

Non-Enrolled Applicant Survey Report

Introduction

The Non-Enrolled Applicant Survey is administered by the Essex County College (ECC) Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, and Assessment (IEPA) annually each fall. The survey is sent to those who applied to ECC but decided not to enroll in the Fall 2025 semester. The purpose is to understand why they decided not attend ECC and how to improve the application and enrollment process. The survey was made up of multiple-choice questions, a matrix table and open-ended comment sections. The survey was sent out to 3,823 applicants and 346 responses were received, yielding a 9.1% response rate. Women were slightly overrepresented in this study and men were underrepresented. In terms of race, black people were overrepresented in this sample. The survey was sent out on November 5th, 2025 and closed on January 2nd, 2026.

Survey Results

A multi-select question asked participants why they chose not to enroll at ECC. The most frequent reason was "I did not have the financial means to attend college (39.3%), then "I did not understand how to register for classes" (28.2%), then "I was not satisfied with the services at Essex County College (Please explain)" (27.6%), then "currently attending another college" (20.9%), and then lastly "I did not understand how to get financial aid". The answer with the biggest difference in respondent selection was "I did not understand how to get financial aid" (9.8%) which had 6.9 percentage point reduction in selection. When asked to explain about their dissatisfaction about services at ECC, students explained that due to difficulties getting into specific programs, transferring credits, or that they were simply planning on delaying enrollment as the most common reasons.

Next, participants were asked about their future plans. The most common response was to "Delay enrollment but will enroll at Essex County College" (52.1%), followed by "Currently enrolled at another college" (18.5%), "Other (Please specify)" (17.6%), "No current plans to enroll in college, entering the workforce" (6.5%), and finally "Delay enrollment, but will enroll at another college (5.3%). This suggests that ECC is not losing potential students to other colleges as much as students needing more time to prepare to be a student before beginning. Based on this finding, IEPA recommends putting additional focus on recruiting students admitted in prior terms. Those who responded that they would delay their enrollment at ECC, the majority said they decided to attend in the winter/upcoming spring semester (61%). Respondents were also asked where ECC ranked in their preference of the colleges they applied to, the majority of respondents reported that ECC was their first choice (74%).

Participants were asked about the marketing efforts that influenced their decision to attend ECC. The most influential was Word of Mouth (36.0% reported very influential), college fairs (31.1%) and high school guidance counselors (30.2% reported very influential). The least

influential was House of Worship (16.4% said very influential) and radio advertisements (18.3% report very influential). See Table 1 below for the full results:

Table 1: Marketing Influence

	Very Influential	Somewhat Influential	Slightly Influential	No Influence
Billboard advertisements	27.8%	21.4%	11.1%	39.7%
Radio advertisements	18.3%	14.2%	12.8%	54.6%
Bus advertisements	25.7%	21.6%	12.6%	40.1%
Mailers	24.4%	19.2%	19.2%	37.1%
Information sent in the mail	28.4%	22.7%	13.3%	35.5%
Social Media	27.0%	23.2%	12.8%	37.0%
College fairs	31.1%	18.9%	11.2%	38.8%
House of Worship Tour/Community events	16.4%	15.5%	12.6%	55.6%
High school guidance counselor	30.2%	19.5%	1.6%	38.6%
Educational Access Channel	20.2%	17.8%	10.1%	51.9%
Word of Mouth	36.0%	24.8%	13.6%	25.7%

Two questions were asked to gauge the level of education gained by their parents. It was the most common for the mother and father of the participant to have up to a high school education. These questions are also used to identifying first generation students. Using the standard definition of at least one parent having some college experience, 57.2% are first generation students. See Table 2 below:

Table 2: Parental Education

What is the highest level of formal education obtained by your:	Mother (Or Guardian)	Father (Or Guardian)
Elementary School or less	9.5%	9.8%
Some high school	18.7%	17.1%
High school graduate or GED	23.8%	27.8%
Vocational or trade school	5.2%	4.9%
Some college	17.9%	15.5%
Undergraduate college degree	9.1%	10.2%
Some graduate school	0.8%	1.2%
Graduate degree	15.1%	13.5%

National Student Clearing House Data

According to the National Students Clearing House, 210 students who applied to ECC enrolled at another 2-year community college in the state of New Jersey. See table 3 below for the top five.

Table 3: Two-Year Community Colleges

Institution	n	%*	Top Programs
Union College of Union County New Jersey	74	35.2%	Health Science, Business, Liberal Arts, Physical Therapy Assistant, Biology, Computer Science, Computer Info Systems, Graphic Design, Psychology, Nursing
Hudson County Community College	34	16.2%	Medical Sciences, Culinary Arts, Business, Criminal Justice, Cybersecurity, Digital Art and Design, Education, Radiography
Bergen Community College	33	15.7%	General Professional Studies, Biology, Business Administration, Psychology, Computer Science
County College of Morris	29	13.8%	Nursing, Radiography, Electrical Engineering, Design
Passaic County Community College	12	5.7%	N/A

**Percentage of students that applied to ECC but enrolled at another 2-year community college.*

The majority of these majors that these students enroll in are majors that ECC offers. This suggests that there are other factors besides program offerings that are causing students to choose another college. The top four colleges on this list have higher enrollment from ECC applicants than the year prior: 23 more at Union College, 8 more at Hudson County, 7 more at Bergen, and 13 more at Morris. Union College of Union County NJ (UCUCNJ) has many fully online programs including Liberal Arts, Health Sciences, Business Admin, Business/Commerce, Computer Science, Communications and Accounting. ECC has recently added Business Admin and Liberal Arts to their fully online degree offerings. There is still room for improvement in offering online courses.

According to the National Student Clear House, 622 students who applied to ECC enrolled in a 4-year institution. A 4-year university offers a different kind of experience than what ECC offers. This includes the opportunity to obtain a bachelor's degree, dormitories/ on-campus housing, and a more traditional college experience. Therefore, many will choose a 4-year school if those opportunities were what they were searching for. See Table 4 below for the top 10 institutions applicants enrolled in:

Table 4: Four-Year Institutions

Institution	Type	n	%
Montclair State University	Public	130	20.9%
Kean University	Public	102	16.4%
Rutgers University - Newark	Public	54	8.7%

New Jersey Institute of Technology	Public	40	6.4%
William Paterson University of New Jersey	Public	32	5.1%
New Jersey City University	Public	31	5.0%
Caldwell University	Private	27	4.3%
Montclair State University - Bloomfield College	Private	26	4.2%
Saint Peter's University	Private	22	3.5%
Seton Hall University	Private	21	3.4%

Conclusion

The largest factor effecting ECC applicants is financial difficulties. The majority want to return to ECC at a later time. This suggests that ECC could benefit from reaching out to these students to find ways to help them enroll. The majority of these students are first generation college students, suggesting that they might need more assistance in navigating college life. Students that choose a different two-year college are mostly enrolling in majors that ECC has, suggesting that ECC should look at what those schools are doing differently. There should also be further recruiting efforts, especially at the West Essex Campus to prevent these losses.