

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Study of the Impact of Enrollment Growth on the Application and Matriculation Decisions of Prospective Undergraduate Students

Final Report: Conclusions from Research
with Inquirers and Admitted Applicants

September 25, 2008

ART & SCIENCE
GROUP L.L.C.

Recap: Major questions addressed in the project

- **What is the likely impact of enrollment growth on the application and matriculation decisions of students considering UNC-Chapel Hill?**
 - **Study tests growth to two total enrollment levels: 33,000 and 36,000**
 - **Study focuses particularly on the impact of growth on top North Carolinians**
- **What strategies might UNC-Chapel Hill employ to manage the challenges and opportunities presented by enrollment growth?**

Perceptions of size

- Inquirers and admitted applicants consider a “large” university as one having more than 21,000 undergraduates or at least 27,000 total enrollment
- Nearly half of inquirers and admitted applicants perceive UNC–Chapel Hill to have 33,000 or more students already
- Several major disadvantages that prospects associate with large universities are:
 - Lack of personal attention
 - Large classes
 - Less access to faculty

Size, quality, and the competition

- **Prospects tend to favor universities smaller than UNC-Chapel Hill**
 - ▶ **UNC-Chapel Hill's competition is much more likely today than four years ago to be schools with enrollments below 10,000**
 - ▶ **82 percent of top North Carolinians who are admitted to UNC-Chapel Hill but go elsewhere choose institutions with fewer than 15,000 undergraduates**
 - ▶ **In-state students are most likely to cite “too big” as the primary reason for not applying to UNC-Chapel Hill**
 - ▶ **Admit-declines are most likely to cite “too big” as the primary reason for not attending UNC-Chapel Hill**

Size, quality, and the competition

- **Prospects' decisions about whether or not to apply or attend are driven by their perceptions of quality at UNC-Chapel Hill**
- **These perceptions are often favorable enough to overcome the negatives they associate with size**
 - **The most often-cited reasons for applying and attending are high-value education, prestigious reputation, strong program in the students' field of interest, and good academics / highly ranked**
 - **Prospects perceive the current student body at UNC-Chapel Hill to be highly qualified—in fact, nearly half of both inquirers and admitted applicants believe a higher percentage of its students graduated in the top 10 percent of their high school class than is actually the case**

