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CHOOSING ROWAN UNIVERSITY: A STUDY ON CONTRIBUTING EXTERNAL
FACTORS AMONGST NATIVE RESIDENTIAL FRESHMEN

by
Eli Trenado

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts in Higher Education Administration
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
May 06, 2011

Thesis Chair: Burton R. Sisco, Ed.D.

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ABSTRACT

Eli Trenado

CHOOSING ROWAN UNIVERSITY: A STUDY ON CONTRIBUTING EXTERNAL FACTORS AMONGST NATIVE RESIDENTIAL FRESHMEN

2010/11

Burton R. Sisco, Ed.D.

Master of Arts in Higher Education Administration

The primary purpose of this study was to determine what the most common contributing external factors amongst native residential freshmen students at Rowan University were when it came to making the decision to attend. The study also investigated if there was a significant relationship between external factors and a particular group of students.

Native residential freshmen students were also able to express the importance of factors in their final decision to attend Rowan University. Data collection consisted of a survey with Likert scale items where students were asked to discuss the importance of external factors that helped them decide to attend Rowan University, along with demographic information, and statements about student college choice decision making. Overall, this study indicated the cost of attending, availability of academic majors, and the availability of residential housing, as the top external factors when deciding to attend Rowan

University. Results of this study may help in future recruiting techniques.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work is dedicated to my family: my mother; Lourdes, my sisters and brother; Penelope, Ashley, and Joshua, my aunt; Leticia, and my cousin; Jonathon. You've taught me the importance of family, love, sacrifice, and dedication. Thank you for always supporting me my entire life as I made our family proud. You have been my inspiration through my college years and I dearly appreciate it from the bottom of my heart.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

After graduating high school, many students decide to attend an institution of higher learning to continue their education. When applying to colleges and universities high school students often take into consideration many factors. After applying, acceptance letters get delivered, and sometimes a potential student may get admitted to more than one college or university. Now comes the difficult task of choosing the best college or university that respectively fits a particular student's need or desire. Before making the difficult decision, a student must take into consideration external factors that influence the final decision.

When making a final decision, a student may look at following in the footsteps of a parent, attending the same college as a sibling, or even consider living at home and attending a community college close by. Many college bound students have never left home, and thus may choose to attend an institution of higher learning that is close to home. Others may need to seek financial assistance in order to afford to attend a college. In addition to location and financial assistance, there are other contributing external factors that may influence a potential student to attend an institution of higher learning. Regardless of which institution a student attends, external factors influence their final decisions.

Native freshmen that are admitted to Rowan University represent an excellent source for understanding the college choice process. For many, they may go their entire academic career without reflecting on whether the choice to attend was wise or satisfying. By seeking such information, university administrators can better understand why native freshman students decide to attend the institution.

Statement of the Problem

Students attend colleges and universities across the United States for a variety of reasons. The cost of tuition, the availability of academic programs, extra-curricular activities, and a student's socioeconomic status, all play important factors when deciding on what college or university to attend. Literature has stated there are contributing external factors that play a key role in a student's final decision to attend an institution of higher learning. However, the literature fails to state what are the most common contributing external factors amongst incoming native freshmen students. This gap in the knowledge base served as the research problem for this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the most common contributing external factors for native incoming freshmen students at Rowan University. This study also investigated whether a contributing external factor was common amongst a particular group of students. Data collected from this study were used to predict what external factors will be taken into consideration by future Rowan University native freshmen students.

Significance of the Study

This study examined the most common contributing external factors for native incoming freshmen students when deciding to attend Rowan University. The findings of this study may provide Rowan University's admissions department with vital information on which external factors play a key role when potential students are deciding to attend. The findings of this study can also give the Rowan University community an understanding of why students are choosing to attend. With the information provided by this study, recruiting goals, techniques, target areas, and recruitment literature, can be changed or improved for potential future Rowan University students. In addition, understanding why students are attending aids the Rowan University community in planning for, changing or creating, and implementing future student programs and initiatives to coincide with the university's mission statement.

Assumptions and Limitations

It was assumed that all students living in one of the six freshmen residence halls on Rowan University's main campus, had to make a decision to attend Rowan University. It was also assumed that students participating in the study understood the research problem and responded in a truthful manner. Since the study dealt with responses to information about contributing external factors in deciding to attend Rowan University, it could be assumed that some students responded negatively on the instrument for fear of embarrassment.

The scope of this study was limited to native freshmen, residing in freshmen residence halls, on the campus of Rowan University during the spring 2011 semester. A

convenience sample of approximately 322 students was available during the spring semester 2011. Only those who returned the survey participated in this study.

Operational Definitions

1. Academic Program: A specific major chosen by Rowan University students at the time the instrument was taken during the spring semester 2011.
2. Division III: A division of the National Collegiate Athletic Association which Rowan University athletics fall under.
3. External Factors: Influences that played key roles in a student's final decision to attend Rowan University.
4. Freshmen Residence Halls: Six residential buildings located on the main campus that are owned and operated by Rowan University and designated specifically for native incoming freshmen students. Freshmen residence halls include Chestnut Hall, Evergreen Hall, Magnolia Hall, Mimosa Hall, Mullica Hall, and Willow Hall.
5. Geographical Distance: The distance in miles from a student's hometown to Rowan University.
6. Governmental Sponsored Program: Government programs sponsored by the state of New Jersey to assist students paying to attend an institution of higher learning.
7. Hometown: The town a current student resides permanently along with their immediate family.
8. Native Freshmen Student: A current undergraduate student enrolled at Rowan University that was admitted with the freshmen class of 2014.

9. Native Freshmen Resident: Native freshmen who submitted a Freshmen Housing Application to the office of Residential Learning and University Housing prior to the start of the 2010 – 2011 academic school year.
10. Subject: A native freshmen student living in one of the six freshmen residence halls who participated in this study by completing an instrument in the spring semester of 2011.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the most common contributing external factors amongst Rowan University native freshmen students living in freshmen residence halls?
2. What factors did native freshmen students use in their college choice decision making process to attend Rowan University?
3. Is there a significant relationship between a subject's ethnicity and a contributing external factors and influences regarding college choice decision making?

Overview of the Study

Chapter II provides a review of scholarly literature related to this study. This section includes conceptual framework, college choice student models, external factors, personal preferences, and influences, which contribute to a student's decision to attend a college or university.

Chapter III describes the study methodology and procedures. The following details are included in this description: the context of the study, the population and sample section and demographics, the data collection instrument, the data collection process, and an analysis of the data.

Chapter IV presents the findings of the study. This chapter addresses the research questions posed in the introduction of this study. Narrative and statistical data are used to summarize the data in this section.

Chapter V summarizes and discusses the major findings of the study, with conclusions and recommendations for further practice and study.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Introduction

When students are considering an institution of higher learning, there are many factors that play a role in making a final decision to attend. Students may look at following in the footsteps of a parent, attending the same college as a sibling, or even consider living at home and attending a community college nearby. Regardless of what the reason may be for choosing, there are contributing external factors that may influence a potential student to attend a particular institution of higher learning. A contributing external factor can determine whether a potential student attends their first, second, or even third school of choice. Because this thesis focuses on the external factors that influenced current freshmen Rowan University students' decisions to attend, it is important to first understand the literature on external factors that influence students' college choice. Therefore this chapter begins with the theoretical framework and theories on student college choice models. Then the chapter examines the research on contributing external factors college students' use in deciding which institution of higher learning to attend. Literature has been written on external factors for attending a particular institution of higher learning including geographical characteristics, proximity, parental influences, athletics, academic programs and facilities, cost of attending, financial aid, and governmental sponsored programs. Regardless of which institution of

higher learning a student attends, external factors influenced their final decisions, many of which are taken into account in student college choice models.

Conceptual Framework

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) created a three phase model for the study of student college choices. Hossler and Gallagher's model separate and contain the college choice process within a three-stage framework that includes predisposition, search, and choice. The predisposition phase is the initial phase in which students decide whether to continue into higher education rather than take alternative paths, such as joining the work force or entering military service. At some point in a student's high school career, a conscious decision is made to attend an institution of higher learning. The search phase in Hossler and Gallagher's model is a learning process in which students gather and compare information about higher education institutions and their characteristics. Searches may be influenced by students' socioeconomic status, their parents' education levels, their peers, and the availability of financial support. The choice phase in Hossler and Gallagher's model is when applications are completed and the student chooses a particular institution of higher learning to attend. Students arrive at the choice phase where they take information gathered from the search phase and make a decision on what school to attend.

