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AN ANALYSIS OF THE MARKETING TACTICS USED TO INFLUENCE MILLENNIAL GENERATION STUDENTS IN THEIR DECISION TO ATTEND A TWO-YEAR OR A FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE

by
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A Thesis

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at
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Thesis Chair: Joseph Basso, Ph.D.; APR

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this manuscript to my husband, Jim, who started me on the journey for my master's degree six years ago and am deeply appreciative to my children, David, Rhianna and Kelly for always encouraging me along the way. Thank you to my family and friends for your constant support. And to Lenny… a big thank you for your motivating and persistent urging to complete the task.

ABSTRACT

Andrea L. Stanton
AN ANALYSIS OF THE MARKETING TACTICS USED TO INFLUENCE
MILLENNIAL GENERATION STUDENTS IN THEIR DECISION TO ATTEND
A TWO-YEAR OR A FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE
2013
Thesis Advisor: Joseph Basso, J.D., Ph.D.
Master of Arts in Public Relations

This study will attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of college recruitment

marketing tactics used to influence Millennial Generation students, ages 17 to 22 years

old, in their decision to attend either a two-year or a four-year college. Changing

demographics and projections indicate a decline in the number of high school graduates

within the next three to five years. This shift translates into fewer college applications

and more competition among institutions of higher learning making it easier for most

students to get accepted into college.

The researcher will use focus groups and a survey to examine the perception of

community colleges in relation to four-year universities and the marketing elements that

most persuaded students in their choices. This information will be used to analyze how

well Gloucester County College targets its marketing strategy towards recent high school

graduates and offer recommendations to improve recruitment opportunities.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

As national trends in community colleges show a decline in enrollment following a decade of record growth, changing demographics indicate that the number of students graduating from high school will continue to decrease. The number of public high-school graduates is projected to drop by 13 percent in the Northeast between 2007 and 2021, according to a U.S. Department of Education report. This decrease in the number of high school students, combined with the current economic downturn, translates into fewer college applications and more competition among institutions of higher learning.

For many students, the less stringent admission requirements of community colleges, affordable tuition and the ability to work while earning a degree serve as an efficient and resourceful way to jumpstart their education. Community college campuses nationwide reported record growth over the last 10 years. In the last few years, a sluggish economy, coupled with the unemployed seeking new job skills, has contributed to the steady rise in the number of new students each semester.

"From the fall of 2010 to 2011 total enrollment dropped nearly 1 percent to 8.3 million based on estimates by the National Student Clearinghouse and the American Association of Community Colleges" (Lipka, 2011). Community college enrollment numbers have continued to flatten and decline, with the amount of full-time students falling while part-time attendance has risen. This downward trend of fewer students and economic difficulty is projected to continue into the next decade, making it imperative for

community colleges to effectively connect and entice Millennial Generation students to the campus.

Statement of the Problem

To prevent enrollment numbers from continuing to decrease, community colleges must evaluate past marketing tactics to determine the most effective means of communicating with high school graduates and students in the 17 to 22-age bracket. Rather than relying on the traditional methods of promoting the college through static printed materials, such as newspaper articles and advertisements, Millennial Generation students are better reached and influenced via mobile marketing devices and other electronic media. This is a generation comfortable with handheld devices and access to instant information. To remain competitive with other schools and universities, community colleges must expand its marketing practices into real-time communication and electronic media promotion.

Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to evaluate which marketing tactics most influence Millennial Generation students in their decision to attend a two-year or a four-year college. Types of marketing materials will be assessed on their effectiveness to appeal to students, ages 17 to 22 years old. The study will help to determine the best advertising approaches to effectively connect with high school graduates and young college students.

Procedures

The researcher conducted focus groups with students from both two- and four-year colleges and universities, in addition to having students respond to an online survey. This approach enabled the researcher to gather important qualitative and quantitative data to determine the changing needs of society and address the most effective tactics for marketing to traditional-aged college students. The focus groups and online survey served as a basis for understanding what motivates Millennial Generation students in their decision to attend a specific college.

Data collected from this study will provide the community college with information for developing a marketing plan that effectually targets a specific age group of students to help boost enrollment.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

The researcher will test the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Face-to-face recruitment and electronic media are the most successful marketing tools when promoting the advantages of attending college to Millennial Generation students.

Hypothesis 2: Parents serve as gatekeepers maintaining substantial influence over students, ages 17 to 22, in their decision of where to attend college.

Research Questions

Research Question 1. What influences most persuade students in their decision to attend either a two-year or four-year institution?

Research Question 2. How do Millennial Generation students seek out information about college?

Research Question 3. How active a role does social media play in a student's college decision?

Research Question 4. How much influence do parents have on a student's college decision?

The Assumptions

For this study's purposes, the researcher has the following assumptions about the Millennial Generation:

1. This age group prefers electronic media to static media.

2. Millennials embrace engaging graphics and select brands.

3. They have been trained to be doers and achievers, and therefore, favor interactive marketing.

4. Programs of study and parents influence their decision of where to attend college.

5. The medium is just as important as the message.

6. This is a media-savvy generation so the message has to be smart and fresh so they will listen.

7. Millennials are better educated, more affluent and more ethnically diverse than past generations.

The Limitations

This study will be restricted by the following limitations:

1. This study will only measure a cross section of the population for the opinions of students, ages 17 to 22 years old.

2. Population – This study will only be evaluating marketing materials that target Millennial Generation students.

3. Time – This study will be conducted between September 2012 and May 2013.

4. Budget – There will be a limited budget with which to produce any materials needed to conduct the research for this study.

Significance of the Study

The researcher asserts that a public relations effort to market community colleges to a population of incoming freshmen needs to be stepped up to reflect the current popularity of iPhones, eye-catching websites, mobile apps, radio and television. As the number of high school graduates continues to decrease, the need to share and disseminate the positive attributes, resources and savings available at community colleges must be reported to the general public, including not only marketing to the Millennial Generation but also informing their parents as well. This study will attempt to determine the most effective marketing avenues for getting the message out and capturing the interest of young college students.

Definition of Terms

Advertising— paid, non-personal communication from an identified source (sponsor) using mass media to persuade or influence an audience (The ABCs of Strategic Communication, 2005).

Community College—a nonresidential junior college established to serve a specific community and typically supported in part by local government funds (Random House Unabridged Dictionary, 1997).

Demographics—the statistical characteristics of human populations (as age or income) used especially to identify markets (Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary, 2003).

Electronic media— online forms of news publication, including websites, blogs and social networking sites (PCmag.com, 2012).

Marketing—identifying unmet needs, producing products and services to meet those needs — and pricing, distributing and promoting those products and services to earn a profit (The ABCs of Strategic Communication, 2005).

Millennial Generation – a term used to refer to the generation, born from 1980 onward, brought up using digital technology and mass media; the children of Baby Boomers (dictionary.reference.com, 2013).

Real-time communication—any mode of telecommunications in which all users can exchange information instantly or with negligible latency (searchunifiedcommunications.techtarget.com, 2008).

Tactics— the specific technique or course of action (activity or task) conducted to help achieve a strategy. It is part of a detailed public relations plan and involves the use of specific personnel (agent), time and cost (The ABCs of Strategic Communication, 2005).

Target Market – the consumers a company wants to sell its products and services to, and to whom it directs its marketing efforts (investopedia.com. 2013).

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

During the past 110 years, the function of community colleges has changed to address the needs of each generation. Since 1901, when the oldest existing public two-year college, Joliet Junior College, was founded in Illinois, to today's classrooms that serve as an access to higher education, community colleges have adapted to societal trends in order to meet the demands of the time. As a new generation of students enter into college, it is important to understand what motivates these young adults and their career goals to successfully market and recruit for the future.

Background

Based on material from the National Profile of Community Colleges: Trends & Statistics, the American Association of Community Colleges offers a history on community colleges past to present:

> In the early college years, the colleges focused on general liberal arts studies. During the Depression of the 1930s, community colleges began offering job-training programs as a way of easing widespread unemployment. After World War II, the conversion of military industries to consumer goods created new, skilled jobs. This economic transformation along with the GI Bill created the drive for more higher education options. In 1948, the Truman Commission suggested the creation of a network of public, community-based colleges to serve local needs.

> Community colleges became a national network in the 1960s with the opening of 457 public community colleges - more than the total in existence before that decade. Baby boomers coming of age fueled enrollment growth. The construction involved in this gigantic growth of facilities was funded by a robust economy and supported by the social activism of the time. The number of community colleges has steadily grown since the 1960s. At present, there are 1,166 community

colleges in the United States. When the branch campuses of community colleges are included, the number totals about 1,600 (Phillippe & Patton, 2000).

As the population and the American dream to pursue an education grew, so did the popularity of community colleges. "For many, community college is sometimes the only viable path to educational advancement. In fact, nearly half of the entire United States undergraduate student population is enrolled in community colleges. And these institutions are diverse: Some offer technical workforce credentials, while others maintain comprehensive sets of transfer and career-training programs" (Park, 2012).

Since the recession started populations on college campuses have dramatically increased, some citing enrollment surges of more than 20 percent a year. Last fall, those enrollment numbers began to decrease (Johnson, 2011). "That figure still represents an increase of 22 percent since 2007, a surge resulting from the recession" (Lipka, 2011). Because of a shift in demographics, this trend now appears to be on a downward slope. Recent enrollment numbers reflect the projection of a decrease in the number of high school graduates, which means fewer students to recruit for community college courses.

"It's not that enrollment is down. It has essentially stopped growing," noted Kent Phillippe, a senior research associate for the American Association of Community Colleges. An analysis prepared with the National Student Clearinghouse used data from more than 700 public, two-year colleges, providing a realistic snapshot of the situation. According to Phillippe, enrollment at two-year colleges has steadied at a high number. "Last year's decline was due to a drop in full-time students, according to the association. Part-time student enrollments increased slightly" (Fain, 2011).