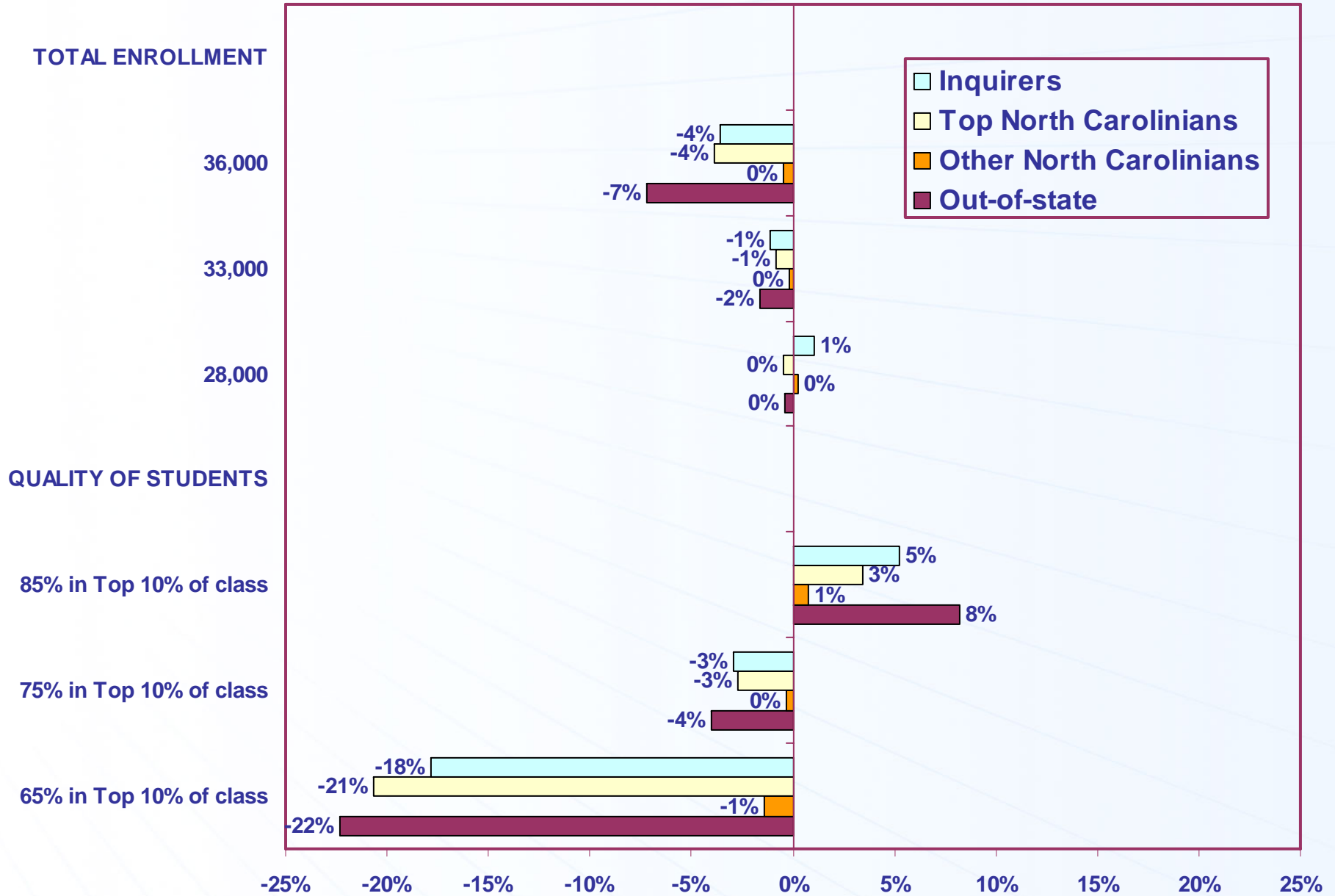
Size, quality, and the competition

- **Our study found:**
 - **Average SAT score of applicants has risen 22 points from study of four years ago – to 1374**
 - **Applicants' average SAT scores is 29 points higher than non-applicants'**
 - **Matriculants' average SAT score of 1392 is 82 points lower than admit-declines'**
- **Competition with top schools has increased**
 - **Highly selective private schools such as Boston College, Georgetown, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton are now more significant competitors than four years ago**