While in high school potential students must choose whether they want to go to college and then which one they should attend (Paulsen & St. John, 1997). According to Cabrera and La Nasa (2000), "... high school students develop predispositions to attend college, search for general information about college, and make choices leading them to enroll at a given institution of higher education" (p. 5). Current Rowan University

students completed Hossler and Gallagher's first two phases of their model before attending Rowan University. While deciding to attend, numerous factors influence students' college predispositions, including family socioeconomic status, parental involvement, peers, high school teachers and counselors, interactions with higher education institutions, high school involvement, and the relative value placed on attending college (Perna & Titus, 2004). In addition, students must also choose whether to attend full-time or part-time, what major and/or minor to pursue, what courses are needed to be taken, and which professors to pick (Paulsen & St. John, 1997). Those few characteristics have a heavy influence on a student's final decision and choice on a specific institution.

Before completing Hossler and Gallagher's model's final phase of choice, many students will take into consideration and are influenced by external factors. Chapman's (1981) Model of Student College Choice suggests a decision to attend a particular college or university is influenced by a set of student characteristics in combination with a series of external factors. The external factors mentioned in Chapman's model are placed in three categories: the influence of significant persons, the fixed characteristics of the institution, and the institution's own efforts to communicate with the prospective student.

Chapman places friends, parents, and high school personnel under significant persons. Cost/Financial aid, location, and availability of program are categorized under fixed characteristics of the institution. Finally, under the category of an institution's own efforts to communicate with the prospective student, Chapman places written information, campus visits, and admissions/recruiting. Under Chapman's model, student characteristics such as socio-economic status, aptitude, level of educational aspiration and

high school performance, along with external influences mentioned in the three categories, and a combination of efforts made by institutions to communicate with students, is all taken into consideration before a student makes a choice to attend an institution. Today, Chapman's model suggests external factors influenced all current students' decisions to complete Hossler and Gallagher's third and final phase of choice.

Geographical Characteristics

Neighborhood peers, labor market demands, and the cost of attending college all have a considerable impact on a student's decision. Rephann (2002) found geographical attributes such as distance, neighborhood qualities, and regional labor markets had an impact on whether a Swedish student decided to attend college. Rephann suggests local and regional factors play a secondary role in a student's decision to enter college.

Swedish students living in neighborhoods where a high portion of the population attended a college were more likely to attend as well. Swedish high school graduates whose mothers received a higher education and moved residences less frequently were more likely to attend a college. The farther a college was to their respective homes, the less likely Swedish high school graduates were to attend. Swedish students graduating from high school who have already entered the work force and who live far away from a college were less likely to attend.

Proximity

The effects of college proximity and availability may have an influence on a student's decision to attend. The more colleges that are available and visible to students, the more likely students will attend. By having a presence nearby, colleges and universities may encourage potential prospects to attend based on local advertisements,

community events such as sports and workshops, and by providing general exposure from current faculty, staff, students, and alumni (Turley, 2009). Turley found “colleges in proximity seem to increase the odds of applying to college because they make transition to college logistically, financially, and emotionally easier” (2009, p. 141). Turley’s study also suggested parents should encourage students to attend institutions in their community as it increases a child’s chances of applying. Students are less likely to receive or view information from institutions that are far from home. Students are likely to obtain information through high school counselors or college recruiters from nearby colleges (DesJardin, Dundar, & Hendel, 1998). Students with lower financial needs consider a wider range of colleges (Chapman, 1981). However, economically disadvantaged students are most likely to apply and enroll in a nearby college (Turley, 2009). Patterns seen in the United States are not different from those from other countries. In a study conducted by Kjellstrom and Regner (1999) in Sweden, findings were similar to American students. Students in Sweden also stayed close to home if colleges were available. Kjellstrom and Regner determined, “A reduction in the geographical distance to the nearest university should increase the likelihood of enrolling in a university education” (p. 346). Evidence also showed the longer the distance a college is from a potential Swedish student, the less likely he/she will enroll (Kjellstrom & Regner). With many options available, it is not surprising many students often decide to stay home and attend a community college. Not only will a community college be close to home, but students can also, as Turley suggests, benefit financially, logistically, and emotionally by attending.

Mattern and Wyatt (2009) used data from the National Student Clearinghouse, which provided information for 91% of all college students in the United States. These data were used to determine a median distance from a student's home and the college of their choice, and a median distance from the student's home and the in-state college attended. A student's home zip code and the zip code of the attending university were used to determine how far the average student traveled to college in their home state. Mattern and Wyatt determined the national median for students to travel and attend college is 94 miles. According to Mattern and Wyatt, 72.1% of all college students in the United States attended a school in their home state, while 27.9% attended a college out of state. In the case of New Jersey, college bound residents traveled a median 162 miles from their hometown to attend the college of their choice, whether in or out-of-state. Within New Jersey's state boundaries, college bound residents traveled a median 151 miles to attend a college located in New Jersey.

Parental Influence

Parents play an influential role in a student's decision to attend college. For many high school graduates, going away to college will be the first time they are away from parental supervision and will be the start of being independent. For many parents, seeing their child leave home can be difficult to accept. Many parents do not want their children to leave home or go far away. Living at home, or attending an institution close to home, will financially benefit both parent and student by saving money on rent, utilities, food, and travel costs (Turley, 2006). In addition, Turley stated that students living at home may help provide care for younger siblings and elderly relatives. With such potential savings and care giving that may be needed, parents do play a role in deciding what

institution their child attends and how far they may go. Turley conducted a study and used... “data from the National Education Longitudinal Survey, which contains data from a national sample of about 25,000 eighth graders in the spring of 1988 as well as follow-ups in 1990, 1992, 1994, and 2000. The analysis focuses on 17,153 students who were high school seniors in the spring of 1992...” (2006, pp. 828-829)

In Turley’s study (2006), 82% of students with parents who had no preference where their child enrolled applied to at least one college, compared to only 55% of students with parents who wanted their child to stay close to home. Turley’s study showed parents’ preference of where their child attended was important, even after taking the student’s desires into consideration. Parents affect their children’s decisions indirectly by teaching the importance of staying close to home, and directly by guiding them toward a local institution and forbidding them from applying to an institution farther away (Turley, 2006). Turley estimated 54% of high school seniors had parents who indicated it was important for their children to attend an institution while living at home. Parents of prospective students do influence and have a final say about where a student applies.

Athletics

Receiving an athletic scholarship could be the most important factor in the decision making process for a student athlete. Division III institutions such as Rowan University are not permitted to award sports scholarships to student athletes. However, this does not stop a potential student from applying to a Division III institution for the sole purpose of participating in an athletic program. Since athletes not only choose an institution, but also choose an athletic team and coach, their college selection process

may be different from non athletes. Although there has been much research focusing on the decision making process of students, the literature focusing on student athletes' decision making is limited. Mathes and Gurney (1985) found the college coach and campus environment were most important in the student athlete decision making process. The opportunity to play early in a student's career was a very high consideration of student athletes (Konnert & Giese, 1987). Letawsky, Schneider, Pedersen, and Palmer (2003) found the most important factor for student athletes was the degree program options offered by the institution. Other important factors for student athletes were the head coach, academic support services, the type of community in which the campus was located, and the school's sports traditions (Letawsky et al., 2003).

Academic Programs and Facilities

Choosing a college major can be one of the most difficult decisions a student makes. Some students change majors once or twice before selecting their future career paths. Specific majors offered at institutions of higher learning can determine if potential students decide to attend. The reputation of the major selected, strength of the faculty, course availability, and course variety all influence students in making their choice of major (Beggs, Bantham, & Taylor, 2008). Beggs, Bantham, and Taylor (2008) found students placed significant importance on the characteristics associated directly with a specific major when making their decision to attend. The choice of a major determines where students will take most of their courses within an institution and also affects interactions with faculty and other students (Porter & Umbach, 2006).

In an article published during the time of this study, in *The Whit*, Rowan University's school newspaper, according to the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, the

elementary education major is the largest on Rowan University's campus with 823 undergraduate students. The article continued to name the top 10 majors at Rowan University. Subject matter education was listed as second with 695 undergraduate students. Followed respectably by law and justice studies with 574; exploratory studies with 531; biological sciences with 483; psychology with 478; history with 431; physical education with 376; English with 322; and finally, mathematics with 306 undergraduate students (Boyle, 2010, pp. 1, 3.)

