A STUDY OF COLLEGE SELECTION CRITERIA AS APPLIED
TO THREE SMALL RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN
NORTH TEXAS

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

By

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Denton, Texas
August, 1989

The purposes of this study were to identify criteria which influence students' decisions to attend specific colleges and to determine whether different groups of students use similar criteria. The following groups were compared: white students and minority students, males and females, older students and younger students, university-bound students and vocational students, and full-time students and part-time students.

The sample used for this study was taken from the students enrolled in freshman English classes at Vernon Regional Junior College, Clarendon College, and Grayson County College. Approximately 100 students at each college were selected to participate in the study. Each student in the study received instruction, provided demographic information, and completed a two-part survey.

The survey asked respondents to evaluate each of twenty items on a Likert-type scale. The data provided were compiled and organized into groups by a data base computer program. Data obtained from specific groups of respondents
were compared, first through an examination of means, then through a chi-square test of independence.

It was determined that the most important college selection criteria to these respondents were the cost of attendance, the availability of specific programs, the size of the college, the size of individual classes, the location of the school, and the availability of financial aid. Further, the research revealed that two comparison groups differed significantly in their choices of important college selection criteria. Younger students appeared to use different selection criteria than their older counterparts, and vocational students differed from university-bound students in their choice of criteria.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The extensive and highly successful system of colleges and universities in the United States faces a tremendous challenge today, a challenge that likely will force the closing of many institutions. The challenge is that of obtaining and maintaining an enrollment sufficient to ensure institutional stability.

The present decline in student enrollment certainly has not come unexpectedly, as many prominent educators have predicted it for years. Hall traces the present decline back to the early 1970s, when a gradual, but steady, decrease in enrollment began. Institutions of higher education, which had more students than they could accommodate a few years earlier, suddenly began to notice fewer applicants and smaller enrollments (Hall 1974, 10-11).

While not uniform across the nation, the decrease in the number of college students has had measurable effect on all regions. One of the most severely affected areas is the Northeast, where the number of high school graduates has dropped about 10 percent over the past five years. An additional decrease of 30 percent is expected in the next decade (Wing and Rowse 1986, 6).
The West and the Southwest also have experienced declining enrollment. By 1974, the colleges of Arizona were observing a gradual leveling-off of enrollment. The loss of enrollment was serious enough that college dormitories, which were in great demand only a few years earlier, were only partly occupied. A social revolution was taking place in the sparsely-populated states of the West. Some students were choosing not to attend college at all. Others chose not to accept the restrictions of campus living. Most serious, however, was the overall decrease in the number of traditional college-age students (Hall 1974, 10).

Community colleges have not escaped the enrollment dilemma. These unique American institutions, of which there are about 1,200, have been forced to cancel programs, reduce salaries, and release employees, largely because enrollment projections of a few years earlier have not been met (Gordon 1983, 14-15).

Institutions of higher education—whether prestigious Eastern universities or small, rural community colleges—have been forced to respond to the reality of frequently intense competition for students. Although some institutions have responded more successfully than others, virtually all have responded. Some responses have been general, representing subtle changes in emphasis rather than actual changes in direction. Others have been large-scale redirection of schools and their programs.
In order to cope with declining student populations, many schools have taken a route similar to that followed by the community colleges of Arizona. The community colleges in that state encourage serious students, who might otherwise pursue liberal arts degrees, to consider the advantages of a two-year technical degree. Virtually assured of immediate employment, many students were responding positively to this approach (Hall 1974, 11).

Community colleges in all states are attempting to successfully market occupational education. One problem that plagues these efforts is the deep-seated attitude of society in general, and parents in particular, that true success is found only with a bachelor's degree and a white collar job. Students and parents alike want prestige, a commodity difficult for many to envision in vocational-technical fields (Wing and Rowse 1986).

Part-time and adult students, once largely ignored, are being sought by colleges to replace traditional students. Many community colleges operate thriving evening and weekend programs, which better fill the needs of such special populations. Non-credit, continuing education programs are a big part of these offerings. Colleges also are attempting to attract larger numbers in such special populations as women and ethnic minorities (Cohen and Brawer 1982).

Community colleges across the nation have made a commitment to lifelong learning. Linkages with both high
schools and senior institutions allow students access to almost any career or degree desired. For the colleges, such commitments provide a steady flow of students through vocational and academic programs. Most of these articulation programs allow students to drop into and out of college at any point in life (Cohen and Brawer 1982).

Educational institutions are taking increased interest in student retention. While many educators once thought that any student lost could be easily replaced, these leaders now realize that it makes as much sense to retain students as to recruit new ones. The dynamics that cause students to continue their education to completion or to withdraw prior to graduation are unclear. However, with drop-out rates as high as 50 percent, educational researchers have been forced to confront this complex problem. While the answer to retention may be difficult to find and indeed may be different for different institutions, research is under way in most institutions (Beal and Noel 1980, 1-3).

