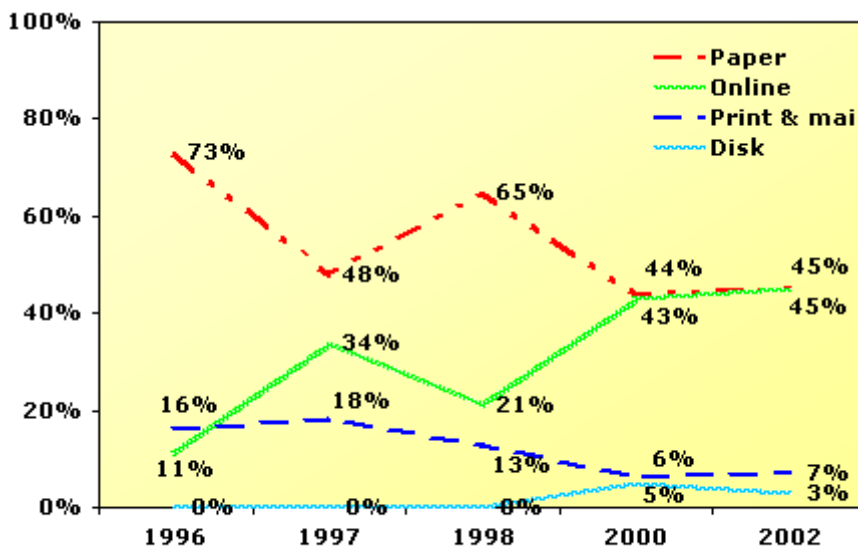
Graph 7: Preferred Application Method
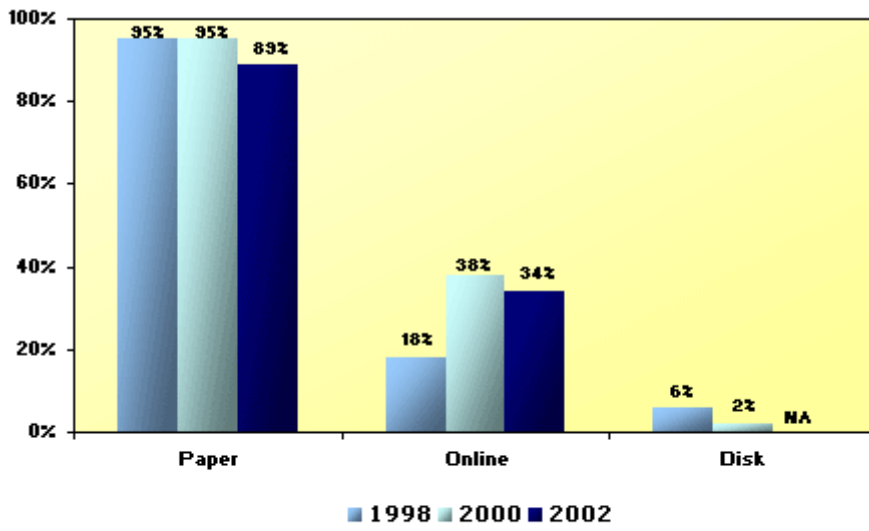
Graph 8: Application Method Used
(multiple responses accepted)