After picking a major, students want to know what types of buildings or facilities are available for their specific major. In a study sponsored by the Association of Higher Education Facilities Officers (June, 2006), 57% of students stated buildings housing their major was a must see on college visits. Facilities available in a student's specific major can determine if a student enrolls at a college or university. Also in the study by the Association of Higher Education Facilities Officers (June, 2006), 73.6% of respondents named facilities related to their majors as extremely important or very important in choosing an institution. Thirty percent of students in the study rejected a college because it lacked a building or amenity they thought important which included buildings that house or support the student's major. The study by the Association of Higher Education Facilities Officers (June, 2006) states the following are the top seven facilities that subjects in the study deemed "extremely important" or "very important" when they were selecting a college: Facilities for major 74%, library 54%, sophisticated technology 51%, classrooms 50%, residence halls 42%, exercise facilities 36%, and the institutions bookstore 35%.

Rowan University has made many improvements to facilities on the main campus and continues to grow with the addition of new buildings and residence halls, making it a unique place for students to attend.

Recent campus improvements include the construction of the university townhouses; Science Hall; Education Hall; and the Samuel H. Jones Innovation Center, the first building of the South Jersey Technology Park at Rowan University. Additionally, the Rowan Boulevard project... is linking the campus with Glassboro's historic downtown... and will create a unique college town setting in the form of a corridor complete with student apartments, a Barnes & Noble Collegiate Superstore, a hotel, shops and restaurants. Rowan University is also developing the Cooper Medical School of Rowan University... and will be the first new medical school created in the state in more than 30 years... (Rowan University, 2010)

Rowan University has had a reputation as being a teacher preparatory institution (College of Education, Rowan University 2010). Recently built within the last 5 years, Education Hall is one of the newest buildings on campus. Rowan University also has been known to have an excellent engineering program. Rowan Hall houses state of the art equipment for use by engineering students. In addition, Rowan University has one of the newest and largest student recreation centers in the state and is also home to the only planetarium located in South Jersey (Rowan University Fact Sheet, 2010). Rowan University also has built a new residence hall named Rowan Boulevard which houses 884 students. Literature suggests current Rowan University students may have chosen to

attend Rowan University due to the reputation of academic majors and the availability of facilities. Although choosing the correct academic major is important to all college students, the cost of attending an institution can prevent many students from having the opportunity to even select one.

Cost of Attending

Students may choose to attend institutions of higher learning because of low tuition costs. Other students may choose an institution to save money by living at home or being employed while attending college. Regardless of the reason, the cost of attending college can add up in four years. Tuition and fees grew by 51% in public four year institutions and by 36% in private four year institutions in the 10 year period ending in 2004 (College Board, 2004). Students must pay tuition and fees while attending, but also have to take into consideration the cost of books and school supplies, housing, food, and social activities. Costs can affect a student's decision to attend. Lower income students are less likely than higher income students to attend private colleges, four year colleges, enroll full-time, or live on campus, and treat cost related factors as a major consideration in the college choice process (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). In a study by Paulsen and St. John (2002), 64% percent of low income students, 58% of lower middle income students, 45% of upper middle income students, and 25% of upper income students considered student aid and/or low tuition to be very important in college choices. In the same study by Paulsen and St. John, 54% of low income students, 55% of lower middle income students, 45% of upper middle income students, and 27% of upper income students considered low living costs and/or having a college close to work very important. Paulsen and St. John (2002) found that low-income students and half of upper

middle income students, made costs a major consideration in the college choice process, while cost considerations did not play an important role in the college choices of upper income students.

Financial Aid

The cost of attending college can be expensive. Students who cannot afford to pay for a college education on their own, must seek some form of financial aid. According to Hossler (2000), 80% of high school students consider the availability of financial aid an important factor when making decisions about which college or university to attend. The most common types of financial aid students may receive are grants, student loans, scholarships, and work study program. Tierney (1980) stated that receiving any type of financial aid impacts a student's decision to attend either public or private institutions. The types of financial aid available and received can impact a student's decision to attend a particular institution of higher learning. If students are given financial aid in the form of grants and work study programs, they are more likely to enroll than those students who are only offered student loans (St. John, 1990). In a study by Kim (2004), different types of financial aid increased the probability of students attending their first choice institutions. Sixty-Six percent of Whites, 71% of African Americans, and 83% of Latino students, answered that being offered financial aid was somewhat or very important when deciding which college to attend. Fifty-six percent of Asian Americans thought having financial aid was an important reason for choosing a particular college. According to Kim (2004), financial aid in the form of grants alone or in a combination of grants and loans is positively associated with attending first choice institutions.

Governmental Sponsored Programs

New Jersey state law provides tuition free enrollment in public institutions of higher education for certain members of the New Jersey National Guard. The tuition program provides soldiers and airmen the opportunity for professional development while serving in the New Jersey National Guard. Any member is permitted to attend regularly scheduled courses at any public institutions of higher education in New Jersey (NJ National Guard, 2010).

The New Jersey Student Tuition Assistance Rewards Scholarship (NJ STARS) law began in 2004 and guaranteed free tuition and fees at New Jersey's community colleges to all high school students who graduated in the top 20% of their classes. In 2006, the program expanded to add NJ STARS II scholarships to those community college graduates who earn their associate's degrees with a 3.25 grade point average or better, and who continued on to a four year public state college (NJ STARS, 2010).

An additional program is the Education Opportunity Fund (EOF). EOF was established in 1968 by the legislature of the state of New Jersey. The program is dedicated to providing access to higher education for New Jersey residents who show the potential and motivation to succeed in college but who would not be able to attend without the financial assistance (New Jersey Commission of Higher Education, 2010).

Relevant Studies Conducted Locally

Similar studies have been conducted close to the Rowan University area. Briles (2009) conducted a study that asked 750 high school seniors in southern New Jersey, to name which factors were most important in their college selection process. Academic

and financial concerns showed no significance difference among the population studied. Briles stated that all students in the study took academics and financial concerns to be the two most important in their college decision making. In the study, the top 10 characteristics that students deemed most important, 6 of the 10 Briles termed “academic concerns.” Availability of major, availability of faculty, academic reputation, faculty reputation, availability of internships, and academic facilities all ranked in the top ten characteristics for our high school seniors. Financial matters including cost, value, price, and necessity of taking out a loan, all were highly important for students in Briles’ study. Quality of life on campus, social concerns, and other non-academic or non-financial factors were not considered as universally important by students in the study.

Summary of the Literature Review

When deciding on which college is the perfect fit, students may take into consideration many factors that contribute to a final decision. Personal preference, family influences, the cost of attending, academic programs, and location of a student’s home are all contributing external factors. Parents may want their child to stay close to home for personal or financial reasons. A student’s community can be influential and also help parents in convincing their child to attend a nearby college. Based on the availability of colleges in surrounding areas, students may choose to stay close to home. New Jersey students in particular travel on average 150 miles to attend a college. The lack of colleges in surrounding areas may cause a student to look further than anticipated, not attend college, or even encourage them to join the work force. The cost of attending and the lack of financial aid available may influence a student to not attend an institution of higher learning. For those students lucky enough to receive financial aid or qualify to

receive assistance from governmental sponsored programs, the tough decision of choosing a major follows. The literature states that external factors influence a student's decision to attend a college or university. Despite all the external contributing factors, the literature fails to inform which external factors are most common amongst students when deciding to attend an institution of higher learning.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Context of the Study

The study was conducted on the campus of Rowan University, a selective, medium-sized public university located in Glassboro, New Jersey. Glassboro is a small town community of history and innovation, with a population of about 20,000 residents, located about a half-hour south east of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Rowan University, 2011). Rowan University finds itself located in the middle of the borough, surrounded by residential homes and small businesses. Rowan University serves approximately 11,392 students, both undergraduate and graduate. Rowan University has seven colleges and offers 80 undergraduate majors and 55 majors leading to master's degree, and a doctoral program in educational leadership (Rowan University Fact Sheet, 2010).

Each academic class is represented on campus housing with native freshman and sophomores being the largest majority as they are required to live on campus. Rowan University houses approximately 3,600 students in eight residence halls and four apartment complexes. These facilities range in size from a capacity of 53 to 883 beds in 12 campus residential buildings. Of the 12 residential buildings, six are dedicated native freshman living.