The modern college—either two-year or four-year—provides social services to attract and retain students; these are services that have increased as competition for students has intensified. For example, colleges now provide special-needs counselors who help students learn to cope with complex social problems and personal crises that they will encounter throughout life. In addition, academic
advisors help fill the students' needs to develop strategies for personal career development and to understand the necessity of lifelong learning experiences to meet the demands of the changing job market. Many schools go one step further by providing job placement services following completion. Finally, colleges are responding to the realization that students are consumers who expect the colleges to be more flexible, adaptable, convenient, and realistic in the delivery of educational services. That is, colleges are becoming increasingly student-oriented (Tyson 1984).

As competition for students has intensified, colleges have become increasingly aware of the various means available to inform students. One rather new source of comparative information about colleges and universities is the college guide book, which lists names and specific features of various colleges and universities. Writing in the Chronicle of Higher Education, Thomas J. Meyer made the following observation: "In the battle for applicants from a shrinking pool of students, a college left out of the most popular guidebooks is like a garden club president dropped from the social register" (1985, 33).

Another common source of information used by colleges is the annual college catalog. Mailed to thousands of students each year, these colorful publications do more than provide basic information about the colleges: they
serve as major recruitment tools for the institutions. In fact, for many schools, the college catalog is the principal means of distributing information about the school. Some parents, students, and school counselors, however, feel that college catalogs are inaccurate, doing as much to misinform as to inform students (How do students choose a college 1986, 30).

Financial aid began as a means to encourage needy students, members of specific ethnic groups, or other designated segments of the population to pursue a college education. In recent years, colleges have found another reason to award financial aid to prospective students: the number of traditional post-secondary students is rapidly decreasing. Regardless of the intent, there is evidence that financial aid does influence students' decisions about college selection. Research conducted by Jackson shows that an applicant who is offered financial aid by an institution is 8.5 percent more likely to attend college than other similar applicants applying to similar colleges but not offered aid (Jackson 1978, 567).

It seems probable that the receipt of financial aid provides a psychological boost to the recipient. In many cases, especially in needs-based assistance, the recipient is a first-generation college attender, usually from a lower socioeconomic background. Even a small amount of financial aid may provide the impetus needed to steer the
student into college. For students from more affluent backgrounds, financial aid may provide the margin needed to be more selective as they prepare for college. There is some evidence that federally-awarded financial aid has shifted students from community colleges and small four-year colleges into universities (Chapman 1981, 496).

These are some of the more frequently used methods to inform and attract students to the colleges and universities of America. To survive, these schools must attract sufficient numbers of new and returning students. To some schools, large numbers contribute to prestige, in others governing boards expect school administrations to show significant annual growth. To most, however, the reasons for competition are more pragmatic: students represent the income needed for a school to remain operational. To view the situation in financial terms, each full-time student who attends a public community college or senior college in Texas earns that school more than 2,000 dollars in state reimbursement each semester (May 1988).

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was to identify major reasons that freshman students at selected small, rural community colleges in North Texas give for deciding to attend the colleges, and to compare those reasons among various groups of students. The study involved students in both
university-parallel (college-transfer) curricula and vocational-technical programs.

**Purposes of the Study**

The purposes of the study were (1) to identify major factors which influence students' decisions to attend specific colleges, (2) to determine whether minority students and white students use similar criteria in their college selection processes, (3) to determine whether males and females use similar criteria in the college selection process, (4) to determine whether the age of the student is a factor in the college selection process, (5) to determine whether students in university-parallel programs and those in vocational-technical programs use similar criteria in the college selection process, and (6) to determine whether full-time students (those taking twelve semester hours or more) and part-time students (those taking fewer than twelve semester hours) use similar criteria in the college selection process.

**Hypotheses**

The following research hypotheses were formulated for this study:

$H_{01}$: There will be no significant difference in college selection criteria between white students and students from ethnic minorities.
**Ho_2**: There will be no significant difference in college selection criteria between male and female students.

**Ho_3**: There will be no significant difference in college selection criteria between students under twenty-five years of age and students twenty-five years of age and older.

**Ho_4**: There will be no significant difference in college selection criteria between university-bound students and vocational students.

**Ho_5**: There will be no significant difference in college selection criteria between full-time and part-time students.

**Background and Significance of the Study**

**Background of the Study**

During the years immediately following World War II, higher education enjoyed a brief period of growth and prosperity which is unparalleled in modern times. This era was one in which colleges and universities had sufficient enrollment of capable students, impressive growth rates with little or no effort, and adequate financial resources to fund even the most marginal programs.

While these years brought tremendous growth and development to the senior colleges and universities of the nation, it was the birth and development of an extensive system of community colleges that was most spectacular. George L. Hall, the Executive Director of the Arizona Junior College Board, called the 1960s the golden years for the nation's
community colleges, further declaring that a teacher was in the White House and that education was "riding the white horse, leading the parade" (Hall 1974, 9).

In Texas, the metropolitan areas of Dallas, El Paso, Houston, and Fort Worth answered local demands for both vocational and traditional university-parallel programs by establishing a multi-campus system in each of these cities. Rural areas also responded to perceived needs by establishing community college districts in virtually every part of the state (Community colleges in Texas 1988, 1-3).