Community colleges still remain a reasonable resource for students pursuing a

four-year degree. Recent National Student Clearinghouse data reveals the importance of community colleges and the need they fill by providing an educational foundation for students looking to get bachelor's degrees. A study based on "student-level information from more than 3,000 colleges reveals that 45 percent of all students who finished a four-year degree in 2010-2011 had previously enrolled in a two-year college" (Lederman, 2012).

Generations

The function of community colleges has adapted over the last century in response to the generation that it serves. Each generation — identified by their age, attitudes, similar ideas, and for experiencing significant life events — share common values, behaviors and reactions. Whether targeting the advertising message towards a generation of traditional, baby boom, Gen X or Millennials, understanding the similarities and differences of each generation provides insight into the best way to accommodate and market to a specific group. "Research on generational difference has gone on for decades. The most recent generation has been labeled the Millennials or Generation Y, and they were born between 1984 and 2002" (Holm 2012).

Generally Millennials are described as "optimistic, team-oriented, high-achieving rule-followers" and the generation that are "most likely to emulate the G.I. Generation," which Tom Brokaw called "America's Greatest Generation" (Eubanks, 2006). "No other adult peer group possesses anything close to their upbeat, high-achieving, team-playing, and civic-minded reputation" (Howe and Strauss, 2003). The Millennials are also the "most racially and ethnically diverse generation in U.S. history. As of 2002, non-whites

and Latinos accounted for 37 percent of the 20-or-under population, one in five has an immigrant parent and one in 10 has a non-citizen parent. In fact, non-white youths are often bigger contributors to this generations' emerging persona than white youths" (Eubanks, 2006).

"In the past, generations were defined largely by the year in which one was born. Now target marketing has reached the point where generational attitudes are discerned and used as a starting point for media planning" (Tsui and Hughes, 2001). Today, trend forecasters look for innovative ways to connect and market to all of the largest consumer groups. "Because of the time period in which they were born, and the era in which they have experienced the world, Millennials see the world differently than previous generations" (Holm, 2012).

"The incoming class of 2012 has the following notable characteristics: they have always had GPS, taxes could always be filed electronically, and IBM has never made typewriters" (The Mindset List, 2012). "Previous generations had maps and knew how to read them while driving, they did taxes on paper and mailed them at midnight, and IBM was refusing to make personal computers because they felt there was no market for them" (Holm, 2012).

Co-authors Neil Howe and William Strauss' book, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*, offers a comprehensive study on the habits of today's teens. According to Strauss, "understanding the new generation as its own animal is key to reaching its members successfully."

> As a whole, Mr. Strauss said, studying generations is crucial for understanding how a society progresses. Because media trace this progression, generational studies are a mirror to society and a way of forecasting trends. Lots of purchasing decisions—from the vehicle to the family vacation to computer technology—are

made between parents and children, together. So while generational marketing is very useful, the key is to target the generation in mind without alienating everyone else. For example, Monday Night Football, which has tried to market to teenagers—hyperkinetics, explosions, disorder—has pretty much turned off the rest of its audience (Tsui and Hughes, 2001).

An article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* by Alan Galsky and Joyce Shotick makes note of a unique difference between this generation and those of the past— the close relationship and involvement Millennials have with their parents. There are also an increasing number of these parents who are active in their children's college educational experience.

Millennial students are more apt to have parents who have attended college than those of previous generations. More and more master and doctorate degrees are offered online. For this generation, unlike prior generations, access to information is only a click away thanks to the Internet and wireless devices (Holm, 2012).

"Many of the baby-boomer parents of Millennials were involved in social-change movements when they were in college. They feel passionate about getting involved and realize that they can make a difference. Often called 'helicopter parents' because they 'hover' over the lives of their sons and daughters from preschool to college graduation, many of them are in fact reasonable and patient when dealing with the university" (Galsky and Shotick, 2012). Since these parents maintain such a substantial influence over Millennial children and their college decision, it is important to relate and slant marketing materials towards both of the generations.

The Millennial Generation will be in college for another seven years or so until about 2020, which is beneficial for colleges since their parents are willing to assist with employment opportunities by recruiting, hiring and offering permanent jobs to students.

"If demographic trends hold, the Gen-X parents will be even more involved, but less patient and reasonable, than their baby-boomer predecessors. Gen-X parents are likely to be less financially secure than the boomers were, so the cost of college education will be an increasingly major factor" (Galsky and Shotick, 2012).

> The most essential point of understanding the characteristics of the Millennial generation sometimes gets lost in the discussion of the more complex cultural and societal dynamics. That point is simply this; our students are not entirely like us. Whether we are faculty, staff or administration; academics, student life or auxiliary; Silent Generation; Baby Boomers or Generation X, it is critical that we remember that what is generally true for others our own age, is not necessarily true of the generation of students that now make up our undergraduate population. We must be prepared to adjust (Eubanks, 2006).

Recruiting

"As much of the higher-education community faces a possible perfect-storm scenario — fewer students, weak economy, less federal and state support, greater accountability, more demands for assessment — it is important that universities understand and are prepared to respond proactively to the post-2010 Millennial students and their Generation X parents" (Galsky and Shotick, 2012).

This generation of students differs from previous generations having grown up in a globally connected society, with cellphones, email, computers and the Internet. They are accustomed to real-time communication and immediate access to information, and so are their parents. Marketing and recruiting to these two audiences cannot depend only on the practices of the past but must also embrace the sources of the digital age.

"The students who currently populate our classrooms are known as digital natives —millennial learners (also known as the Net Gen) who have grown up with a host of relatively new technologies, including computers, cell phones, and video games; they connect with friends and family through social networking, text messaging and other

technology-mediated approaches" (Brumberger, 2011).

The Millennial Generation's familiarity and ease with technology has affected the way students learn enhancing their visual and thinking abilities, making them visual learners. They are better able to "read" images and overlook the information and messages that are not of interest to them.

"The Net Generation is more visually literate than earlier generations. Many are fluent in personal expression using images," according to Oblinger and Oblinger in *Educating the Net Generation*. "They are intuitive visual communicators" who are "able to weave together images, text, and sound in a natural way" (Oblinger and Oblinger, 2005).

"Today, students are experts at ignoring messages they do not feel apply specifically to them. Social media websites bombard them with advertisements filtered by their personal profiles and web browsing history. If it is not a dead-on match, they are not interested" (Holm, 2012).

Millennials are also a generation that grew up with parents placing a high value on children and their education. Colleges would be wise to use this knowledge for marketing and recruitment purposes.

> As Millennials absorb the adult message that they dominate America's agenda, they come to the conclusion that *their* problems are the *nation's* problems, *their* future is the *nation's* future, and that, by extension, the American people will be inclined to help them solve those problems. They tend to trust large national institutions (including government) to do the right thing. In addition to their faith in institutions to serve them well, this generation is also more willing than other generations to acknowledge the importance of their own personal choices and actions. In recruiting, colleges can capitalize on this trait by stressing traditions and high standards, and involving the co-purchasing parents in recruiting activities. Administrators must prepare to deal with the impact of helicopter parents on campus life, and students' high expectations for housing and other facilities. Feedback and structure are critical in the classroom for this group of

students who has come up through the "no child left behind" approach to education (Eubanks, 2006).

Marketing

Social media and technology has had a profound effect on the way today's college students communicate, learn, make decisions and spend their money. Millennials are a generation of consumers who are quickly becoming an economic influence, targeted by marketers aware of the buying power of these young consumers.

"In a recent research report, media agency OMD calculated that Millennials—people born between 1981 and 1995 who are now between the ages of 15 and 29—have 11 percent more buying power than the Baby Boomers did when they were young. OMD figures there are 55 million Millennials" (Lafayette, 2011).

One area where Millennials and their parents look to save during times of economic uncertainty is through the educational value of community colleges. The College Board recently published a study that said four out of five community college students want to transfer to a four-year institution. Another study by Sallie Mae finds that even the more affluent students are choosing community colleges.

According to a February 2012 New York Times article by Lily Altavena, "Inside Higher Ed reported a study from Sallie Mae that said 22 percent of college students with a family income of over $100,000 opted for a community college last year. Four years ago, it was at 16 percent" (Altavena, 2012).

The increase in community college enrollment across the country during the past year can be attributed to the significantly lower tuition cost over that of a four-year university, in addition to also saving money by living at home. As more students and parents choose this alternative, community colleges are becoming more acceptable.

In Altavena's article, "More Affluent Students Are Choosing Community

Colleges, Study Finds," Raritan Valley Community College President Casey Crabill

is quoted, noting a "49 percent increase in students under the age of 21 in the past five

years." The college is focusing on how to accommodate the rising population.

> Raritan Valley has had plenty of recent success stories, including students who
> have transferred to Cornell University, the University of California at Berkeley
> and other high-profile institutions. Crabill said the publicity has helped convince
> more traditional students that the two-year college is a good choice.

> "Our profile peaked at the same time" that the recession began, she said.

> The college has taken many steps to respond to the changing demographics on
> its main campus. To improve student amenities, college officials remodeled the
> cafeteria and expanded and updated the fitness center. The college also created
> a first year experience office and related programming. A new student life and
> leadership center is in the works, with a related fund-raising campaign launched
> in 2010 (Altavena, 2012).

Colleges must be prepared to market to parents, in addition to the Millennial

students, since as gatekeepers they play such an influential part in their children's

decision making process. Engaging advertising using varying channels and successful

marketing of a college can attract all generations. "The way to reach Millennials is

through Boomers and Xers," said Strauss, "and vice versa. It's a very synergistic

relationship" (Howe and Strauss, 2003).

Where Generation X was into individuality and niche marketing, mass brands

appeal more to the Millennial Generation as evidenced by the popularity of everything

from iPods to popular clothing stores, to Harry Potter.

> Baby boomers and Gen Xers declared mass marketing dead long ago. We live in
> a world of fragmented media surrounded by cynical consumers who can spot and
> block an ad message from a mile away. But what Gen Xers and boomers may
> not realize is that the unabashed embrace of select brands by Millennials, from
> technology to beverages to fashion, has made this decade a true golden era of
> marketing for those who know what they are doing (Feld, 2008).