Currently, Chestnut Hall, Evergreen Hall, Magnolia Hall, Mimosa Hall, Mullica Hall and Willow Hall are designated as freshman buildings and receive special programming geared towards the "First Year Living Experience" of living on a college

campus. Residential Learning staff in these buildings are trained to deal with freshmen related issues and residential programming. Chestnut Hall houses 384 students, Evergreen Hall houses 206 students, Magnolia Hall houses 201 students, Mimosa Hall houses 315 students, Mullica Hall houses 104 students, and finally, Willow Hall houses 203 students, for a total of 1,413 possible native freshmen living on campus. All six buildings have at least one floor dedicated to residential learning communities where all the residents of the floor have the same major and use each other as a resource and for assistance.

The study focused on native freshmen residential students, primarily because they recently had to make the decision to attend Rowan University.

Population and Sample Selection

The target population for this study was all native freshmen students of Rowan University during the 2010-2011 academic year. The available population was the 1,149 native freshmen residential students of Rowan University living on campus. The convenience sample of 322 were residents living in the six designated native freshmen buildings on campus. The buildings included Chestnut Hall, Evergreen Hall, Magnolia Hall, Mimosa Hall, Mullica Hall, and Willow Hall.

A report of all native freshmen residents living in the six designated native freshmen buildings was generated by the Graduate Coordinator for Housing Assignments in the Department of Residential Learning and University Housing on the first day of the spring semester, January 18, 2011. This report was generated based on the Freshmen Housing Applications that were on file, in a database, in the Office of Residential Learning and University Housing. This report was also generated for me to ensure the

most up to date occupancy of native freshmen in the six designated native freshmen buildings as of the start of the 2011 spring semester. According to the report generated, Chestnut Hall housed 351 native freshmen, Evergreen Hall housed 66 native freshmen, Magnolia Hall housed 177 native freshmen, Mimosa Hall housed 292 native freshmen, Mullica Hall housed 88 native freshmen, and finally, Willow Hall housed 175 native freshmen, for a total of 1,149 total native freshmen living on campus at Rowan University at the time of the study.

Instrumentation

Instrumentation for this study (Appendix A) was created by me with the assistance of the instrument used by Briles (2009) in his dissertation research. I took Briles instrument into consideration and reformatted the wording to apply to the specifics of this study and Rowan University. The survey was organized into three sections. The first section of the survey consisted of demographic information. Subjects supplied their age, gender, ethnicity, campus housing assignment, hometown zip code, and type of high school attended. In this section subjects were also asked to provide information on other schools they applied to and were accepted, if any form of financial aid was being received, and if their hallway/floor was designated as a learning community.

The second section of the instrumentation involved 23 statements using a Likert scale to match personal levels of agreement or disagreement. Questions 13 through 35 asked the subject to discuss the importance of college characteristics and external factors that influenced their decision to attend Rowan University. College characteristics and external factors in this section included location, academics, types of facilities, and extra-curricular activities. The Likert scale for this section used terms such as “Extremely

Important,” “Very Important,” “Important,” “Slightly Important,” and “Not Important.” The numbers 5 to 1 were used respectively for subjects to relay their levels of agreement.

The third and final section included 17 statements that focused on student college choice decision making. This section asked students if a specific statement applied to them when making a decision to attend Rowan University. Each question was a yes or no answer.

Briles conducted three focus groups made up of between 5 and 7 students from three different high schools to establish validity of the instrument in his dissertation. The purpose of the focus groups was to determine how the students interpreted each question on the instrument. The instrument was reviewed after it was completed, and the students were asked what they thought was the meaning of each question. After the first two focus groups, Briles adjusted the wording based upon what the students reported. After hearing the third group’s comments, Briles established that the students would understand the intent of each question on his instrument (Briles, 2009).

Following approval from the Institutional Review Board, readability and validity was measured for the instrument. To ensure readability and validity of the survey, a pilot survey was given to 20 students during the opening floor meeting of a Resident Assistant in Mimosa Hall. Subjects who took the pilot survey were not clear and had difficulty understanding what some statements from each section of the survey meant. Subjects who took the pilot survey felt some of the wording was too vague and confusing and needed to be more specific. The concerns of the subjects who took the pilot survey were taken into consideration and some statements on the final survey were re-worded to improve understanding of each statement. A Cronbach’s Alpha reliability analysis was

also calculated for the instrument yielding an r coefficient of .855 respectively indicating the instrument was internally consistent and therefore reliable.

Data Collection

Instrumentation approval was received from the Rowan University Institutional Review Board in December of 2010 (Appendix B). The survey was administered in January, February, and March, 2010. An informational cover letter accompanied the survey giving subjects information about the researcher, the policies, and the information being requested. Information on informed consent was listed at the top of the survey. Participation and completion of the survey constituted informed consent.

During the first Resident Assistant in-service of the spring 2011 semester, those RA's that live in the 6 designated native freshmen halls were asked to remain a few minutes after RA in-service was completed. After explaining my study to the freshmen hall RA's, I asked for assistance with help distributing the surveys amongst the buildings. Twenty-five RA's volunteered to help me distribute surveys. Each RA received a numbered manila folder with 12 surveys and was asked to distribute amongst their residents in their hallway/floor. Only 17 RA's who volunteered to assist returned the numbered manila folders to me and a total of 184 surveys were received. The other 138 surveys needed for the study were attained by me, walking with the RA's on duty in Chestnut Hall, Magnolia Hall, Mullica Hall, and Magnolia Hall, and knocking on random doors or by asking residents as the RA's and I walked by. A total of 322 surveys were collected for the study.

Data Analysis

The independent variables in this study included age, gender, ethnicity, campus housing assignment, hometown zip code, and form of financial aid received. Information for these variables was collected in the first section of the instrumentation. The dependent variables included college characteristics and external factors that influenced a student's decision to attend Rowan University and statements on student college choice decision making. Variations in college characteristics and external factors and statements on student college choice decision making were explored using Predictive Analytic Software (PSAW) version 18.0. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Correlation analysis was performed using the Pearson product moment correlation.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

Profile of the Sample

The subjects for this study were selected from the 6 different native freshmen residence halls on the campus of Rowan University: Chestnut Hall, Evergreen Hall, Magnolia Hall, Mimosa Hall, Mullica Hall and Willow Hall. The available population was 1,149 native freshmen residents. The targeted sample size was 322 native freshmen students residing in designated freshmen residence halls. Of the 204 surveys distributed to the RA's who volunteered to help distribute the survey, 184 were returned for an 89% response rate. The other 138 (43%) of the 322 surveys were attained by me, walking with the RA's on duty in Chestnut Hall, Magnolia Hall, Mullica Hall, and Magnolia Hall, and knocking on random doors or by asking residents as the RA's and I walked by. The targeted sample size of 322 was achieved. There were 197 females (61%) and 125 males (39%) that participated in the study. The subjects were between the ages of 18 to 21 with the majority being 18 years or age (65%). Three hundred and twelve of the subjects stated their hometown was in the state of New Jersey, while 10 subjects stated their hometown was outside the state of New Jersey.

Table 4.1 contains demographic information on the ethnicity of the subjects, while Table 4.2 contains demographic information on the residency of the subjects on campus.

Table 4.1

Ethnicity of Subjects (N=322)

Ethnicity	<i>f</i>	%
White Caucasian	246	76.4
African American	31	9.6
Hispanic	29	9.0
Asian	10	3.1
Other	6	1.9

Table 4.2

Residency on Campus (N=322)

Residence Hall	<i>f</i>	%
Chestnut Hall	128	39.8
Mimosa Hall	59	18.3
Magnolia Hall	48	14.9
Willow Hall	39	12.1
Mullica Hall	25	7.8
Evergreen Hall	23	7.1

Ninety-three percent of subjects attended a public school while 7% attended a private high school. Ninety-two percent of subjects applied to other schools other than Rowan University with 88% of subjects admitted to at least one other school. Regarding finances, 61% received some form of financial aid, 42% received some form of scholarships, and 63% took out loans to pay for the 2011 spring semester. Only 28% of subjects who participated in this study lived on a hallway/floor that was considered a learning community (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3

Subjects Who Resided in Learning Communities (n = 90)

Learning Community	<i>f</i>	Rank
Mathematics	30	1
Engineering	16	2
Honors	13	3
Computer Science	10	4
Scholars	10	4
Biology	8	6
CLIO	1	7
E.O.F.	1	7
Radio, TV, & Film	1	7
Total Frequency	90	

Analysis of the Data

Research Question 1: What are the most common contributing external factors amongst Rowan University native freshmen students living in freshmen residence halls?