The 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s were prosperous for the Texas economy, as well as for the state's system of higher education. The price of petroleum products, the greatest natural resources of the state, grew continuously, stimulating growth in industries and businesses based on this resource. Further, in most rural areas, a thriving agricultural economy was second only to petroleum in importance. Together, these two resources provided a seemingly endless source of revenue for higher education. The children who had been born during World War II were graduating from high schools and were entering the constantly-expanding system of higher education (North Texas: Its place in the economy of the future 1988).

The community colleges of Texas did not escape the enrollment decline of the 1970s. Large and small systems alike were forced to adjust to the simultaneous pressures
of fewer students and fewer dollars. Rural community colleges seemed to be hit hardest, as families left the farms, ranches, and small towns in anticipation of a better life in the cities (Hall 1974, 10-11).

The rural community colleges of North Texas have been damaged severely by this social change. Sparsely populated in even the best of times, rural areas lose even more residents during severe economic periods, as during the 1970s and early 1980s. First, the Arab Oil Embargo drove agricultural production costs higher, forcing many small operators into immediate bankruptcy. Then, the collapse of oil prices in the 1980s devastated the thousands of North Texas workers whose jobs and businesses depended on a thriving petroleum market. With lower oil prices, it would seem that the agricultural economy would improve. Unfortunately, that economy has been slow to respond. These economic reversals have resulted in fewer families in the area, fewer students in the schools, fewer businesses on the tax rolls, and less money available to pay the college expenses of individuals (North Texas: Its place in the economy of the future 1988, 39-44).

Such economic difficulties are not unique to North Texas. Vineyard (1979) states that in the 1970s the population of rural Americans over age fifty-five rose by one-third while the population younger than fourteen declined by one-half. Meanwhile, small-town businesses
have reported about 16,000 failures per year and almost a million rural residents have moved to cities each year. Other studies indicate that this trend has continued into the 1980s.

Vineyard also identifies many non-economic problems that face the rural community colleges of America. Some of these problems are the lack of local jobs for students and graduates, the inefficiencies associated with being small, the cost of constructing and maintaining student housing, limited course offerings, the lack of contact between local college officials and other college and civic leaders, the lack of status and respect among leaders of other colleges, the relative absence of political power, an over-worked administrative staff, and the lack of research into the problems unique to small rural community colleges (Vineyard 1979, 34-35).

In his discussion of the problems that beset small, rural community colleges, Vineyard enthusiastically expresses his belief in the worth of the institutions: "The community college represents an ideal catalyst for addressing many of the problems of rural life whose solutions may lie in the education and development of people" (1979, 34).

More recently, authors have reinforced the guarded optimism expressed by Vineyard almost ten years ago. Weiss and Bryden (1987) describe the success of Northeastern Junior College in eastern Colorado, as the school adapted
to meet the demands of a dwindling pool of high school students. Young (1987) observes the ability of rural community colleges to respond to the ever-changing needs of the community. Sharples (1987) discusses the role of the community college in bringing industrial development to rural areas. Gordon (1983) discusses ways in which all community colleges—urban and rural—provide quality education to a frequently at-risk clientele, even while maintaining an open-door policy.

In describing the effects of higher education experiences upon rural youth, Aylesworth and Bloom make the following observations:

The rural student comes from a lower income and less well-educated family, has lower self-esteem, especially in relation to the opposite sex, has been educated in a small high school having few course offerings, and is highly apprehensive and unsure as to what the college experience will have in store for him or her. When asked what the worst problems had been for them in their freshman year, however, rural students did not include such factors as lack of finances or difficulty with school work. Rather, rural students mentioned problems that would indicate high levels of stress and alienation (Aylesworth and Bloom 1976, 240).

Local community colleges ease the rural students' transition into college by providing training in a familiar environment, by presenting small classes in a small, friendly college, and by allowing two more years for them to mature.
Significance of the Study

While small, rural community colleges across the nation may be suffering from financial and enrollment problems, they are filling a need that cannot be filled by any other institution. They serve local areas as cultural centers, and their instructional staffs serve as expert consultants in various fields. They provide libraries, dramatic productions, and musical experiences. They offer training in vocational fields, provide continuing education in career fields and in general-interest subjects, and offer the first two years of study for students in traditional transfer programs (Cohen and Brawer 1982).

In the North Texas area there are several small, rural community colleges, which serve the local area in ways described by Vineyard (1979), Sharples (1987), and others. Each of these community colleges is involved in an intense struggle for its portion of the declining number of students in the region. Community colleges must compete for traditional students with regional universities, private, church-affiliated institutions, and large, nationally known universities. For vocational students, the community colleges must compete with proprietary schools, technical institutions, and employment.

Three North Texas community colleges participated in this study of student college selection criteria. These
colleges are Vernon Regional Junior College (VRJC), Clarendon College, and Grayson County College.

Vernon Regional Junior College is one of the small, rural community colleges in North Texas. The college was established in 1970 and began classes in 1972, to serve a sparsely-populated, twelve-county region. Wichita Falls, with a population of 100,000 residents, is the largest city in the region. Vernon, the location of the home campus, has a population of about 12,000. Other towns in the region are small, ranging from a few hundred to about 4,000 in population (Facts and figures for 1987-88).