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"With all these segments of the population being cross-cut yet again by internal divisions, media buyers and planners have thought hard about how to reach the whole populace and at the same time appeal to each of these generations specifically. The answer may lie in the Internet" (Tsui and Hughes, 2001).

College students are now using technology more than ever before for entertainment, information and social interaction to maintain relationships and stay connected. (Pearson, Carmon, Tobola, & Fowler, 2009). "Media content, in virtually every sensory format, can now be literally melted into an almost completely liquid state through digitization. This liquidity allows us to mold and reshape content in as many ways, as there are individuals interested in experiencing it" (Marks, 2000).

To the digital-savvy Millennial Generation, technology is viewed as a functional necessity, not as a modern convenience. To communicate with, and recruit students and their parents, colleges and universities need to adapt their services to the technologically perceptive consumer.

Changes in technology during the last two decades have altered personal and professional communication and the way business is conducted, decisions made and free time spent. Public relations practitioners and marketers need to find new methods to reach the "mass audience" other than the media outlets of print, radio and television used fifty years ago.

The "absolute amount of time consumers engage with media in general has risen dramatically, while time spent with any one medium alone has declined and media 'multi-tasking' has increased dramatically. As evidence of this trend, a typical American home now has more than 26 media devices, and the average U.S. consumer spends more

time using these devices (televisions, radios, computers, iPods, cell phones, etc.) than any

other activity" (Hill and Moran, 2011). Television continues to be an important past-time

activity for college-aged students, coming in third after computer Internet use and

console gaming. Generation Xers and Boomers rank TV second (Lafayette, 2011).

> While media are important vehicles through which people acquire new attitudes
> and behaviors, the question remains whether this new media environment causes
> people to learn and adopt new behaviors differently than they did through
> traditional media, and if so, how. While many research questions have been
> generated by the advent of new media, one major stream of research has dealt
> with issues surrounding new media usage and attention, specifically focusing on
> how learning may be compromised in the new media environment. Research in
> cognitive psychology has shown that individuals pay less attention to marketing
> messages when faced with environmental distractions, and retain less information
> overall (Hill and Moran, 2011).

This research indicating that less attention is being given to marketing

information because of media multi-tasking and communication overload suggests that

many messages may be ignored. College marketers need to focus on making new media

engaging and beneficial to recruiting efforts. Using interactive media and other online

activities to motivate students may be advantageous to improving attention and filling

classroom seats. "Studies show that increased levels of interactivity can lead to higher

involvement and more positive attitudes toward websites, along with higher source

credibility" (Hill and Moran, 2011).

New media has proven to be a catalyst for creating varying forms of social

interaction. With people spending more time online engaged in social media (emails, IM

chat, Twitter and Facebook), new media has changed the amount of time and how often

people communicate online. This growth in online social interaction has also increased

the number of people being communicated with and provides another means for

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influencing behaviors.

"Consumer behavior studies reveal that individuals give greater consideration to advice and information shared online, spending more time with websites that provide third-party evaluations" (Hill and Moran, 2011).

> In a Noel-Levitz Report on marketing and student recruitment, mobile apps ranked among the least-used practices across institutions types, despite the fact that nearly two-thirds of respondents from four-year institutions (63 to 64 percent) rated them 'very effective' or 'somewhat effective.' Student-to-student contact programs—programs that keep enrolled students in touch with prospective students—were found to be used by a majority of four-year private and public institutions (73 and 61 percent, respectively) but only by a minority of two-year public institutions (27 percent), with a wide variety of practice in the frequency of such contacts (www.noellevitz.com, 2011).

Although the Millennial Generation is comfortable with electronic communication, they also are receptive to the traditional forms of media. Campaigns targeting college-aged students should include less modern marketing channels especially television, the most common source for learning about information.

"Television is the most prevalent source for how Millennials first learn about products and services. TV was named by 57 percent of Millennials, followed by friends at 29 percent, family at 26 percent, search engines at 22 percent and magazines at 21 percent. Social network websites were named by 10 percent as where they first become aware of products and services; the Internet on a mobile device was also cited by 10 percent; and deal-of-the-day websites were named by 9 percent" (Lafayette, 2011).

A Higher Ed Benchmarks Noel-Levitz Report, "Marketing and Student Recruitment Practices at Four-Year and Two-Year Institutions," on undergraduate trends in enrollment management conducted a 97-item, web-based poll in April 2011. The survey found that among public and private, two-year and four-year campuses, the

"top 10" most effective practices included open houses and campus visit days.

"Perhaps the most surprising result was live chats (instant messaging) finishing slightly ahead of social media. This preference is likely related to the real-time response and more private forum that are not found in social media" (www.noellevitz.com, 2010). In the report on e-recruitment practices, it found that over the years campuses have reduced their use of live chats. In response to this data, colleges may want to consider including live chat to their communication strategies (www.noellevitz.com, 2010).

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Introduction

The researcher will attempt to evaluate the most effective marketing tactics in influencing students, ages 17 to 22 years old, in their decision to attend a two-year college. The study will examine the marketing materials that most persuade students in their college choices. This study will also attempt to determine the influence parents have on their children when advising them about higher education options.

This study includes qualitative and quantitative research in the forms of focus groups and online surveys with students attending both two- and four-year colleges. These methods will provide a broad overview of how students like to receive marketing information and which recruitment strategies work best to promote student attendance. Participants in the focus groups and answering the online survey will be asked to identify what college marketing materials are most influential to them –billboards, websites, print and online advertisements, brochures, newspaper articles, posters, face-to-face recruitment, and radio and television ads – as well as their preferences.

Focus Groups

The researcher needed to learn what influenced Millennial Generation students in their decisions to attend either two- or four-year institutions. In "Communication Research" by Hocking, Stacks & McDermott, focus groups are described as small group meetings of a target population brought together to help explain the population's beliefs, attitudes, values, and motivations toward a particular subject that allow a researcher to

gather large amounts of information in a short period of time. Focus groups can be useful

when trying to determine the best way to communicate with a target population (Hocking

Stacks & McDermott, 2003). Using the qualitative methodology of a focus group allows

the researcher to target and study a specific group with considerable control in a

relatively inexpensive way. Caution will be used to make sure the facilitator keeps the

group on target and permits all students to participate in the discussion.

The researcher will conduct two focus groups with students between the ages of

17 and 22. One group will consist of community college students. The other group will

include students who began their education at a four-year institution. Each focus group

will have between 5 to 6 participants. Focus group participants will be students who

volunteer to answer questions about their perception of colleges in the controlled-setting

study. A facilitator will conduct each of the discussions and a note taker will be present.

Survey

As another method of testing the hypotheses, the researcher will conduct an

online survey to analyze the most effective marketing tactics influencing Millennial

Generation students' decision of where to attend college. This information will be

examined to determine how well Gloucester County College currently targets its

marketing strategy towards high school graduates and offer recommendations to improve

recruitment opportunities.

According to Hocking, Stacks & McDermott, the methodology of quantitative

research involves describing a subset of a population of people in such a way as to

present accurate depictions of how the total population would respond. Descriptive

research using survey methods provides the researcher with a systematic way of measuring, including who, when, where, and how to measure the variables under study (Hocking, Stacks & McDermott, 2003).

Using an online survey, the researcher will examine the responses of two-year and four-year college students over a four-week period via email and social media. This design takes a cross section of a population to study *at a given time* (Hocking, Stacks & McDermott, 2003).

Using SurveyMonkey, a popular online-survey tool, students ages 17 to 22 years old will be asked to anonymously answer a series of 14 questions. The survey will be accompanied by an introduction identifying the researcher as a graduate student at Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey. The introduction will also explain the purpose of the study and guaranteed anonymity for all survey respondents. Respondents will receive instructions to answer the survey by "checking" the answer(s) that best applies. The survey will also include an open-ended question asking the respondents to share their comments.

CHAPTER 4

Research Results

The researcher conducted both qualitative and quantitative research data using focus groups and an online survey to target males and females ages 17 to 22 years of age currently attending college or in the process of deciding where to go to school. The data collected is comprised of high school seniors and two-year and four-year college students and evaluates the most influential sources when marketing to the Millennial Generation. The individuals participating in both the focus groups and the online survey are students from a broad range of colleges and universities including Gloucester County College, Camden County College, The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, Rider University, University of South Carolina, Widener University, Albright College, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Rowan University, St. Joseph's University and others.

The researcher held two focus groups between December 2012 and February 2013, one consisting of four-year university students and the other of community college students, with five respondents participating in each session. A questionnaire was distributed to the participants, which the moderator used to stimulate discussion. The researcher served as the note taker.

An online survey shared through social media via Facebook and email was conducted over a one-month period using the web-survey tool SurveyMonkey to collect and process responses. One hundred and twelve students anonymously responded to the 14-question survey. Not all of the 112 respondents answered every question.

Focus Group 1

Focus group 1 took place on Dec. 26, 2012 at the researcher's home in Williamstown, N.J. during the students' winter break from college. The two females and three males in this focus group were all first-year students, 18-years old and attended four-year universities with majors in physics/mechanical engineering, aerospace engineering, biology, criminal justice and elementary education/music. All of the participants in the group graduated in the top 20 percent of their high school class. A high school history teacher facilitated the one-hour discussion.

Findings

1. What influenced your decision to attend a four-year college?

    • All of the participants indicated that the academic programs of study offered at the colleges influenced their decision on which school to attend.   Three of the respondents cited the importance of potential employment opportunities because of the college's reputation and career support.

    • Four of the participants wanted the experience of living away at college and all five respondents indicated the desire to get away from their high school crowd.

    • All of the students received scholarship offers. Four of the five participants were also eligible for the NJ STARS scholarship that provides free tuition for five semesters at a New Jersey community college, followed by scholarship dollars for two years at a four-year New Jersey university for students meeting GPA requirements. None of the four participants took advantage of the NJ STARS scholarship.

2. How important was a major in your college search and decision of where to attend?

- The academic majors offered at the colleges were of high importance to all of the participants in their decision.

- Two of the participants felt that the degree major and college attended would make a difference to future employers when reviewing resumes for new hires.