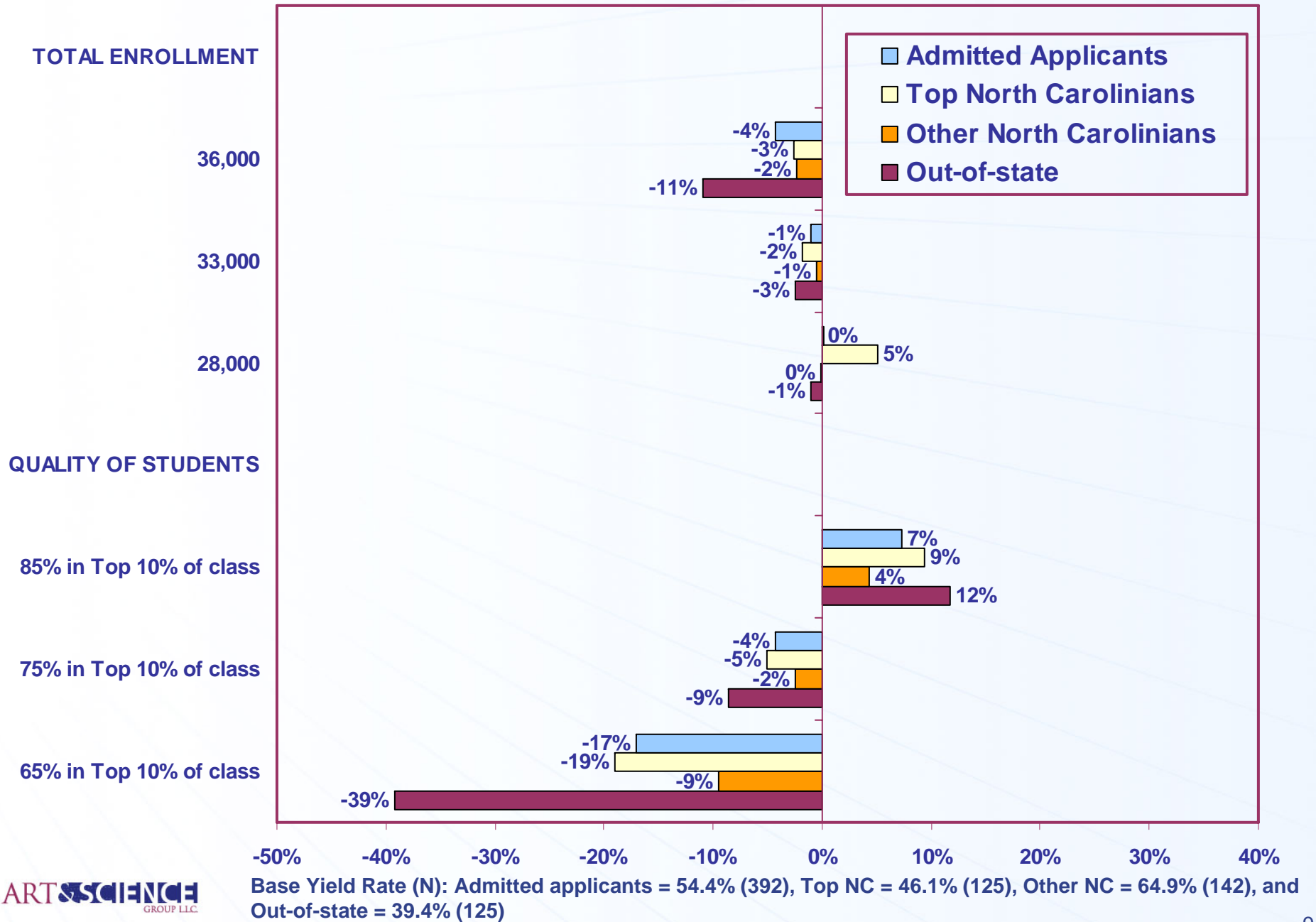
Effects of growth and perceived quality

- When tested simply as a number, growth to 33,000 would have a negligible impact on applications and enrollment; growth to 36,000 would have an unfavorable impact on applications and enrollment
- Growing without maintaining the current quality of the UNC-Chapel Hill student body (as measured by percentage of students in the top 10 percent of their high school class) would result in dramatic decreases in applications and enrollment from top North Carolinians and out-of-state students
 - Applications from each of these two cohorts would fall by more than 20 percent
 - Enrollment from top North Carolinians would fall by nearly 20 percent; enrollment from out-of-state students would fall by nearly 40 percent

Inquirers: Effect of size and student quality on number of applications



Admitted applicants: Effect of size and student quality on enrollment



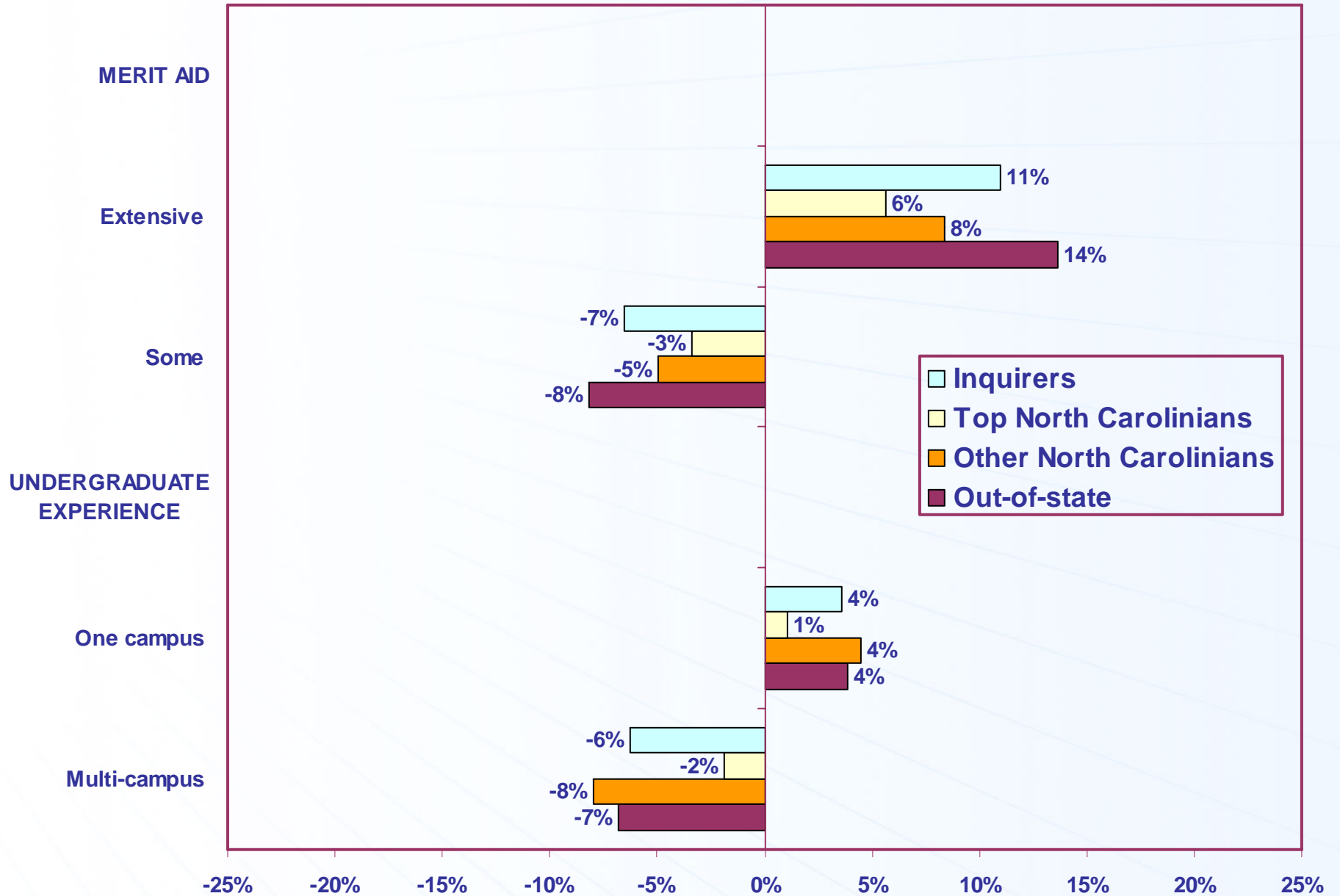
Strategies to manage the impact of growth