Vernon Regional Junior College maintains a relatively steady enrollment of about 1,800 students, most of whom are enrolled on three major campuses: the Vernon Campus, the Wichita Falls Campus, and the Sheppard Air Force Base Campus. The Vernon Campus has an average enrollment of about 600 in both vocational-technical programs and university-parallel curricula. The Wichita Falls Campus has vocational-technical programs in electronics, office technology, cosmetology, and vocational nursing. No college-transfer courses are taught in Wichita Falls. The Sheppard Air Force Base Campus provides vocational training and limited college-transfer courses for military and military-affiliated students. These students usually remain at VRJC for short periods of time and are not representative of typical residents of the community (Mills 1988, 5-7).
Grayson County College is another of the small, rural community colleges in North Texas. Located in Denison, Grayson County College has an average enrollment of slightly more than 3,000 students who are about equally divided between university-parallel and vocational-technical programs. Approximately 40 percent of the enrollment attends only night classes. Grayson College has only Fannin and Grayson Counties in its district; however, it serves fifteen public schools in those two counties. In addition, almost 20 percent of Grayson's enrollment comes from Oklahoma. The college attracts its large enrollment from Oklahoma by reducing out-of-state tuition fees for residents of Oklahoma (Bowers 1988).

Almost 75 percent of the student body of Grayson County College comes from neighboring rural high schools of the immediate area. The college participates in intercollegiate men's and women's basketball, tennis, and golf. There is no intercollegiate football or baseball program (Bowers 1988).

Clarendon College was established in Clarendon, Texas, in 1927 to serve the residents of an eight-county district in the southern part of the Texas Panhandle. The district served by Clarendon College is perhaps even more sparsely populated than the one served by Vernon Regional Junior College. The town of Clarendon has a population of about
2,500. Pampa to the north, and Childress to the southeast, have populations somewhat larger (Shirley 1988).

Clarendon College enrolls about 400 students each semester at its home campus. The Pampa Center, located in Pampa, Texas, enrolls about 250 students per semester in academic, vocational, adult-vocational, and continuing education programs and classes. A smaller center in Childress, Texas, enrolls about 100 students per semester. While some students come from Amarillo, the only large city in the area, most come from surrounding small towns.

The college sponsors an extensive number of student and community activities, including theater, rodeo club, music programs, and men's and women's intercollegiate basketball (Shirley 1988).

There are several institutions which compete with the community colleges in the region for students. Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, West Texas State University in Canyon, East Texas State University in Commerce, the University of North Texas in Denton, and Texas Tech University in Lubbock compete for traditional, non-vocational students. Texas State Technical Institute, with campuses in Amarillo, Sweetwater, Harlingen, and Waco, and several proprietary schools compete for vocational students.

Administrators of these three community colleges do not know precisely why students attend the schools. No
significant studies have been done to determine the factors which attract their students. Although there is a general belief that the low cost and convenience to home are two important factors, these factors have not been tested. Similarly, the other small, rural community colleges in North Texas have not conducted such a study.

This study is significant in that it (1) determines which factors are important to students in the college selection process; (2) determines whether different, specific groups of students use the same, or similar, selection criteria; (3) provides information that will allow colleges participating in the study to more successfully attract and retain students; and (4) provides information that is useful to other similar community colleges in their efforts to attract and retain students.

**Definitions of Terms**

The following terms are defined as they relate to this study.

*College-transfer curricula* are those programs or courses which are taken by students for the purpose of transferring into a baccalaureate degree-producing program at a senior institution.

*Community college* is a two-year institution which responds to the needs of the local community, largely by providing education in college-transfer, vocational-technical, and continuing education programs.
associate degree (Technical and vocational program guidelines 1989, 2).

Delimitations

For the purpose of this study the following delimitation is imposed:

The study included only those students taking courses on the campuses of the three community colleges selected as participants in the study.

Assumptions

The study was based upon these assumptions.

1. It is assumed that research data and conclusions were unaffected by uncontrolled data.

2. It is assumed that all respondents to survey questionnaires answered all instruments accurately to the best of their abilities.

3. It is assumed that the respondents to the questionnaires were representative of students on the three community college campuses selected for the study.
CHAPTER II

SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE

A large body of research has been conducted in an attempt to understand and explain the factors which direct students in their selection of colleges and universities. Most of the research has the following characteristics in common:

1. The research is recent; most has been performed in the last ten or twelve years.

2. The research falls into two general categories: (a) general studies involving authors' perceptions of student nature and attitudes and (b) statistical studies of specific, narrowly-defined populations.

3. Virtually all of the research has been performed in large universities, mostly in the East and Midwest. It appears that the small amount of research that has been done in community colleges has been for the practical purpose of learning about local students rather than for the purpose of publication.

Stages in the College Selection Process

Several researchers have identified specific stages, or steps, in the process through which students pass in their efforts to select a college. Litten, in reviewing
the works of various other researchers, proposed that students pass through seven identifiable stages in the selection process: (1) deciding to attend college, (2) seeking and receiving information from several colleges, (3) submitting inquiries to specific colleges, (4) making application to one or more colleges, (5) undergoing admission procedures, (6) making a final choice of a college, and (7) completing registration procedures (1982, 386).