An overall look at the responses related to the most common contributing external factors amongst Rowan University native freshmen students living in freshmen residence halls show a general importance when it came to tuition, academics, and on-campus housing (see Table 4.4). Eighty-five percent of subjects thought the cost to attend Rowan University were either “extremely important” or “very important.” Fifty-four percent of subjects responded the cost to attend Rowan University as “extremely important.”

Table 4.4

Responses Regarding College Characteristics and External Factors

Statement	Extremely Important		Very Important		Important		Slightly Important		Not Important	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Cost to attend Rowan University (Tuition, Fees, Room & Board). <i>n</i> =321, <i>M</i> =4.34, <i>SD</i> = 0.863 Missing = 1	174	54.0	98	30.5	38	11.8	7	2.2	4	1.2

Availability of academic major(s). <i>n</i> =321, <i>M</i> =4.32, <i>SD</i> = 0.822 Missing = 1	169	52.5	95	29.5	49	15.2	8	2.5	0	0
Availability of on-campus housing. <i>n</i> =320, <i>M</i> =4.42, <i>SD</i> = 3.156 Missing = 2	164	50.9	99	30.7	38	11.8	11	3.4	8	2.5
Value for the price to attend Rowan University. <i>n</i> =321, <i>M</i> =4.21, <i>SD</i> = 0.886 Missing = 1	147	45.7	108	33.5	57	17.7	4	1.2	5	1.6
The quality of the dining facilities. <i>n</i> =320, <i>M</i> =4.10, <i>SD</i> = 0.946 Missing = 2	133	41.3	110	34.2	59	18.3	13	4.0	5	1.6
Academic reputation of Rowan University. <i>n</i> =321, <i>M</i> =4.09, <i>SD</i> = 0.863 Missing = 1	119	37.0	126	39.1	64	19.9	10	3.1	2	0.6
The availability of internships and/or practical field work. <i>n</i> =321, <i>M</i> =3.91, <i>SD</i> = 1.059 Missing = 1	117	36.3	97	30.1	76	23.6	22	6.8	9	2.8
Availability of professors and staff. <i>n</i> =321, <i>M</i> =4.04, <i>SD</i> = 0.876 Missing = 1	113	35.1	125	38.8	68	21.1	14	4.3	1	0.3
The reputation of the faculty. <i>n</i> =321, <i>M</i> =3.92, <i>SD</i> = 0.918 Missing = 1	96	29.8	127	39.4	77	23.9	18	5.6	3	0.9
Academic Facilities (Academic buildings, Campbell Library, Labs, etc...) <i>n</i> =320, <i>M</i> =2.96, <i>SD</i> = 0.903 Missing = 2	93	28.9	129	40.1	81	25.2	13	4.0	4	1.2

The necessity of taking out a loan. <i>n</i> =319, <i>M</i> =3.52, <i>SD</i> = 1.228 Missing = 3	84	26.1	85	26.4	92	28.6	29	9.0	29	9.0
Ability to do undergraduate research. <i>n</i> =321, <i>M</i> =3.48, <i>SD</i> = 1.173 Missing = 1	77	23.9	85	26.4	94	29.2	46	14.3	19	5.9
The availability of a student union or recreation center. <i>n</i> =319, <i>M</i> =3.58, <i>SD</i> = 1.021 Missing = 3	69	21.4	98	30.4	110	34.2	34	10.6	8	2.5
Quality of off campus housing. <i>n</i> =317, <i>M</i> =3.45, <i>SD</i> = 1.167 Missing = 5	69	21.4	92	28.6	91	28.3	44	13.7	21	6.5
Attractiveness of Rowan University's campus. <i>n</i> =320, <i>M</i> =3.68, <i>SD</i> = 0.924 Missing = 2	61	18.9	129	40.1	100	31.1	25	7.8	5	1.6
The availability of study abroad programs. <i>n</i> =321, <i>M</i> =3.13, <i>SD</i> = 1.284 Missing = 1	58	18.0	68	21.1	97	30.1	53	16.5	45	14.0
Recreational facilities. <i>n</i> =318, <i>M</i> =3.47, <i>SD</i> = 1.073 Missing = 4	56	17.4	109	33.9	100	31.1	36	11.2	17	5.3
Opportunity to play intramural athletics. <i>n</i> =320, <i>M</i> =2.80, <i>SD</i> = 1.374 Missing = 2	45	14.0	63	19.6	71	22.0	64	19.9	77	23.9
Distance of Rowan University from your hometown. <i>n</i> =321, <i>M</i> =3.23, <i>SD</i> = 1.079 Missing = 1	43	13.4	77	23.9	136	42.2	40	12.4	25	7.8
Athletic facilities. <i>n</i> =320, <i>M</i> =2.96, <i>SD</i> = 1.244 Missing = 2	43	13.4	65	20.2	93	28.9	73	22.7	46	14.3

Opportunity to play intercollegiate athletics. <i>n</i> =321, <i>M</i> =2.48, <i>SD</i> = 1.328 Missing = 1	30	9.3	47	14.6	75	23.3	65	20.2	103	32.3
Availability of Greek Life (Fraternities and Sororities). <i>n</i> =321, <i>M</i> =2.25, <i>SD</i> = 1.303 Missing = 1	26	8.1	37	11.5	54	16.8	77	23.9	127	39.4
Location of Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey. <i>n</i> =320, <i>M</i> =2.49, <i>SD</i> = 1.174 Missing = 2	15	4.7	51	15.8	94	29.2	76	23.6	84	26.1

The availability of academic programs was the second most important contributing external factor in this study. Eighty percent of subjects declared 38 different majors. Eighty-two percent of subjects stated the availability of academic major(s) were either “extremely important” or “very important.” Fifty-two percent of subjects found the availability of academic majors extremely important. Subject matter education, elementary education and, engineering were the top three majors (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5

*Top 10 Majors Declared by Native Freshmen at
Rowan University*

Rank	Rowan University Native Freshmen
1	Subject Matter Education (<i>n</i> =38)
2	Elementary Education (<i>n</i> =37)
3	Engineering (<i>n</i> =27)
4	Psychology (<i>n</i> =16)
5	Biology (<i>n</i> =15)
6	Radio, TV, & Film (<i>n</i> =13)
7	Computer Science (<i>n</i> =10)
8	Law and Justice (<i>n</i> =10)
9	Public Relations (<i>n</i> =9)
10	English (<i>n</i> =7)

Eighty-two percent of subjects stated the availability of on-campus housing were either “extremely important” or “very important.” Fifty-one of subjects stated the availability of on-campus housing as extremely important. The cost to attend Rowan University had the highest number of “extremely important” at 174 subjects while the availability of academic major(s) was second with 169 subjects. The availability of academic major(s) received the lowest percentage of “slightly important” or “not important” at 3%, while the cost to attend Rowan University came in second with 4%.

Tuition, academics, and on-campus housing were the only external factors that had at least half of subjects respond as “extremely important.” Other factors considered “extremely important” or “very important” include; the value for the price to attend Rowan University (79%); the quality of the dining facilities at (76%); and the academic reputation of Rowan University (76%).

However, the location of Rowan University, Greek life, and intercollegiate athletics were of least importance to subjects. Five percent of subjects stated the location of Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey as “extremely important” while 49% stated it was “slightly important” or “not important.” Eight percent of subjects stated the availability of Greek life as “extremely important” while 63% stated it was “slightly important” or “not important.” Nine percent of subjects stated the opportunity to play intercollegiate athletics as “extremely important” while 53% stated it was “slightly important” or “not important.” Other factors considered “slightly important” or “not important” include; the opportunity to play intramural athletics (44%); the availability of study abroad programs (30%); athletic facilities (37%); and the distance of Rowan University from your hometown (20%).

Research Question 2: What factors did native freshmen students use in their college choice decision making process to attend Rowan University?

An overall look at the responses related to factors native freshmen student's used in their college choice decision making process to attend Rowan University showed the top three choices being; comparing information of other school to Rowan University, visiting the Rowan University campus, and the cost to attend Rowan University (see Table 4.6). Ninety-four percent of subjects compared information from other schools to Rowan University. Ninety-three percent visited the campus and 86% stated the cost to attend Rowan University influenced their decision making process to attend. Reviewing information such as brochures and websites about Rowan University was fourth with 85% and the availability of academic majors was fifth with 83%.