3. Who is financially responsible for paying for college?

- All of the participants noted that cost did not play a key factor in their choice of college. All reported relying on scholarships, parents, and student loans to pay for their education.

- Changes to NJ STARS II (the last two years at a four-year university) have made the scholarship less attractive to students.

- Two of the students worked part-time during the school year. Three of the participants worked only during the summer months.

4. Who was influential in helping you to choose a college?

- All of the students indicated that parents had the most influence in their college decision. One participant said her parents wanted her to stay at home and commute. Two participants reported parents wanted their children to have the "college experience."

- Participants indicated that high school guidance counselors "pushed" four-year schools.

- Scholarship offers also were an important factor (to students and to parents) when deciding on a college.

5. How do you prefer to receive information about colleges?

- Three of the students stated that they liked having college recruiters visit the high school to tell them what colleges had to offer.

- All of the participants attended Open House events at their colleges.

- College visitations and speaking one-on-one to students and staff made a good impression.

- College websites are a main communication source for students seeking information.

- One participant noted that she preferred to read brochures and flyers.

Focus Group 2

Focus group 2 took place on Feb. 21, 2013 at Gloucester County College in Sewell, N.J. The three females and two males in this focus group ranged in age from 18 to 22 years old and attended a two-year community college with plans to transfer to a four-year university for a bachelor's degree. Two of the five students are community college graduates and currently in their junior year at local universities. Students in this group were pursuing majors in biology, business, computer graphic arts, education, and equine science. A public relations assistant at Gloucester County College with a communications degree from Rowan University served as the moderator for the one-hour session.

Findings

1. What influenced your decision to attend a four-year college?

- Each of the five participants reported that cost and location were important factors in their decision.

- Three of the students are NJ STARS scholarship recipients with plans to graduate with associate degrees and transfer to four-year universities for their bachelor's degrees.

- One participant was unsure about his career choice and viewed attending a community college as a "good transitional place."

2. How important was a major in your college search and decision of where to attend?

   - Two of the students stated that the community college offered the program of study they were looking to pursue, which was important in their decision.

   - One respondent said that other than for a few academic areas, a specific major would not be a main reason to attend a community college. He viewed a community college as a place where general education requirements could be taken at a reduced cost than transferred to a four-year school.

   - Two students responded that a major was somewhat important in their decision but also viewed a community college as a good place to begin their education at a reasonable price.

3. Who is financially responsible for paying for college?

   - Some of the participants responded that their parents are covering the tuition cost. Others said that they are helping their parents pay for college.

   - Three participants received free tuition through the NJ STARS program.

   - Financial aid and scholarships assisted students with college costs.

4. Who was influential in helping you to choose a college?

   - Parents and family influenced all of the participants in their decision.

- Students made their own decisions to attend a community college based on major, cost, location and other factors.

- One student viewed the two-year college as an opportunity to become involved, stand out and grow academically. She also noted it was more enjoyable than the four-year university she now attends.

- One participant, who played tennis, referenced the good sports teams. Another mentioned the opportunity to gain work experience as a student worker in her related major.

5. How do you prefer to receive information about colleges?

- College websites are preferred by all of the participants.

- College recruiters visiting high schools and Open Houses are also popular among the students as two of the best ways to learn about colleges.

- One participant said "shadowing" a college student was a preferred way to learn about the college.

- All five of the participants remarked that they did not read newspapers or look at the print ads.

- Students said that they notice television ads and billboards but do not think they are an influence.

Survey Data

The following data results are from an online survey conducted over a one-month period. The participants, of which 59 percent were female and 41percent male, range in age from 17 to 22 years old. Fifty-seven percent of the respondents attend a two-year college and 43 percent are enrolled at four-year universities.

Question 1: What is your age?

What is your age?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
17	2.7%	3
18	17.9%	20
19	31.3%	35
20	18.8%	21
21	13.4%	15
22	16.1%	18
answered question		112
skipped question		0
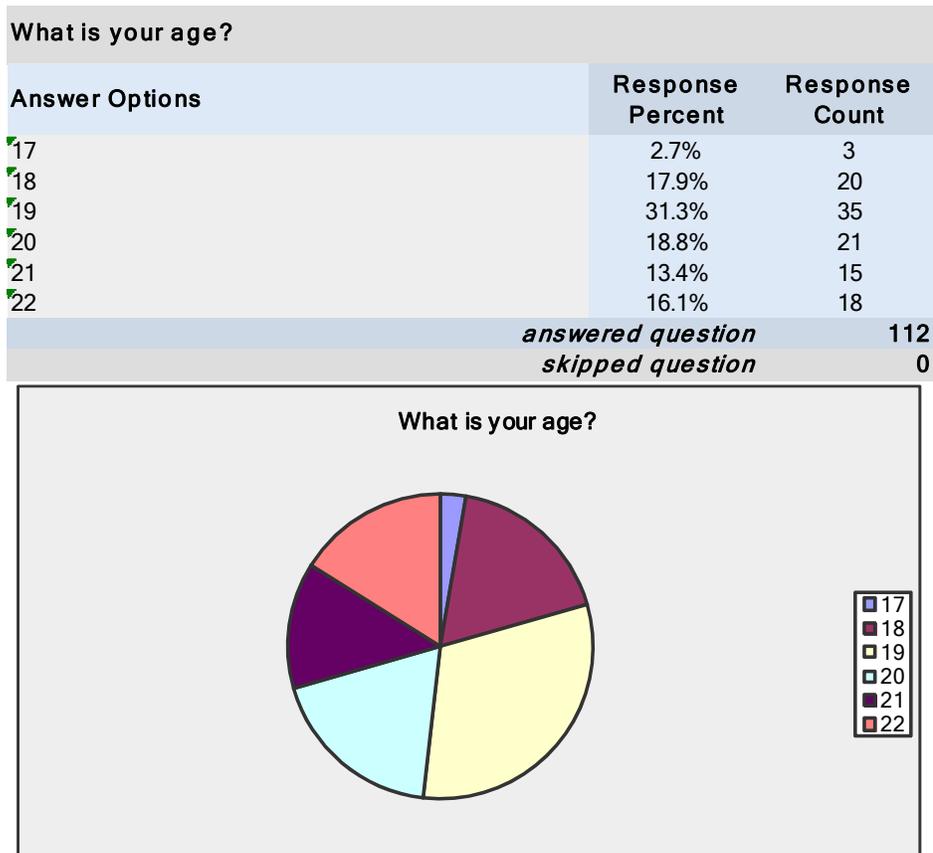
Figure 1 Age of Survey Participants

Question 2: What is your gender?

What is your gender?		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Female	58.9%	66
Male	41.1%	46
answered question		112
skipped question		0

What is your gender?

☐ Female
☐ Male
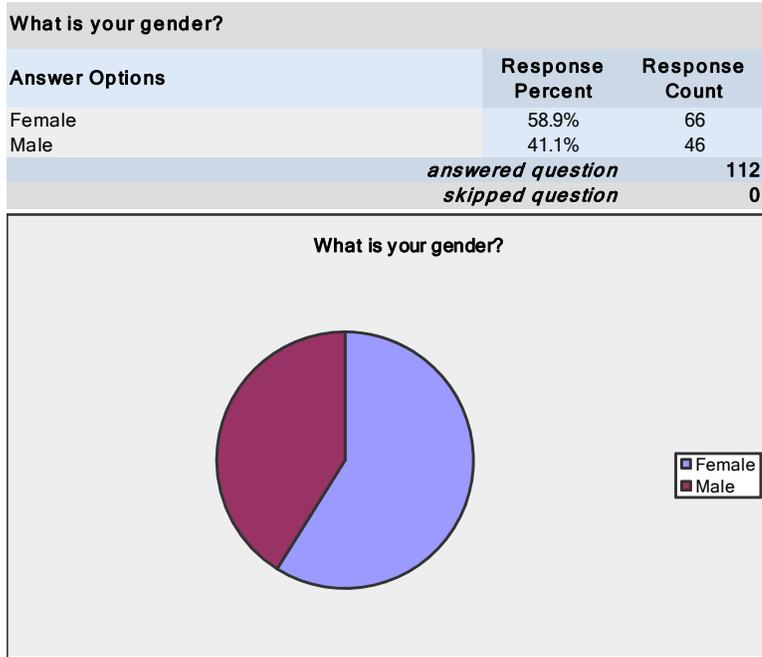
Figure 2 Gender of Survey Participants

Question 3: What type of college are you attending?

What type of college are you attending?		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
Two Year College	57.1%	64
Four Year College	42.9%	48
answered question		112
skipped question		0

What type of college are you attending?

☐ Two Year College
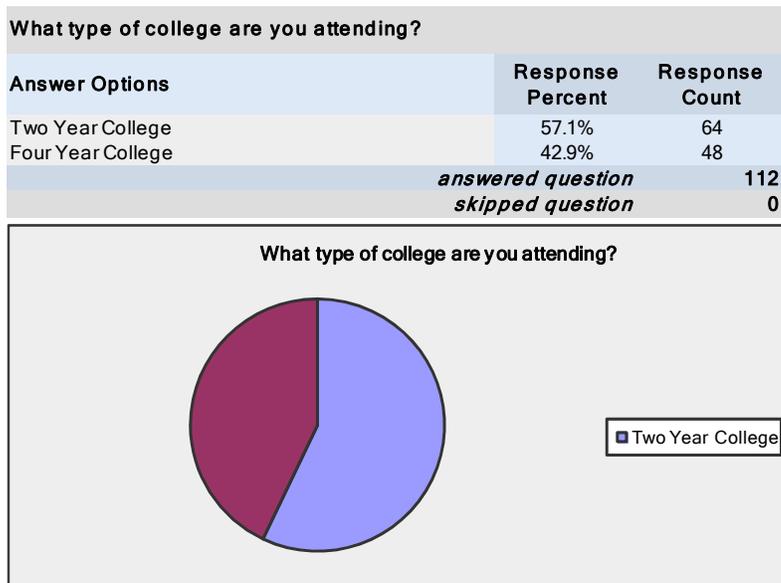
Figure 3 Type of College Attending

Question 4: What on-campus activities are you involved in or plan on becoming involved in?