Another approach divides the process into Stage 1, which involves the establishment of a desire to attend and a decision to do so; Stage 2, an investigation of institutions; and Stage 3, the admission process and actual enrollment (Litten 1982, 387).

Dembrowski describes college choice as a three-stage process. In his model the student takes the first step by deciding upon the college, or colleges, to which he will apply. Step two comes when the student decides to go to specific colleges to participate in such admission processing as meeting faculty, touring the campus, and engaging in interviews. The third and final step comes when the student makes his decision to enter a specific school (Dembrowski 1980).

In addressing the same procedure, Cain and McClintock reveal that "students will consider more than one college and that some colleges are more suitable than others for particular students and that all suitable colleges should
have an equal choice for initial consideration" (1984, 16). These authors, who see the process as one involving three stages which differ only slightly from those presented by Dembrowski, suggest that these stages make up the selection process: (1) deciding which colleges to consider, (2) deciding upon colleges to which to submit applications, and (3) deciding upon which college to attend. Drawing upon the works of Litten and others, Hossler and Gallagher present a three-stage model in which students seek an increased understanding of their educational choices as they approach a college career. In the Predisposition Phase, the first stage of this model, students make a decision to go to college. The second stage is the Search Phase, in which a student formulates a choice set or group of colleges to which the student will apply. The third stage, the Choice Phase, involves the process of actually choosing a college or university to attend. In this model each stage includes individual and organizational factors, which interact to produce outcomes. Outcomes then influence the actual selection process (Hossler and Gallagher 1987, 207-208).

**Group Differences in the College Selection Process**

Although all groups of students appear to pass through clearly-defined stages in their college selection processes, various groups seem to progress at different rates.
There seem to be relatively few differences in the way that males and females approach the selection process. Litten's research shows that females begin the process somewhat earlier than males, but that they complete it at about the same time. Females are slightly more concerned than males about the quality of campus life. Overall, males and females show few differences in the manner in which they work through the selection process (Litten 1982).

Concerning the influence of parents and others, students with more highly educated parents make greater use of parents' opinions and less use of high school guidance personnel. These students also make greater use of multiple sources of information, such as campus visits, college guidebooks, and college admission personnel. In geographic areas where parental educational levels are low, the influence of high school counselors increases dramatically (Litten 1982).

Chapman's research shows that students from families of high socioeconomic status are most likely to go to prestigious private universities; those from middle-income families attend state supported universities; and children of lower-income families attend smaller state colleges and community colleges (Chapman 1981).
The Modern College Student

Recent research has been conducted for the purpose of establishing a general profile of the modern college student. Such studies have revealed characteristics which often are critical of students.

In the past fifteen years there have been dramatic changes in the goals and aspirations of American college students. The number of students receiving degrees in literature and English has declined by 50 percent, while the number majoring in business has doubled. Decreased student interest in human service occupations such as teaching, nursing, social work, law enforcement, and the clergy is well documented. Similar declines have been observed in social sciences, natural sciences, and the humanities. During this period, however, the fields of engineering, economics and computer science have enjoyed rapid growth (Friedman 1984).

Alexander W. Astin, who has done a survey of student interests and attitudes for each of the last eighteen years, is concerned that changes in student interests actually reflect changes in their values and beliefs. Summarizing his views of the modern college student, Astin states:

What we find here is students are becoming increasingly interested in money, power, and status, and that there has been a steady decline in student concern with helping others, cleaning up the environment, improving racial relations, and participating in community action programs (Astin 1984, 4).
Today's college students appear to be more materialistic and less altruistic than freshman classes of a decade ago (Evangelauf 1984). Recent surveys reveal that a significant number of entering freshmen give financial reasons as their major motivations for attending college. Fifteen years ago the most valued goal of the college freshman was to develop a meaningful philosophy of life. By the mid-1980s, that goal had dropped to seventh place on the list. Today, almost 70 percent of college freshmen state that their life goal is being very well-off financially. Ten years ago that choice was selected by 40 percent of students (Astin 1985, 218).

Current freshman classes also are attracted to schools because of the perceived prestige of the college of choice, as indicated by size and location of the school rather than the quality of the faculty and student body, which were important only a decade ago. Other measures of prestige among current college students are the ability of college graduates to enter into prestigious positions in business and industry, and the success that graduates have in gaining acceptance to professional schools (Krukowski 1985).

Attitudes of modern college students reveal changes that are occurring in American students long before they reach college age. A recent survey of 170 elementary school teachers provides a disturbing picture of methods used by
public school students to learn and to deal with materials presented in school, as well as the way they relate to the adult world. According to this study, students come to school with large amounts of fragmentary information, but with little ability to synthesize this information into meaningful units. These students require immediate gratification; acquiring knowledge for future use seems unreasonable to them. They are more self-assertive and less likely to respond positively to authority than their predecessors. While somewhat articulate and able to speak to a group, today's public school students are far less able to put their thoughts into writing. Reading, especially for pleasure, has lost its importance (Winn 1985).