- **The single largest positive effect on applications and enrollment from top North Carolinians could be realized if the University gave more merit awards**
 - **If UNC-Chapel Hill were perceived as generous with merit awards, 6 percent more top North Carolinians would apply**
 - **With a \$2,500 increase in merit awards, 8 percent more top North Carolinians would enroll; with a \$5,000 increase, 17 percent more would enroll**

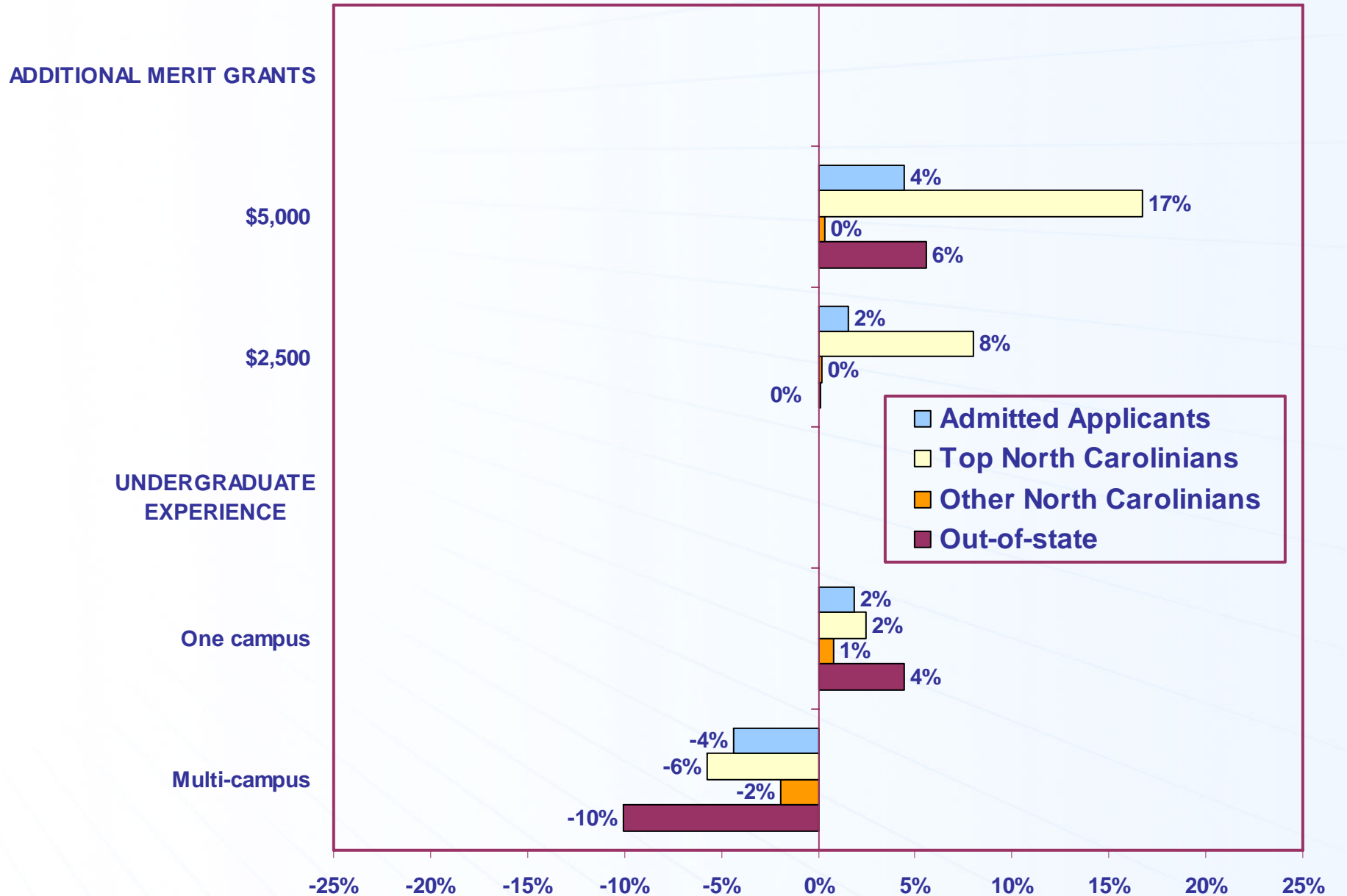
Strategies to manage the impact of growth