What on-campus activities are you involved in or plan on becoming involved in (i.e., baseball team, chess club, student government):	
answered question 88 skipped question 24	
Number	**Response Text**
1	none
2	Student government
3	History club that disbanded
4	newspaper
5	Music, Theatre, Photography
6	none
7	None
8	Soccer team
9	Vanguard Fine Arts
10	none
11	Music clubs
12	None
13	none
14	Track & Field
15	none
16	Habitat for Humanity, engineers without Borders, resident assistant
17	none
18	Newspaper, science club
19	N/A
20	Teachers 2000
21	none
22	none
23	phi thetta kappa
24	Phi Theta Kappa
25	photography
26	DECA
27	none
28	none
29	psychology club, going to the gym

What on-campus activities are you involved in or plan on becoming involved in (i.e., baseball team, chess club, student government):	
	answered question 88 skipped question 24
Number	**Response Text**
30	multicultural club
31	none
32	Track
33	Basketball
34	The honor society
35	Volleyball team, entertainment club
36	none
37	n/a
38	N/A
39	Psychology Club
40	nothing, i like to sleep.
41	Yoga club, Vegetarian club
42	None, until I go to a university.
43	Student Governmet
44	Cross Country, Student Government, Track and Field
45	Student Government
46	Student government
47	College newspaper, College Republicans
48	Physical Therapy Club
49	track, student government
50	tennis team
51	Dance Company, Pharmacy sorority
52	track and field
53	Gospel Choir
54	Cross Country Team
55	Cross Country Team
56	None as of right now
57	Psi Chi, Psych Club, Sigma Theta Tau
58	Service Learning, Work Study, Campus Tour Guide, Club Soccer
59	Tennis team
60	Senate, SUB
61	Weekly Service
62	Gay Straight Alliance, Hand in Hand, Work Study, Magis, Service

	What on-campus activities are you involved in or plan on becoming involved in (i.e., baseball team, chess club, student government):		
		answered question 88	skipped question 24
Number	**Response Text**		
	Learning, Urban Plunge		
63	Service learning, work with special needs students, education society		
64	peer educators, service opportunities		
65	student government, political science club		
66	Phi theta kappa, DMS SOU		
67	Honor society, T2K		
68	None		
69	Math League		
70	Business Clubs		
71	Non		
72	Wrestling Team, Alpha Tau Omega Fraternity		
73	Wrestling Team, Alpha Tau Omega Fraternity, TV Sitcom		
74	Wrestling Team, Alpha Tau Omega Fraternity		
75	Wrestling, Environmental Club		
76	Wrestling Team, Alpha Tau Omega Fraternity		
77	Football team, Business frat		
78	Peer Educators, Student Alumni Association, Community Service		
79	Wrestling team, art club		
80	Commuter Club		
81	SSDP, work-study, hall council: president		
82	none		
83	PTK		
84	Alpha Lamda Delta Honor Society, Delta Delta Delta, Women in Business Council		
85	Environmental Club		
86	Seeing Eye Dog Raising Club		
87	American Society of Mechanical Engineers		
88	tennis team		

Figure 4 On-Campus Activity Involvement

Question 5: Do you work full-time (35+ hours/week) while attending school?

Do you work full-time (35+ hours/week) while attending school?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
YES	16.1%	18
NO	83.9%	94
answered question		112
skipped question		0

Do you work full-time (35+ hours/week) while attending school?
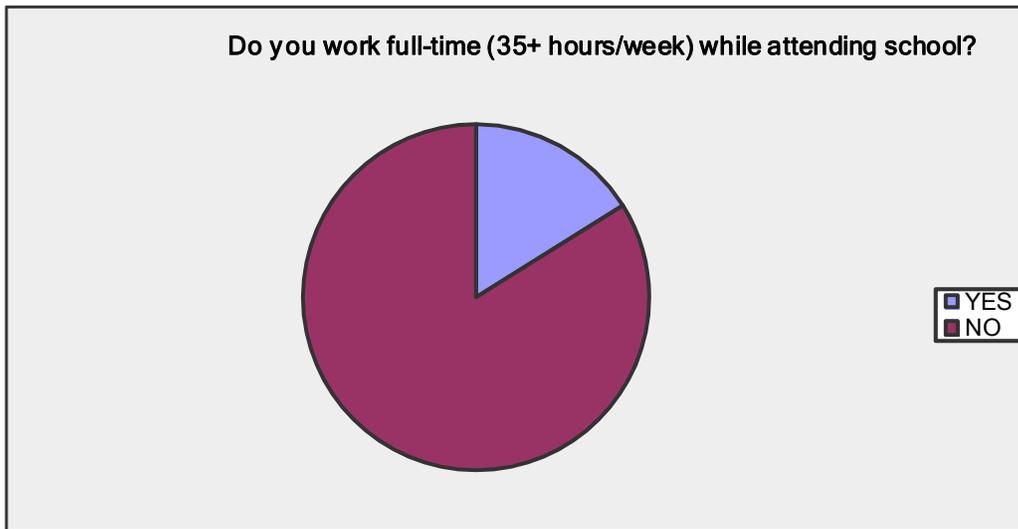
Figure 5 Full-Time Employment

Question 6: Do you work part-time?

Do you work part-time?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
YES	61.6%	69
NO	38.4%	43
answered question		112
skipped question		0
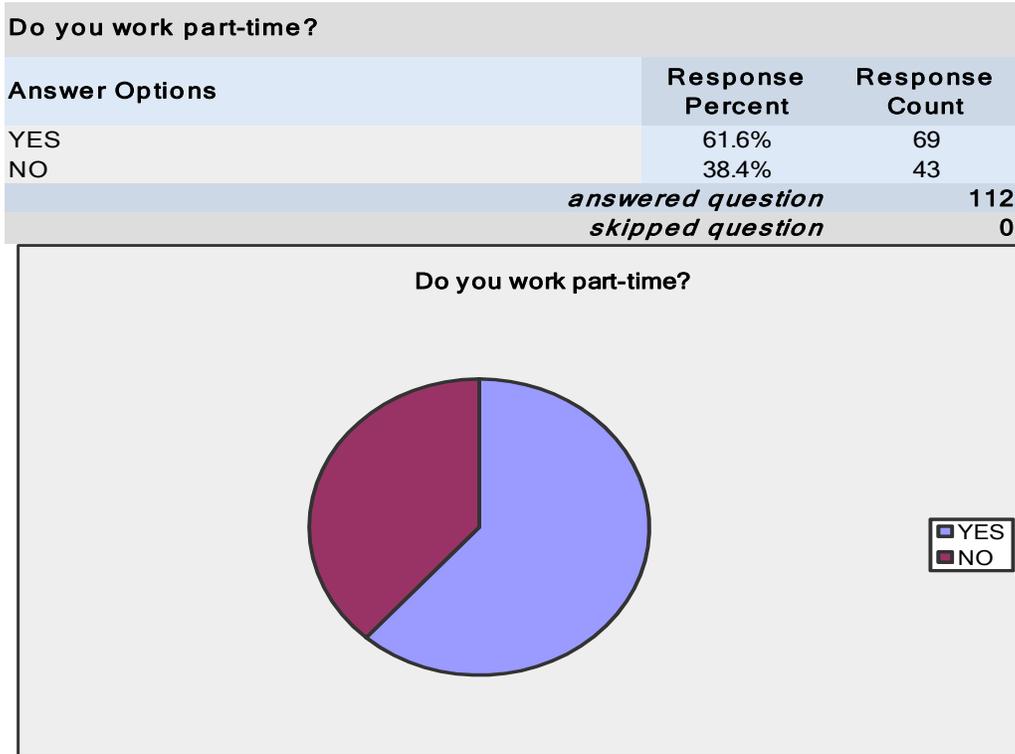
Figure 6 Part-Time Employment

Question 7: In seeking a higher education institution, my original intent is/was to:

In seeking a higher education institution, my original intent is/was to:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
attend a technical school	0.0%	0
attend a two-year college	17.8%	19
attend a four-year university in New Jersey	37.4%	40
attend a four-year university out of state	37.4%	40
other	7.5%	8
	answered question	107
	skipped question	5
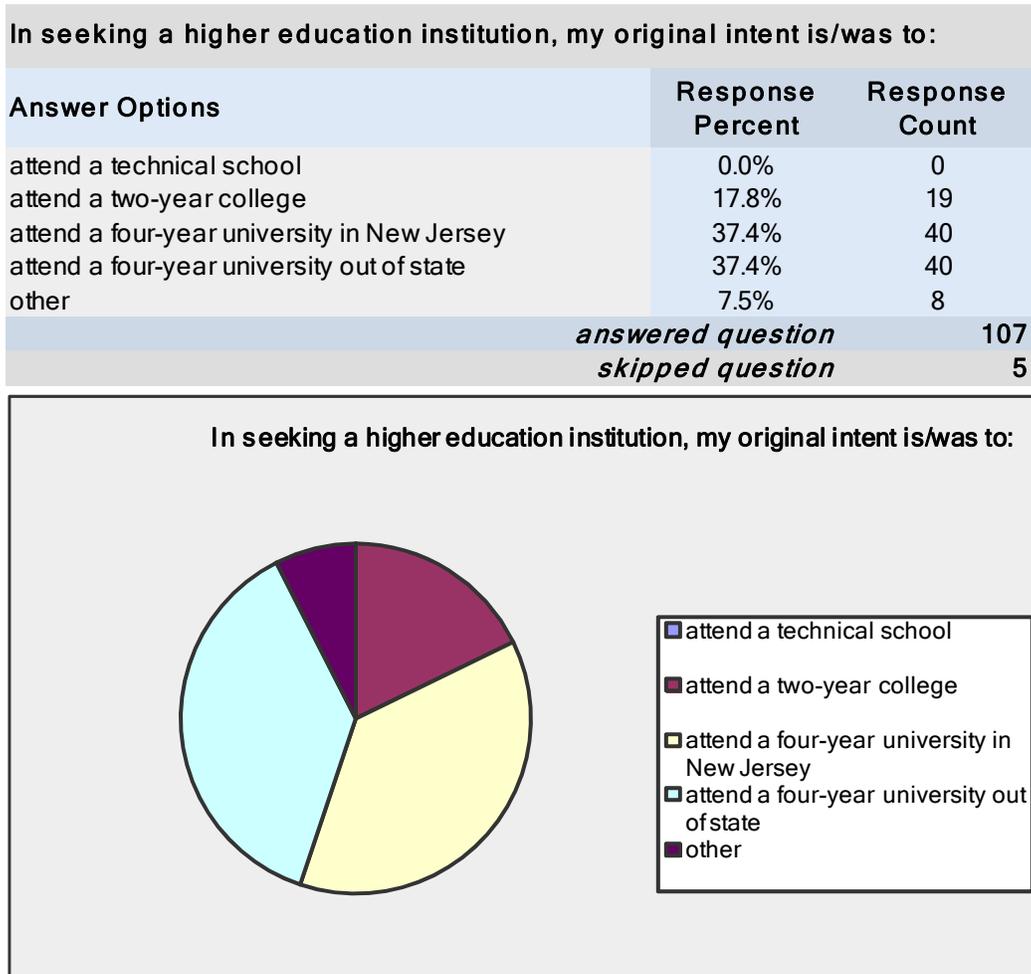
Figure 7 Academic Goals