Students' attitudes, prejudices, and study habits strongly influence choice, and once admitted, students bring these factors into college classrooms. Many cannot cope with the increased demands of the college environment, and thus join the increasing number of dropouts. Many who can cope seek out fields of study which allow them to continue habits formed much earlier (Winn 1985).

While recognizing a decline in the academic skills, attitudes, and values of entering freshman students, Astin stops short of placing all the blame on students for this change. Instead, he takes the position that students are reflecting changing national values. Astin observes that
society's concerns about financial matters, such as taxes, inflation, and federal spending brought about former President Ronald Reagan's defeat of Walter Mondale, who campaigned on a platform including raising taxes and increasing support for the disadvantaged. Simultaneously, federal support is being eliminated or reduced in such fields as sociology, psychology, and history (Astin 1985).

**The College Selection Process**

A variety of schools and agencies have performed research in the college selection process. In 1984 the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching conducted a nationwide survey of 1,000 high school seniors, their parents, and school counselors to discover their sources for information and influences on students' decisions to attend college. The results of the survey reveal that college publications are the number one source of information used by participants in their search for the right college. This source is followed by personal letters from colleges, high school counselors, college guidebooks, and campus visits.

The survey reveals an interesting paradox concerning the literature that participants receive from colleges: although college publications are widely used by students, students and parents alike find these publications to be lacking in relevance and accuracy. Fully 41 percent of the
students surveyed and 51 percent of their parents found college literature to be inaccurate, and only 32 percent of the students and 34 percent of the parents found the material to be relevant to their needs.

About 60 percent of the students surveyed had used commercial college guides. The problem with this source of information, according to many respondents, is that because there are so many guides, selecting the appropriate one is difficult. However, only two guides—The College Handbook and Peterson's Guide to Four-Year Colleges—were found in most high school libraries. These two publications were identified as being most informative by college officials (How do students choose a college 1986, 31).

The most useful source of information identified by both high school students and parents is the campus visit. Such trips allow prospective students to visit current students, view and evaluate college campuses, and make a general evaluation of the school. The survey showed that well over half of the students paid close attention to the condition of college grounds and buildings. Student life on campus was also mentioned frequently as being important.

When asked to identify the individuals most influential in helping them in the selection process, 32 percent of the high school seniors indicated their parents. Friends, counselors, and teachers were relatively unimportant in the
process. In attempting to determine reasons why school counselors were named by so few respondents, the authors of the survey found that these school officials are severely overworked. Each counselor must advise from 300 to 500 students—a virtually impossible task. Because of demands on their time counselors were able to provide current, detailed information on relatively few colleges (How do students choose a college 1986).

Finally, the Carnegie study identified some problems in the college selection process used today. More than one-half of the students in the survey said that even after using all sources available, they still had insufficient information about colleges to make an intelligent choice. More than 80 percent of the students and their parents wanted more information about the cost of tuition, books, and fees. Almost as many wanted to know more about financial aid and scholarship availability. Another problem area identified by the survey was the inadequacy of high school counseling programs. It was discovered that more counselors are needed in schools, and computerized information about colleges is needed in counseling offices.

In a study designed to determine factors which influence a student's choice of which college to attend, and to identify factors which determine a first choice college for students, Erdmann sent questionnaires to 1,100 guidance
counselors and 1,100 high school seniors across the nation. Forty-eight percent of the counselors and 37 percent of the seniors returned the survey instruments. The study responses were divided into subgroups, based on geography and school size, and then these subgroups were compared. In addition, responses of various student subgroups were compared with counselor responses (Erdmann 1983).

Eight factors were considered important by most students responding to the survey. Listed in order of perceived importance by students, those factors are academic programs offered by the college, college reputation, college location, college size, recommendations of parents, recommendations of high school counselor, and contact with college alumni. In comparing the responses of students, the author found that all subgroups, regardless of geographic region or size of school, ranked academic programs first, reputation second, location third, and size fourth. The next three items varied by subgroup, but all subgroups considered alumni contact least important (Erdmann 1983, 4).

The survey showed general agreement among the subgroups of counselors. However, when compared with student responses, counselors had differing views of the relative importance of the eight items. Most counselor subgroups considered school reputation to be most important and academic programs second or third. Counselors from the Northeast underestimated
the importance of school size and overestimated the importance of the influence of parents. Counselors from other regions of the nation underestimated the importance of size, while overestimating the importance of college cost.