- **Making students aware that the University has only one campus (that students' residential, academic, research, and co-curricular experiences all take place on one campus) would also generate gains (though not from top North Carolinians)**
- **Nearly one-third of inquirers and admitted applicants currently think the UNC-Chapel Hill experience takes place on multiple campuses**
- **Other initiatives involving faculty profile, honors, and advising would have smaller positive impacts**

Inquirers: Effect of initiatives on number of applications



Admitted applicants: Effect of initiatives on enrollment



Base Yield Rate (N): Admitted applicants = 54.4% (392), Top NC = 46.1% (125), Other NC = 64.9% (142), and Out-of-state = 39.4% (125)

A challenge with top North Carolinians

- **UNC-Chapel Hill has improved its market share of top North Carolinians who apply and enroll**
- **Because enrolling these students is the cornerstone of the University's recruitment strategy, and because their presence on campus greatly influences all prospects' application and enrollment decisions, the University must continue to hold this market share in order to maintain quality as it grows**
- **This will be a significant challenge**
 - **On the one hand, as high school enrollment in North Carolina grows over the next several decades, the number of students in the top ten percent of their high school classes will also grow**
 - **On the other hand, the number of top SAT scorers in NC has shown little change in the past ten years and is not likely to grow substantially in the years ahead**

A challenge for North Carolina

- **If UNC-Chapel Hill does not attract top North Carolinians, they are likely to go out of state for college**
 - **61 percent of top in-state students who inquire at UNC-Chapel Hill have out-of-state institutions as their first or second choice**
 - **58 percent of top in-state students who decline UNC-Chapel Hill's offer of admission choose out-of-state institutions**

Conclusions

- **Growing while continuing to enroll top North Carolinians can be achieved only by tying growth targets to the achievement of student-quality measures.**
 - **Recognize that growth that results in diminished student quality would have a compound negative effect: a drop-off in student quality would in turn lead to many fewer top students applying and enrolling.**

Conclusions

- **Significantly improved performance in converting top inquirers to applicants is highly unlikely. Efforts should be focused on yielding more top admitted students, recognizing that the students currently declining UNC-Chapel Hill's offers of admission are highly accomplished and ambitious, and competition for those students is and will remain strenuous.**

Conclusions

- **Growth-with-quality will also require significant new investments in merit awards and in elements of the undergraduate experience that make it comparable to what students can expect from highly regarded, smaller competitors.**
 - **UNC-Chapel Hill must be a place of pre-eminent scholars and intellectually engaged students, where students have access to faculty, the classes they need, and an integrated advising program.**
 - **Current reputation, quality of academic programs, and placement record must be strengthened even further.**
 - **The need for a merit awards program is strongly indicated; the University might pilot such a program with selected top in-state students.**

Conclusions

- **Finally, also invest in communications to:**
 - ▶ **Dispel misperceptions about size**
 - ▶ **Make better known the single-campus experience**
 - ▶ **Promote further the full range of academic offerings**
 - ▶ **Describe the honors program**
 - ▶ **Substantiate and heighten the perception of student quality**