Question 8: I prefer a college with:

I prefer a college with:		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
a small student population (less than 5,000 students)	15.9%	17
a mid-size student population (5,001 - 10,000 students)	35.5%	38
a large student population (greater than 10,001	13.1%	14
population doesn't matter	35.5%	38
answered question		107
skipped question		5

I prefer a college with:

- a small student population (less than 5,000 students)
- a mid-size student population (5,001 - 10,000 students)
- a large student population (greater than 10,001 students)

Figure 8 College Preferences

Question 9: My decision of which college to attend is/was influenced by:

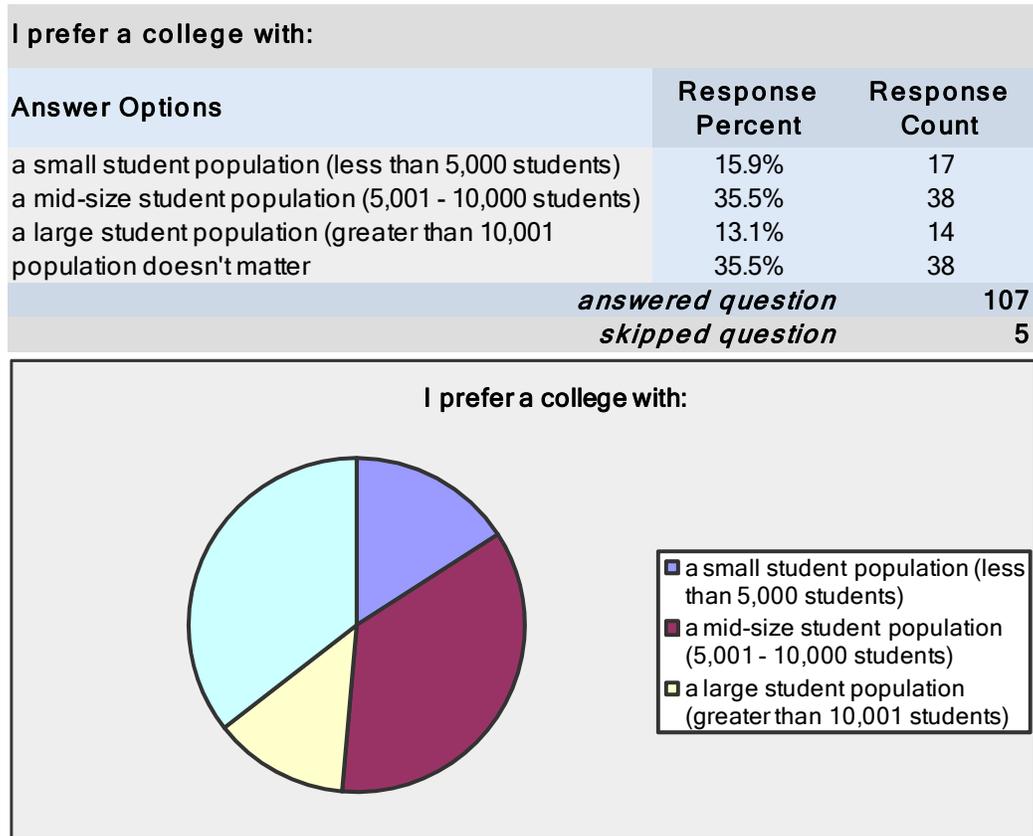| My decision of which college to attend is/was influenced by: (please mark all that apply)		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
my friends and peers	35.0%	36
my parent(s)/guardians	72.8%	75
my guidance counselor	15.5%	16
a college recruiter (non-athletic)	8.7%	9
a former coach	9.7%	10
a coach of the institution	7.8%	8
a favorite teacher	9.7%	10
student life and activities offerings (student	22.3%	23
program of study (major/minors offered)	62.1%	64
athletics team	21.4%	22
a specific club/organization	3.9%	4
International studies	6.8%	7
	answered question	103
	skipped question	9
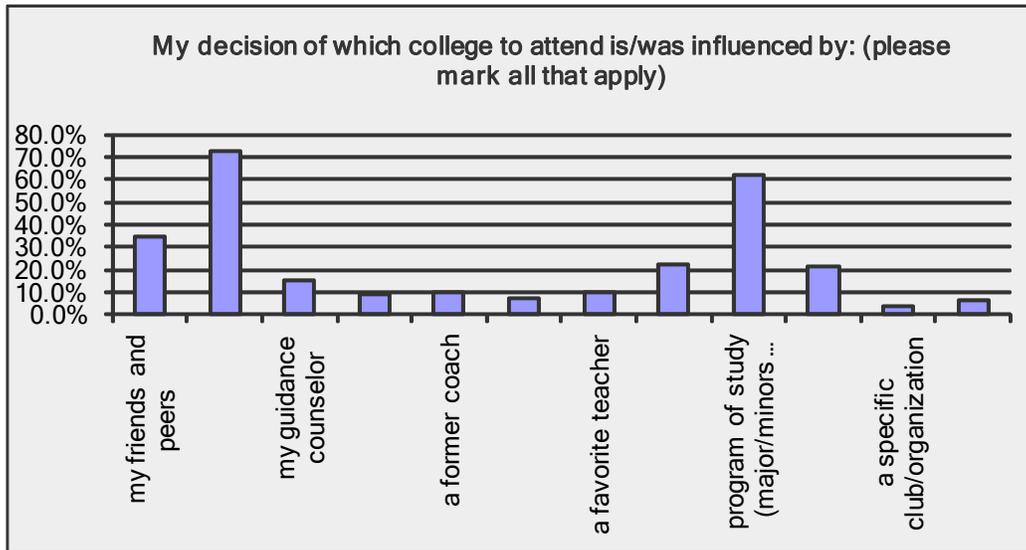
Figure 9 Student Influences

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Question 10: How influential were the following factors when choosing a college to attend?

How influential were the following factors when choosing a college to attend?				
Answer Options	Extremely influential	Somewhat influential	Not influential at all	Response Count
Location	62	33	3	98
Cost	77	15	4	96
A specific major/program of study	61	30	6	97
Athletics	14	19	64	97
Student life (activities, clubs)	14	52	31	97
			answered question	98
			skipped question	14
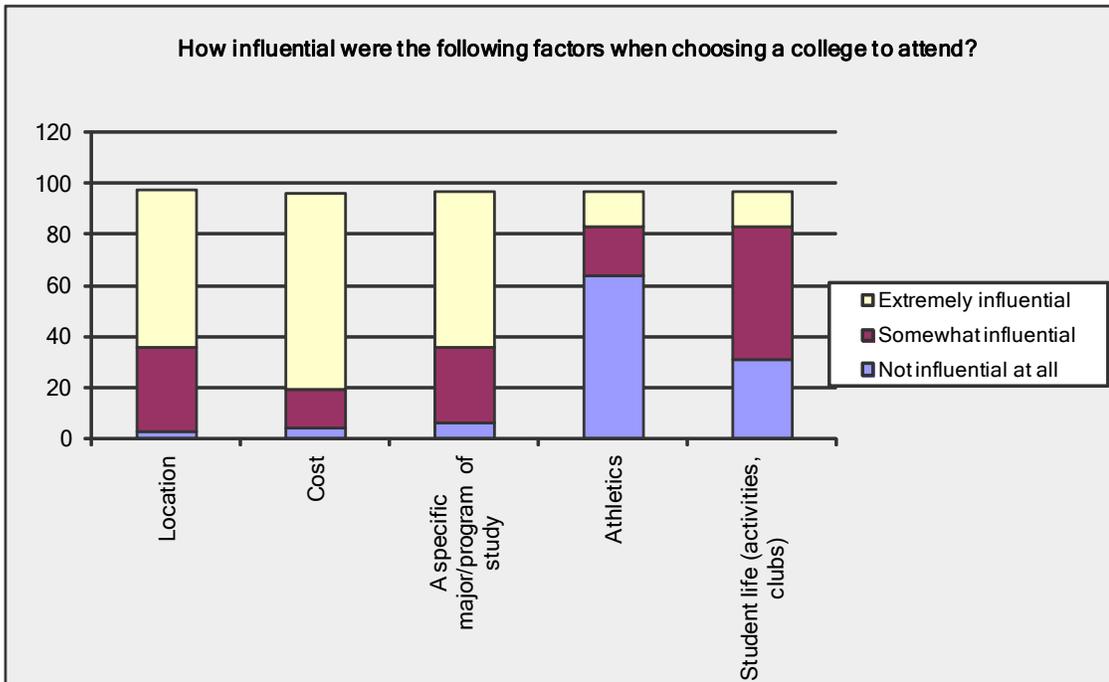
Figure 10 Factors Influencing College Choice

Question 11: While deciding what college to attend, were any of the following media outlets influential in your decision?