The final part of the study was designed to identify factors most important to students' selection of a college of first choice. In this part of the study, counselor opinions were not used. The following items were selected for ranking: size, location, academic programs, reputation (or prestige), and suitability of the school to the student. Students from all subgroups listed academic programs first and college reputation second. The factors suitability, location, and size ranged from third to fifth. All subgroups considered parents' recommendations in last place.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this study. First, the academic programs offered by schools are very important to students. Next, a student's perception of the reputation of a college is also important, as are the school's size and location. Another point identified by the survey is that students from small, private Northeastern schools depend upon the recommendation of guidance counselors more than do students in larger public schools in other areas, where the influence of parents is more important (Erdmann 1983).
In 1984 a study somewhat similar to the one by Erdmann was made at Washington State University (WSU), which is a rural, public land-grant school with an enrollment of about 16,000. In this study, the names of 800 high school seniors were randomly selected from the application files of the school. The parents of 400 different students and a guidance counselor from each of Washington's 342 high schools also were selected to participate in the study (Sanders 1986). A questionnaire was sent to each participant, asking the person to identify the most important considerations used by WSU students in the college selection process. An overall return rate of 72.3 percent was achieved. An analysis of returned questionnaires showed little difference in the factors selected by student and parent groups. Table 1 shows the top eight factors chosen by students and the cumulative percentage of students who considered the factor either very important or quite important.

Parents included six of the same choices in their list of the eight top factors. Parents included general university reputation and student morale, instead of housing opportunities and career counseling (Sanders 1986, 25).

While parents and students showed general agreement concerning the most significant factors, research at Washington State indicated that counselors used a very different list of major influences, as shown in Table 2.
TABLE 1

TOP EIGHT FACTORS CHOSEN BY STUDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment opportunity after graduation</td>
<td>88.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of courses</td>
<td>82.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation of teaching faculty</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic programs</td>
<td>78.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of attendance</td>
<td>77.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing opportunities</td>
<td>69.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of career counseling</td>
<td>69.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of financial aid</td>
<td>68.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Unlike Erdmann, who suggests that counselors are not aware of student opinions, Sanders suggests that "guidance personnel may well have identified factors whose influence students and parents had assessed incorrectly" (Sanders 1986, 26).

Since the mid-1970s, Robert Lay and John Macguire have conducted research projects on the subject of college choice at Boston College. In one project involving a sample of 2,500 students, questionnaires were submitted to each participant, asking the participant to compare Boston
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Costs of attendance</td>
<td>87.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial aid</td>
<td>76.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific academic programs</td>
<td>76.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends' ratings</td>
<td>73.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General reputation of the school</td>
<td>64.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment opportunity after graduation</td>
<td>60.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location of the campus</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of the school</td>
<td>56.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


College and another school. Students who had been accepted to Boston College were asked to compare it with their alternate choices. Those who did not plan to attend Boston College compared their schools of choice with Boston College (Lay and Maguire 1980; Maguire and Lay 1981).

The questionnaire asked the participants to compare Boston College with the other schools on the basis of twenty-eight attributes: financial aid, distance from home, college faculty, co-ed ratio, social activities, teaching reputation, parents' preference, size of school,
emphasis on graduate programs, quality of student body, costs, contact with admissions personnel, attractiveness of campus, variety of courses, specific academic programs, general reputation, reputation of alumni, athletic programs, athletic facilities, accelerated programs—advanced placement, student-faculty ratio, research reputation, location of campus, high school counselor's rating, religious opportunities, contact with undergraduates, housing opportunities, and admissions literature (Maguire and Lay 1981, 123-125).

The purpose of the study was to compare the drawing power of Boston College with that of its major competitors. Seven of the twenty-eight attributes were found to be useful predictors: financial aid, parents' preference, specific academic programs, size of school, location of campus, athletic facilities, and social activities. The study did not attempt to determine the order of importance of these factors (Lay and Maguire 1980, 58).

In 1984, and again in 1985, the Admissions Officer at John Carroll University conducted surveys to determine the influence that applicant perceptions have on actual enrollment decisions. The surveys included high school students who were accepted for initial enrollment at the university. Some of these students actually completed enrollment and attended John Carroll while others enrolled at other universities. The survey asked students to compare John Carroll with the school they would have attended if
they had not chosen John Carroll. Students who attended another school were asked to compare John Carroll with the school they were attending (Welki and Navratil 1987).

The survey instrument was a modified version of the one developed by Maguire and Lay at Boston College. The study revealed little unexpected information. An analysis of the data of enrollment decisions showed that parental preference, cost and financial aid opportunities, campus location and design, student-faculty ratio, and academic programs were important influences on prospective students at John Carroll University (Welki and Navratil 1987).

Cook and Zallocco used the research of Chapman, Maguire and Lay, Dembowski, and others to develop a model to predict student preference of colleges, based on a list of specific attributes. The model consisted of a mathematical formula that compared five major universities in Ohio according to students' perceptions of how satisfactorily each school conformed to a set of eighteen attributes (criteria). The results indicate that the universities under examination fell into three categories: those catering to commuter students, those emphasizing academic reputation, and those with a highly social reputation (Cook and Zallocco 1983).

The practical application of this model lies in its ability to identify students' perceptions of a specific school. Using this information, a school might work to overcome an undesired image, to improve an image, or to use
an existing image to attract a targeted group of students (Cook and Zallocco 1983, 208).

In the spring, 1979, the American College Testing Program (ACT) and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) conducted a national survey entitled What Works in Student Retention. The purpose of the study was to identify, analyze, and compile information about programs and efforts directed toward improving student retention in higher education (Beal and Noel 1980, 15).

Although this study did not attempt specifically to identify college selection criteria, it was conducted in much the same manner as those designed to identify selection criteria. The study found that many retention criteria are similar to those identified in other studies as selection criteria.