A subject's friends, the location of Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey, and the influence of parents/guardians on a subject's decision to attend were the bottom three choices in a subject's college choice decision making process. Thirty-three percent of subjects stated their friends had an influence on their decision to attend. About half of subjects (51%) stated the location of Rowan University had an influence on them to attend. A little more than half of subjects (58%) stated their parents/guardians had an influence on their decision making process. However, 64% stated their parents/guardians assisted in their decision making process to attend Rowan University.

Table 4.6

Influences Regarding College Choice Decision Making.

Statement	Yes		No	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
I compared information from others schools to Rowan University. <i>n</i> =321, <i>M</i> =1.05, <i>SD</i> = .224 Missing = 1	304	94.4	17	5.3
I visited the campus before my decision to attend Rowan University. <i>n</i> =321, <i>M</i> =1.07, <i>SD</i> = .248 Missing = 1	300	93.2	21	6.5
The cost to attend Rowan University had an influence on my decision to attend. <i>n</i> =321, <i>M</i> =1.13, <i>SD</i> = .341 Missing = 1	278	86.3	43	13.4
I reviewed information such as brochures or websites about Rowan University before my decision to attend. <i>n</i> =321, <i>M</i> =1.15, <i>SD</i> = .357 Missing = 1	273	84.8	48	14.9
The availability of academic programs had an influence on my decision to attend Rowan University. <i>n</i> =321, <i>M</i> =1.13, <i>SD</i> = .341 Missing = 1	268	83.2	53	16.5
My parents/guardian assisted in my decision making process to attend Rowan University. <i>n</i> =319, <i>M</i> =1.35, <i>SD</i> = .477 Missing = 3	208	64.6	111	34.5

My parents/guardian had an influence on my decision to attend Rowan University.	187	58.1	134	41.6
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$n=321$, $M=1.42$, $SD=.494$
Missing = 1

The location of Rowan University in Glassboro, NJ had an influence on my decision to attend.	164	50.9	156	48.4
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$n=320$, $M=1.49$, $SD=.507$
Missing = 2

My friends had an influence on my decision to attend rowan University.	107	33.2	214	66.5
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$n=321$, $M=1.67$, $SD=.472$
Missing = 1

Subjects in this study traveled a mean of 70 miles and had the opportunity to attend schools closer to their hometown. Eighty-one percent stated there were other colleges or universities closer to their hometown than Rowan University (see Table 4.7). Even though 50% stated their parents/guardian did not want them to go far to attend a college or university and 38% stated their parents/guardian wanted them to attend a college or university closer to their hometown, subjects in this study decided to attend Rowan University. Twenty-three percent of subjects in this study had the opportunity to attend a local community college, tuition free, for up to five semesters, but still decided to attend Rowan University.

Table 4.7

Factors Regarding Distance in College Choice Decision Making.

Statement	Yes		No	
	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
There are other colleges or universities closer to my hometown than Rowan University. <i>n</i> =320, <i>M</i> =1.18, <i>SD</i> = .386 Missing = 2	262	81.4	58	18.0
My parents/guardian did not want me to go far to attend a college or university. <i>n</i> =320, <i>M</i> =1.49, <i>SD</i> = .501 Missing = 2	162	50.3	158	49.1
My parents/guardian wanted me to attend a college or university closer to my hometown. <i>n</i> =320, <i>M</i> =1.62, <i>SD</i> = .486 Missing = 2	121	37.6	199	61.8
Did you qualify for the NJ STARS Program? <i>n</i> =319, <i>M</i> =1.76, <i>SD</i> = .425 Missing = 3	75	23.3	244	75.8

Research Question 3: Is there a significant relationship between a subject's ethnicity and a contributing external factor and influences regarding college choice decision making?

A Pearson product moment was calculated to see if a significant relationship existed between ethnicity and college characteristics and external factors. According to the results, two significant correlations were found between ethnicity and college characteristics and external factors (see Table 4.8). In response to receiving some form

of financial aid, there is a weak direct relationship ($r = .179, p = .001$). Cross-tabulation of the variables showed that all ethnic groups had at least 57% of subjects or higher who were receiving some form of financial aid to attend Rowan University. Asian American subjects percentage wise, had the highest with 88% of subjects receiving financial aid, followed by African American (84%), Hispanic (62%), and finally White/Caucasian (57%).

Table 4.8

Correlation Between Ethnicity and College Characteristics and External Factors (N=322)

Statement	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Are you currently receiving some form of financial aid?	.179**	.001
Did you take out student loans to pay for this semester?	.141**	.012

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-Tailed).

In response to taking out student loans to pay for the semester, there was also a weak direct relationship ($r = .141, p = .012$). Cross-tabulation of the variables showed that all ethnic groups had at least 62% of subjects or higher who were taking out student loans to pay for the semester. African American subjects percentage wise, had the highest with 80% of subjects taking out loans, followed by Asian American (70%), Hispanic (69%), and finally White/Caucasian (62%).

A Pearson product moment was also calculated to see if a significant relationship existed between ethnicity and influences regarding college choice decision making. According to the results, significant correlations were found between ethnicity and the

location of Rowan University, the availability of academic programs, and the participation of subjects in the E.O.F. program (see Table 4.9). In response to the location of Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey, there was a weak negative correlation ($r = -.151, p = .007$). Cross-tabulation of the variables showed that three of the four ethnic groups had 39% of subjects or less who were influenced on the location of Rowan University being in Glassboro, New Jersey. White/Caucasian subjects percentage wise, had the highest with 55% influenced on the location of Rowan University being in Glassboro, New Jersey, followed by Hispanics (39%), African American (35%), and finally Asian (30%).

Table 4.9

Correlation Between Ethnicity and Influences Regarding College Choice Decision Making (N=322)

Statement	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
The location of Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey had an influence on my decision.	-.151**	.007
The availability of academic programs had an influence on my decision to attend Rowan University.	-.190**	.001
Are you currently participating in the E.O.F. Program?	.419**	.000

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-Tailed).

In response to the availability of academic programs having an influence on a subjects decision to attend Rowan University there was also a weak negative correlation ($r = -.190, p = .001$). Cross-tabulation of the variables showed that ethnic groups were mixed on the availability of academic majors having an influence on their decision.

Hispanic (92%) and White/Caucasian (90%) subjects had the highest percentage of influence from the availability academic majors. Sixty-seven percent of African American and 30% of Asian subjects stated the availability of academics had an influence on their decision.

In response to participating in the E.O.F. Program, there was a moderate direct relationship ($r = .419, p = .000$). Cross-tabulation of the variables showed that African American (48%) and Hispanic (32%) subjects had the highest percentage of participating in the program (see Table 4.14). Asian (10%) and White/Caucasian (4%) subjects had a low amount of subjects participating in the E.O.F Program.

A low number of subjects in the study were taking advantage of governmental sponsored programs. Only 4% of subjects ($n=13$) were participating in the New Jersey National Guard Tuition Program and 11% of subjects ($n=35$) were participating in the E.O.F. program. Twenty-four percent of subjects ($n=75$) had the opportunity to attend their local community college under the NJ STARS program and decided not to. The top reasons given by subjects who qualified for the NJ STARS Programs stated a personal preference to not attend (see Table 4.10). Wanting to leave a subjects hometown was second, followed by subjects wanting a college experience at a four year school.

Table 4.10

<i>Reason for Not Attending Community College</i>	
Rank	Reason
1	Personal preference to not attend ($n=31$)
2	Wanted to leave hometown ($n=21$)
3	Wanted a college experience at a four year school ($n=8$)
4	Academics ($n=7$)
5	Belief that NJ STARS Program being cancelled ($n=3$)
6	Received scholarships ($n=2$)

CHAPTER V

Summary, Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary of the Study

This study investigated the most common contributing external factors for native incoming freshmen students at Rowan University. The study also investigated what factors native freshmen students used in their college choice decision making process to attend Rowan University. Through correlation analysis, the study aimed to determine if there was a significant relationship between a subject's ethnicity and a contributing external factors and influences regarding college choice decision making. Age was not used for correlation analysis since 65% of subjects were 18 years of age and 34% were 19 years of age. Gender was also not used for correlation analysis since 61% of subjects were female compared to 31% male.

A three section survey consisting of 52 questions and statements was distributed. The available population was 1,149 native freshmen residents. The targeted sample size was 322 native freshmen students residing in designated freshmen residence halls. Of the 204 surveys distributed to the RA's who volunteered to help distribute the survey, 184 were returned for an 89% response rate. The other 138 (43%) of the 322 surveys were attained by me, walking with the RA's on duty in Chestnut Hall, Magnolia Hall, and Mullica Hall, and knocking on random doors or by asking residents as the RA's and I walked by. The targeted sample size of 322 was achieved.