While deciding what college to attend, were any of the following media outlets influential in your decision?					
Answer Options	Very influential	Somewhat influential	Noticed the information, but not influential at all	Did not even notice	Response Count
Television commercials	1	11	21	65	98
College websites	25	37	21	15	98
Social media (Facebook/twitter)	10	23	31	32	96
Print advertisements	8	21	27	42	98
Radio advertisements	0	6	15	77	98
				answered question	98
				skipped question	14

Figure 11 Influential Media Outlets

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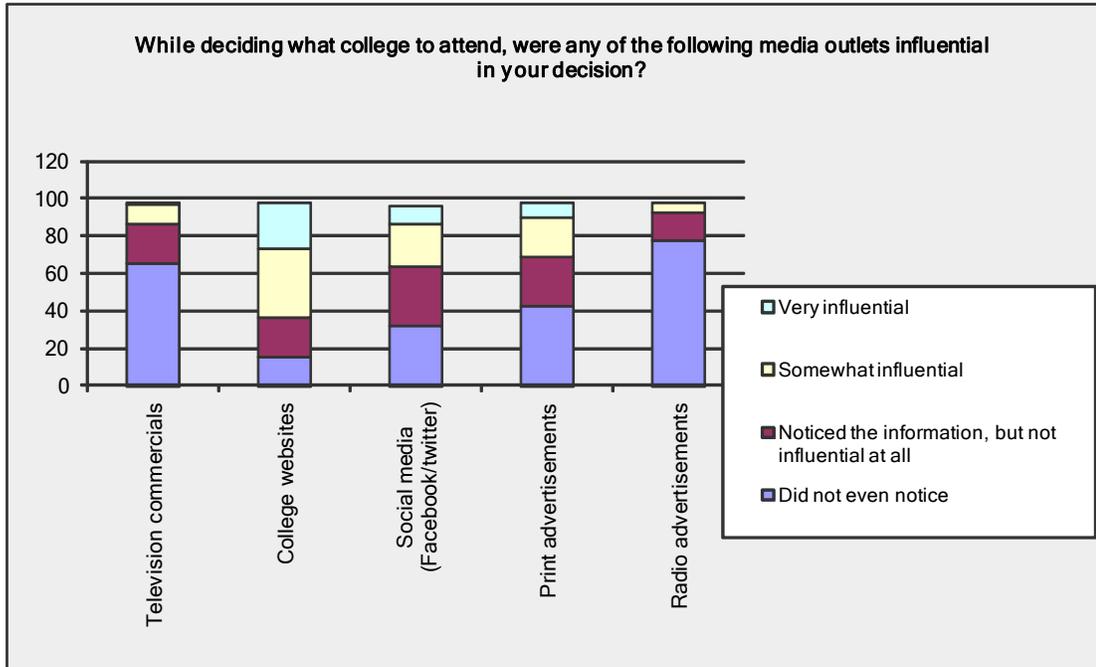Question 12: Please rank from 1 (most preferred) to 4 (least preferred) your preference to receive information about college.

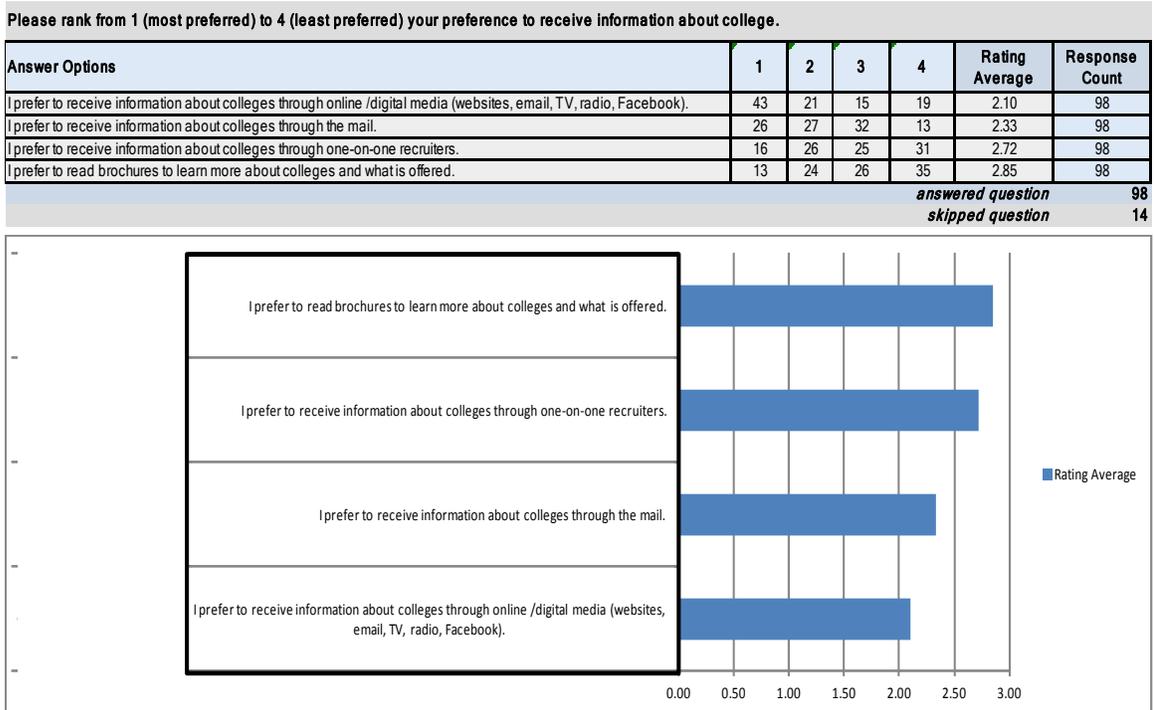| Please rank from 1 (most preferred) to 4 (least preferred) your preference to receive information about college.						
Answer Options	1	2	3	4	Rating Average	Response Count
I prefer to receive information about colleges through online /digital media (websites, email, TV, radio, Facebook).	43	21	15	19	2.10	98
I prefer to receive information about colleges through the mail.	26	27	32	13	2.33	98
I prefer to receive information about colleges through one-on-one recruiters.	16	26	25	31	2.72	98
I prefer to read brochures to learn more about colleges and what is offered.	13	24	26	35	2.85	98
					answered question	98
					skipped question	14

Figure 12 College Information Preferences

Question 13: Please rank on how you agree or disagree on the below statements:

Please rank on how you agree or disagree on the below statements:

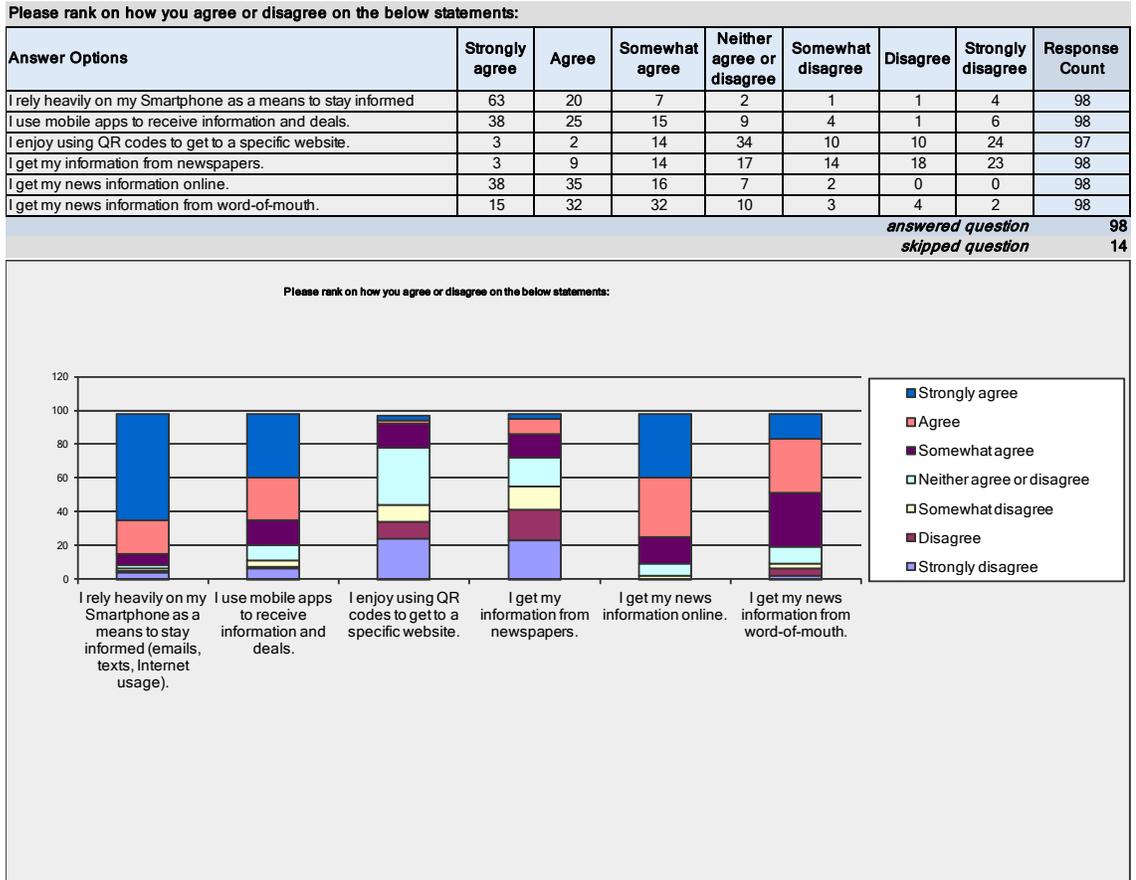| Answer Options	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Response Count
I rely heavily on my Smartphone as a means to stay informed	63	20	7	2	1	1	4	98
I use mobile apps to receive information and deals.	38	25	15	9	4	1	6	98
I enjoy using QR codes to get to a specific website.	3	2	14	34	10	10	24	97
I get my information from newspapers.	3	9	14	17	14	18	23	98
I get my news information online.	38	35	16	7	2	0	0	98
I get my news information from word-of-mouth.	15	32	32	10	3	4	2	98
						answered question		98
						skipped question		14

Figure 13 Sources of Information

Question 14: Please provide any additional thoughts on why you selected the college you are attending.

Please provide any additional thoughts on why you selected the college you are attending.	
Number	**Response Text**
1	Finances
2	Price
3	Good and concenient
4	Money was the only factor basicly
5	I was changing my major, and it was both an economical choice and a good choice for the quality of the program.
6	I'm a mom working full time and I like the fact that gcc is diverse and that the teachers are excepting that we all have diverse ideals, concepts, and opiniond. I also like that they are excepting that life does happen.
7	I qualified for a scholarship that pays for the majority of my tuition. If I had understand the social and academic costs of attending a small county school, I never would have studied where I did.
8	Campus tours....and college recruiters coming to the highschool to talk about the school
9	Cost was the main reason, otherwise I would have attended another school. I received the STARS scholarship which aided me greatly. Gloucester county college was not my first choice; however the transfer program with Thomas Jefferson University was hard to pass up.
10	Good nursion program, low cost, great location.
11	Cost
12	course length
13	Scholarship.
14	I received a generous scholarship.
15	Just to get used to it, and because it doesn't cost a lot of money, also to move onto a university.
16	Drexel University has an awesome co-op experience. This provides for experience before entering the workforce which makes me desirable.
17	I selected the college, Gloucester County College, due to it's relative location and it's prior athletic success.

18	The reason I chose the college I am attending is because the amount of choice you have as a transfer student is important. Tuttion is cheaper and will be cheaper when I transfer to a 4 year instuition. I will also have an idea of the huge change between college and highschool there is without the first semester of craziness where some students don't do as well as they want during their freshmen year.
19	I am an NJ STARS student.
20	A relative of mine sits on the Board of Trustees at the university I attend.
21	It's cheap
22	I was at an out of state school but then transferred to an instate school.
23	The two-year college I attend now is cheaper than a four-year university to complete prerequisite courses & my commute from home is only 10 minutes to the college. Once I earn my Associate's Degree, I plan to transfer to a 4-year university most likely out of state & to continue my tennis career.
24	It was affordable to start at a county college since it is close by, and it would not cause a serious financial burden at the start of college. And then I plan on transferring to a 4 hr university to that is also nearby and easier to afford.
25	It was a great school and they are connected with Rowan University.
26	I like the atmosphere of the college I attended. They gave me a good amount of money.
27	The sense of community at my college.
28	I loved the beautiful campus/location, which was small and wooded, but so close to NYC
29	It was the only online school that offered my program. I chose an online program because it fit my work schedule..
30	Great
31	i like college
32	I selected the college I attended because of when I visited the college. The students and faculty created a welcoming atmosphere, with tour guides, activities, speakers, and events. Students tend to market their college best when they truly love the school.
33	I decided to attend a two year school first because of the cost of big four year universities.
34	I am mainly selecting my college because it will allow me to still live at home while attending.
35	Offered me full tuition with a great engineering program.
36	I got a scholarship. It was free. I also play tennis and they have a good team :)

Figure 14 Student Comments

CHAPTER 5

Interpretation and Suggestions

Evaluation

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of college recruitment

marketing tactics used to influence Millennial Generation students in their decision to

attend either a two-year or a four-year college. The researcher used two focus groups and

a survey to examine the marketing elements that most persuaded students in their choices.

After comparing the findings, the study revealed that the majority of students were highly

influenced in their decision of where to attend college by their parents. Findings also

showed that the most effective means of communicating with students of this generation

is through electronic media, such as websites and mobile marketing devices, as well as

one-on-one interaction with recruiters. This study will also serve to make college public

relations practitioners aware that to remain competitive with other schools and

universities, community colleges must publicize the advantages of two-year schools

to parents in addition to expanding electronic media promotion to students.

Interpretation

Hypothesis 1. Face-to-face recruitment and electronic media are the most successful

marketing tools when promoting the advantages of attending a college to Millennial

Generation students.

The researcher investigated this hypothesis of determining which types of

marketing tools were most influential when appealing to college-aged students ages 17 to

22 by using two focus group interviews and with questions on the survey instrument. It

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was discovered that participants in both the two-year community college and four-year university focus groups ranked college recruiters visiting their high schools, Open House events, college visitations and other one-on-one interactions as having the most significant appeal and affect on their college decision. College websites were also a preferred source of communication for students seeking information to assist in their higher education selection.

In addition, 62 out of the 98 survey respondents (with 14 not answering) indicated that websites were very influential or somewhat influential in their college search (*Figure 11*). On survey Question 12, answers remained consistent with the hypothesis favoring websites and other online social media as the preferred channel of communication among this student age group. Unlike the focus group findings, survey respondents selected receiving information through the mail as their second choice, with one-on-one recruitment ranking third. Data in Figure 13 supports the theory that electronic media is the most used form of communication by students. Out of 98 survey responses (with 14 of the 112 not answering) 83 students either strongly agreed or agreed that they used their Smartphones to stay connected and up-to-date with events and information. Likewise, 73 got their news online and 63 used mobile apps. Conversely, only 12 individuals strongly agreed or agreed to receiving their information from newspapers.

Hypothesis 2. Parents serve as gatekeepers maintaining substantial influence over students, ages 17 to 22, in their decision of where to attend college.

In both focus groups, students concurred that their parents maintained the most authority when it came to helping them to make their college decision. Students in Focus

Group 1 indicated that high school guidance counselors encouraged enrollment at four-year universities helping to reinforce the choice. Among the community college students in Focus Group 2, the cost of the college also played an important factor in their school selection.

Figure 9 survey results confirmed the findings of the focus groups, with 73 percent answering that parents and guardians ranked most influential. Thirty-five percent of the surveyed respondents said that friends and peers had an impact. Only 15.5 percent named high school guidance counselors as having an effect. Interestingly, in Figure 6 of the survey, 62 percent of the respondents worked part-time and 16 percent worked full time (*Figure 5*) while attending school, substantiating the findings of Focus Group 2 that cost is an influence, particularly among community college students, when it comes to choosing a college.

Research Question 1. What influences most persuade students in their decision to attend either a two-year or four-year institution?

The researcher found that students considered parents' influence (*Figure 9*), the academic programs of study (*Figure 9*), and the cost of college (*Figure 10*), including scholarship opportunities, to be the top three factors most persuasive in their decision-making process.

Research Question 2. How do Millennial Generation students seek out information about college?

Information garnered through the focus groups and the survey show students in the 17 to 22 year old range can better be reached and influenced via websites (*Figure 11, Figure 12*), mobile devices (*Figure 13*) and other forms of electronic communication. Contact with recruiters and other one-on-one outreach interactions, such as Open Houses and college visitations, are listed as very important in the survey (*Figure 13*) and in both focus groups.

Research Question 3. How active a role does social media play in a student's college decision?

While social media serves as an important resource for students in their search for information about a college's academic majors, tuition cost, and athletic and campus activities, research indicates that students are most influenced in their choice of college by parents and other personal interactions.

Research Question 4. How much influence do parents have on a student's college decision?

The findings from both the qualitative and quantitative research conducted prove that parents and guardians exert the most influence on a student's decision of where to attend college (*Figure 9, Focus Groups 1 and 2*).

Conclusion

This researcher's survey results, combined with comparing the data collected from the two-year and four-year focus groups, helps to determine the most effective approaches for disseminating college information and ultimately boosting enrollment

among students ages 17 to 22 years old. Based on the findings, websites and other online communication ranked as the most significant media sources for publicizing college facts and figures. With Millennial Generation students staying informed and getting their news via the Internet through their Smartphones, mobile apps and other digital devices, the traditional methods of promoting colleges with static printed materials, like newspaper articles and advertisements, are passé.

This study also suggests the value of targeting marketing strategies not only to the Millennial Generation, but also to their parents. Data indicates that parents have the most influence on students and their decision on which college to attend followed closely by the programs of study being pursued.

Recommendations

The researcher has several suggestions to improve college recruitment marketing tactics among high school graduates and young adult students:

- Continue to explore and expand electronic and social media marketing to Millennial Generation students.
- Get the word out to parents, guardians and guidance counselors about community college advantages—less costly tuition, available programs, transfer opportunities, partnerships and dual-enrollment options with four-year universities
- While the participants attending four-year universities in Focus Group 1 were less concerned about college expenses and debt, tuition costs proved to be of major importance to community college students in Focus Group 2 and for

survey respondents. With today's unease about the job economy and the amount of debt college graduates are accumulating, community colleges need to publicize the savings parents can realize by having children complete general education requirements at a two-year school then transfer into a bachelor's degree program.

- Since parents are so influential in the decision-making process and most are paying for college, it is important to educate them about all of the offerings available at community colleges. Face-to-face interaction is proven to be the most effective method of communication. It would be beneficial to have the college president – a credible and knowledgeable authority figure—briefly address parents at a high school forum (for example, National Honor Society induction ceremony) about programs, affordability, four-year partnerships, and transfer options.

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Appendix

Focus Group Handout Sheet
(Two focus groups will be held -- one group of students attending two-year colleges and a group of students attending four-year colleges.)

Name:

Age:

Town:

Gender:

College:

Major:

Year in school:

Employment:

Email:

Questions:

What influenced your decision to attend a two-year or a four-year college?
(Conversation will probably touch on: cost, location, student life, size of school, etc.)

How important was a major in your college search and decision of where to attend?

Who is financially responsible for paying for college?
(parents, student, share cost, loans; Is student employed?)

Who was influential in helping you to choose a college?
(parents, peers, guidance counselors, favorite teachers)

How do you prefer to receive information about colleges?
(newspaper, TV, radio, online, recruiters, posters, flyers, billboards, etc.)