The first section of the survey collected demographic information on the subjects, while the second section of the survey used a Likert scale to gauge a subject's level of agreement on college characteristics and external factors. The third section included statements that focused on student college choice decision making that were answered by subjects using either "yes" or "no."

Descriptive statistics and correlations were used to analyze data from the surveys. Student responses were investigated using Predictive Analytic Software (PSAW) version 18.0. Significant correlation information was determined using Pearson product moment calculations.

Discussion of the Findings

The overall level of agreement related to the most common contributing external factors amongst Rowan University native freshmen students living in freshmen residence was cost. The cost to attend Rowan University received the highest percentage of "extremely important" or "very important" at 85%. Rowan University native freshmen students take the cost of attending (Briles, 2009; Chapman, 1981; Paulsen & St. John, 2002) to be the most important contributing external factors when deciding to attend Rowan University. The external factor of cost is a fixed characteristic of the institution in Chapman's Model of Student College Choice that has an influence on a student's decision to attend. Rowan University native freshmen followed Chapman's model and noted the cost of attending Rowan University influenced their decision to attend. Paulsen and St. John (2002) identified cost as the major consideration in the college choice process by lower and middle income students. As it is unknown the income level of subjects in this study, the cost to attend coincides with Paulsen and St. John's study as

cost being a major consideration in the college choice process by Rowan University native freshmen. The results in the study were opposite of Briles' study where the availability of majors was listed highest followed by the cost of attending. The study also confirms Briles' (2009) suggestion of future research being completed to see if one contributing external factor, specifically financial, begins to outweigh other factors.

In Briles' study, the top 10 characteristics that students deemed most important were similar to the top 10 characteristics that Rowan University native freshmen deemed most important. Briles' top 10 characteristics consisted of: availability of major (1), cost (2), value (3), price (4), availability of faculty (5), academic reputation (6), faculty reputation (7), availability of internships (8), Academic facilities (9), and necessity to take out a loan (10). In this study, the top 10 characteristics that students deemed most important were: cost (1), availability of majors (2), availability of on-campus housing (3), value (4), dining facilities (5), academic reputation (6), availability of internships (7), availability of faculty (8), faculty reputation (9), and academic facilities (10). Subjects in this study deemed the availability of on-campus housing (3) and dining facilities (5) important most likely from their experience of living on campus during the spring 2011 semester. Subjects in Briles' study did not have the experience of living or dining on college campuses and therefore did not have those two external factors in their top 10. In addition, subjects in this study traveled a mean of 70 miles to attend Rowan University and therefore had the availability of on-campus housing ranked high, as 70 miles is not a reasonable distance to commute.

According to the data, 37% of subjects stated their parents/guardian wanted them to attend a college or university closer to their hometown. Although 50% of subjects

stated their parents did not want them to go far to attend a college or university, 81% of subjects stated there were other colleges and universities closer to their hometown, and yet still decided to attend Rowan University. Subjects in this study were not heavily influenced by closer colleges or universities or the distance of Rowan University to their hometown. Subjects in this study had no problem deciding to enroll in Rowan University despite a college or university being closer to their hometown.

It is unknown what colleges or universities are closer to a subject's hometown, in distance, in this study. However, 312 out of the 322 subjects listed their hometown within the borders of the state of New Jersey and traveled a mean of 70 miles to attend Rowan University. Ten subjects in this study placed their hometown in the states of California, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Illinois. When one factors the mean distance of all total subjects, including the subjects from out-of-state, the mean distance of 80.1 miles is still shorter than the national and state averages. Both means of in-state (70 miles) and out-of state (80.1 miles) of distance traveled by subjects in this study was shorter than Mattern and Wyatt (2009) national average distance of traveling 94 miles and also shorter than the distance traveled within the state of New Jersey of 151 miles.

The parents/guardians of this study had an influence on a subject's decision to attend. Turley's (2006) study showed a parent's preference of where a student should attend was very important. A total of 58% of subjects in this study stated their parents/guardian influenced their decision to attend Rowan University. In addition, 65% stated their parents/guardian assisted in the decision making process to attend Rowan

University. Data from this study supports Turley's findings that parents of prospective students do influence and have a final say about where a student applies.

The availability of academic programs was the second most important contributing external factor in this study. Eighty percent of subjects declared 38 different majors. The data from this study supports the Office of Institutional Effectiveness' (Boyle, 2010) report as education being one of the largest majors on campus. The top major in this study was subject matter education followed by elementary education and then engineering. Thirty-two percent of subjects (n=81) declared some form of education as their major which included; early childhood education, elementary education, physical education, or subject matter education. The engineering major, which consists of chemical, civil, electrical, or mechanical engineering, was the only other major to be declared by more than 25 subjects in this study, giving it a rank of third.

Although academics facilities ranked 10th in this study of contributing external factors, 69% of subjects deemed it "extremely important" or "very important" when deciding to attend Rowan University. This is slightly lower than the 74% of respondents from the study conducted by the Association of Higher Education Facilities Officers (June, 2006). Subjects in this study were mainly concerned with academics and not the actual academic facilities used. However, keeping academic facilities that are used by the majority students on campus fully operational and functional is important to achieving that academic success.

With cost being the top ranked contributing external factor in this study, subjects must have secured funds to cover the cost to attend Rowan University. Receiving any type of financial aid impacts a student's decision to attend a college or university

(Tierney, 1980). Sixty-two percent of subjects in this study stated they received some form of financial aid to assist with the cost of attending Rowan University. Although it is not known in this study what type of financial aid was received, students are more likely to enroll in a college or university if they receive financial aid in the form of grants and work study rather than those students who are only offered loans (St. John, 1990). One can imply subjects from this study received financial aid in the form of grants and work study programs. However, 42% of subjects stated they received some form of scholarship and 63% stated they took out loans to pay for the cost of this semester. With more than half of subjects taking out loans, one can disagree with St. John as more and more students are willing to go into debt for a college degree.

Conclusions

Results of this study show that Rowan University native freshmen do take contributing external factors into consideration during their college choice decision making process. While several contributing external factors were analyzed, the cost to attend was the most important. Given the hard economic times the United States is currently going through and the everlasting trend of budget cuts within higher education, it is no surprise that the cost to attend Rowan University was the number one contributing external factor. With only 10 out-of-state subjects participating in the study, many subjects may have stayed in New Jersey for the purpose of paying in-state-tuition from a state supported institution such as Rowan University. Keeping the cost to attend Rowan University low, is certainly important for those students who need to take out loans, knowing they will be in debt after graduation and before even joining the work force.

Chapman's Model of Student College Choice was used as external factors such as cost, the availability of academics, and parents opinions were taken into consideration during the decision-making process. Receiving financial aid to cover the cost of attending is important as the price of attending college keeps growing with less money being contributed by state funding. Having the right major available will have an influence on a student's decision to attend. Students are willing to travel to attend a school despite closer colleges and universities available in their hometowns. Parents/guardians do have an influence on a student's decision to attend.

Overall, students have shown they care about their future and education. This study and the previous study conducted by Briles, show that students take many factors into consideration when deciding to attend an institution of higher learning. At times this process can be long and tedious, sometimes even stressful, but it is a process through which all students wishing to receive a higher education must endure. Students must be patient and consider key external factors, to ensure they are selecting the correct college or university.

Recommendations for Practice

The study shows that native residential freshmen take many factors into consideration when deciding to attend Rowan University. The results of this study show that the cost to attend, the availability of academic majors, and the availability of on campus housing play a role in a student's decision to attend Rowan University. By serving as a sort of needs analysis, this study has uncovered the importance of external factors within the Rowan community as the data suggest that all students, regardless of class standing, also take cost and academics into consideration.

Overall, the study shows evidence that students believe keeping the cost to attend low, offering the same quality of academic programs, and by having residential housing available, will ensure enrollment into Rowan University. In an institution whose mission statement states it "...provides a collaborative, learning-centered environment... and enriches the lives of those in the campus community..." (Rowan University, 2010), it is important for students to have access to academics and residential housing.

Within Rowan University's different departments that may have interactions with potential students, it is important to keep in mind the needs of students. With cost being important to many, the Board of Trustees should make an effort to avoid substantial tuition increases for students. Rowan University should strive to be a low cost, public, state supported institution to continue to attract potential students and remain competitive.

The university as a whole must continue to offer the same challenging academic programs to attract potential students. With education and engineering being what Rowan University is highly known for, such academic programs must continue to expand to attract the brightest students in addition to highly qualified faculty members. Other academic programs should strive to be as recognizable and successful as education and engineering. The loss of faculty, staff, or academic programs can be detrimental to Rowan University for future students.

In regards to residential housing, the Department of Residential Learning and University Housing must make the availability of housing to all students. Currently only freshmen and sophomores are required to live on campus, while juniors and seniors participate in a lottery process for housing. Those students not lucky enough to

participate in the lottery process are placed on a waiting list, with hopes that housing becomes available. With more students applying for housing than spaces available, the Department of Residential Learning and University Housing should be able to make housing available to everyone by investing in more residence halls. By not having residential housing available, many students may not want to commute and may opt to attend a closer college.

Overall, data suggest the Admissions Department should pitch the idea of cost, academics, and housing to potential students. Rowan University advertisements, marketing plans, and published literature for potential students, must show and promote key contributing external factors that students take into consideration. By adhering to a student's needs, Rowan University can make the decision making process for future potential students easier and less stressful.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following suggestions are presented:

1. Further studies should be conducted with larger populations to confirm the findings of this study.
2. A study could be conducted using qualitative rather than quantitative data to get a more detailed look at a student's decision-making process of selecting a college or university to attend.
3. Studies should be conducted at other local institutions to determine contributing external factors for their student population in an attempt to help Rowan University become knowledgeable of its surrounding area.

4. A study should be conducted with upperclassmen – e.g. sophomores, juniors and seniors.
5. A study should be conducted and focused on graduate students.
6. Future research should be conducted to determine if cost remains the most common contributing external factor amongst all Rowan University native freshmen.
7. Research should be conducted to determine the most common contributing external factor amongst all Rowan University students.

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APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter



December 15, 2010

Eli Trenado
55 New Street
Bridgeton, NJ 08302

Dear Eli Trenado:

In accordance with the University's IRB policies and 45 CFR 46, the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to inform you that the Rowan University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved your project:

IRB application number: 2011-065

Project Title: Choosing Rowan University: A Study on Contributing External Factors Amongst Native Residential Freshmen

In accordance with federal law, this approval is effective for one calendar year from the date of this letter. If your research project extends beyond that date or if you need to make significant modifications to your study, you must notify the IRB immediately. Please reference the above-cited IRB application number in any future communications with our office regarding this research.

Please retain copies of consent forms for this research for three years after completion of the research.

If, during your research, you encounter any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects, you must report this immediately to Dr. Harriet Hartman (hartman@rowan.edu or call 856-256-4500, ext. 3787) or contact Dr. Gautam Pillay, Associate Provost for Research (pillay@rowan.edu or call 856-256-5150).

If you have any administrative questions, please contact Karen Heiser (heiser@rowan.edu or 856-256-5150).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Harriet Hartman".

Harriet Hartman, Ph.D.
Chair, Rowan University IRB

c: Burton Sisco, Educational Leadership, Education Hall

Office of Research
Bole Hall Annex
201 Mullica Hill Road
Glassboro, NJ 08028-1701

856-256-5150
856-256-4425 fax

APPENDIX B

Survey Instrument

EXTERNAL FACTORS IN COLLEGE CHOICE SURVEY

The information presented to you in this voluntary survey is being requested to gain a better understanding of contributing external factors that played a role in your decision to attend Rowan University, for the purpose of a master's thesis publication. The information gathered from this survey will be used for statistical reporting purposes only. You are assured that all of your responses will be kept anonymous and not affect class standing with the university. By completing this survey you are certifying that you are at least 18 years of age or older. If you have any questions please contact Eli Trenado at (856) 256-7471 (Trenad58@students.rowan.edu) or Dr. Burton Sisco at 856-256-3717 (Sisco@rowan.edu). Thank you for your participation in this survey!

I. Background Information

Answer the following questions by
circling your answer.

- 1) What is your age? _____ (Specify)
- 2) What is your gender?
 - A. Male
 - B. Female
- 3) What is your ethnic background?
 - A. African American
 - B. Asian
 - C. Hispanic
 - D. White/Caucasian
 - E. Other _____ (Specify)
- 4) Where do you currently reside on campus?
 - A. Chestnut Hall
 - B. Evergreen Hall
 - C. Magnolia Hall
 - D. Mimosa Hall
 - E. Mullica Hall
 - F. Willow Hall
- 5) What is your hometown's postal zip code? _____ (Specify)
- 6) What type of high school did you attend?
 - A. Public High School
 - B. Private High School
 - C. Home Schooled
- 7) Did you apply to other schools besides Rowan University?
 - Yes
 - NoIf Yes how many? _____ (Specify)
- 8) Did you get accepted to other schools besides Rowan University?
 - Yes
 - NoIf Yes how many? _____ (Specify)
- 9) Are you currently receiving some form of financial aid to pay for college?
 - Yes
 - No
- 10) Are you currently receiving any scholarships?
 - Yes
 - No
- 11) Did you take out student loans to pay for this semester?
 - Yes
 - No
- 12) Is your hallway/floor designated as a learning community?
 - Yes
 - NoIf Yes, which community? _____ (Specify)

EXTERNAL FACTORS IN COLLEGE CHOICE SURVEY

For each statement identified below, circle the number
to the right that best fits your judgment of the level of agreement.

College Characteristics and External Factors	Scale				
	Extremely Important	Very Important	Important	Slightly Important	Not Important
13. Distance of Rowan University from your hometown	5	4	3	2	1
14. Location of Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey	5	4	3	2	1
15. Attractiveness of Rowan University's campus	5	4	3	2	1
16. Academic Facilities (Academic buildings, Campbell Library, Labs, etc...)	5	4	3	2	1
17. Athletic Facilities	5	4	3	2	1
18. Recreational Facilities	5	4	3	2	1
19. Academic reputation of Rowan University	5	4	3	2	1
20. Availability of professors and staff	5	4	3	2	1
21. The reputation of the faculty	5	4	3	2	1
22. Availability of academic major(s)	5	4	3	2	1
23. Ability to do undergraduate research	5	4	3	2	1
24. Availability of on-campus housing	5	4	3	2	1
25. Quality of off campus housing	5	4	3	2	1
26. The availability of a student union or recreation center	5	4	3	2	1
27. The quality of the dining facilities	5	4	3	2	1
28. Availability of Greek Life (Fraternities and Sororities)	5	4	3	2	1
29. Opportunity to play intercollegiate athletics	5	4	3	2	1
30. Opportunity to play intramural athletics	5	4	3	2	1
31. Cost to attend Rowan University (Tuition, Fees, Room & Board)	5	4	3	2	1
32. The necessity of taking out a loan	5	4	3	2	1
33. Value for the price to attend Rowan University	5	4	3	2	1
34. The availability of study abroad programs	5	4	3	2	1
35. The availability of internships and/or practical field work	5	4	3	2	1

EXTERNAL FACTORS IN COLLEGE CHOICE SURVEY

For each statement identified below, circle whether the statement applies to you or not.

The following are statements about student college choice decision making.		
36. I compared information from others schools to Rowan University.	Y	N
37. My friends had an influence on my decision to attend Rowan University.	Y	N
38. My parents/guardian had an influence on my decision to attend Rowan University.	Y	N
39. The location of Rowan University in Glassboro, NJ had an influence on my decision to attend.	Y	N
40. The availability of academic programs had an influence on my decision to attend Rowan University.	Y	N
41. The cost to attend Rowan University had an influence on my decision to attend.	Y	N
42. I reviewed information such as brochures or websites about Rowan University before my decision to attend.	Y	N
43. I visited the campus before my decision to attend Rowan University.	Y	N
44. There are other colleges or universities closer to my hometown than Rowan University.	Y	N
45. My parents/guardian wanted me to attend a college or university closer to my hometown.	Y	N
46. My parents/guardian did not want me to go far to attend a college or university.	Y	N
47. My parents/guardian assisted in my decision making process to attend Rowan University.	Y	N
48. I came to Rowan University to play an intercollegiate sport. If yes, please specify _____	Y	N
49. Have you declared a major(s)? If yes, please specify _____	Y	N
50. Are you currently participating in the New Jersey National Guard Tuition Program?	Y	N
51. Are you currently participating in the E.O.F. Program?	Y	N
52. Did you qualify for the NJ STARS program? If yes, please specify below why you did not attend a community college? _____	Y	N