In the ACT study, each of 1,600 presidents of two-year and four-year institutions designated a campus representative to respond to the survey. Almost 1,000 completed questionnaires were returned by these representatives. One important finding of the study was that approximately three-fourths of the respondents reported that active retention policies and procedures were either in progress or under consideration at their schools.

The study also identified campus characteristics which related both negatively and positively to retention. In order of decreasing importance, the major negative
characteristics were as follows: inadequate academic advising, inadequate curricular offerings, conflict between class schedule and job, inadequate financial aid, inadequate extracurricular offerings, and inadequate counseling support systems. The major positive characteristics, again in order of decreasing importance, were as follows: caring attitude of faculty and staff, high quality of teaching, adequate financial aid, student involvement in campus life, and high quality of advising. Clearly, many of the factors which attract students to a college campus also keep them there once they arrive (Beal and Noel 1980, 44-45).

Studies Involving Single Factors

The foregoing research projects were large-scale studies comparing several influences on college choice within large populations. While expensive and difficult to perform, these projects have contributed greatly to a better understanding of factors which influence college choice. However, other less-costly and less-ambitious studies also have added to this understanding. Many of these smaller projects have investigated the importance of one or a few influences upon the selection process.

College Cost and Financial Aid

One influence, or set of influences, upon college choice is the combination of factors which compose the total cost of a student's education. David W. Chapman
found that much of the research into the influence of the cost of education upon college choice is inconclusive, even contradictory. At the same time, cost is a factor which has been found to be important in virtually every major study of the selection process. Thus, it must be taken into consideration in future studies. Financial aid is an assistance program that reduces the burden of expense for qualifying students. One general effect of financial aid programs has been to increase the number of students attending college and to redistribute them among private, four-year and smaller institutions (Chapman 1981, 496-497).

Randall G. Chapman, researching the effects of cost upon college choice at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada, concluded that for lower-income students, cost definitely has a role in the college selection process. In drawing his conclusions, Chapman reported, "for students receiving financial aid, the kind and amount of the financial aid does have an important impact on their college choice behavior" (Chapman 1979, 54).

Gregory A. Jackson, in a study of about 2,100 college applicants, found that approximately 650 received offers of aid and approximately 1,500 did not. Of those receiving offers of aid, 85 percent entered college. Of those receiving no offer of aid, 78 percent entered college. Jackson further found that as little as 100 dollars in aid measurably increased the likelihood that an applicant would
enter college. The student most likely to be influenced by financial aid is one who is wavering between two or more schools. The granting of aid likely will sway such a student toward the college offering aid. Jackson's research points out that the financial aid program most likely to increase enrollment is the program that is directed toward a population that will be unlikely to attend without aid (Jackson 1978).

The influence of financial aid upon the educational achievements of special populations is illustrated in a project conducted on the Paiute Indian reservation in California. Under sponsorship of the Indian Tribal Council, Cerro Coso Community College provided computer instruction for Indian students who had poor records of school attendance and achievement. Small financial grants were provided to encourage the students to continue the program. This ongoing project was successful in retaining the students until completion, and in placing them in jobs upon graduation (Cerro Coso and Paiute Reservation create a skillful partnership 1988).

Porter and McColloch found that by the 1970s the purely academic scholarship had become much less prevalent than scholarships based upon student need. In the early 1980s these authors surveyed 824 directors of admission at four-year colleges and universities in an effort to determine how these schools administered no-need scholarships to
full-time undergraduates. A response rate of 48.7 revealed that most schools provide no-need scholarships in amounts generally less than 1,000 dollars per year. None of the respondents had done an adequate job of assessing the effect of these scholarships on enrollment; however, the fact that approximately 90 percent of the scholarships are awarded to freshman students indicates a belief in their effectiveness. The authors identified the need for a study to determine the effect of no-need scholarships on college choice (Porter and McColloch 1983).

**College Quality and Reputation**

Although many students use school reputation, perceived quality, and institutional prestige as reasons for selecting a specific school, there appear to be few studies which have addressed these criteria individually. Two studies, by David Webster (1981) and Astin and Solomon (1981), raise the questions of the preferred method to assess institutional reputation and quality, but they could not link reputation or quality directly to the college choice process.

McLeod and Carter surveyed 132 community colleges in order to learn how these schools assess the quality of their programs. This study revealed that high-quality instruction and educational excellence are important to leaders of two-year colleges and that these qualities are considered by students in the college selection process (McLeod and Carter 1986).
Palmer identifies five determinants of quality at the community college that sometimes are considered by prospective students and their parents: institutional resources, instructional and management processes, student outcomes, value-added impact on students, and curricular structure and emphasis (Palmer 1984).

In examining resources of community colleges, applicants must examine such items as the number of programs offered, the number of courses taught in each program, and other indications of growth and development in curriculum. Another important factor is the quality of the faculty, as indicated by their education and past teaching successes. Concerning instructional and management processes, students should be aware of sophistication of instructional delivery systems, indications of faculty commitment, and signs of institutional vitality. Student outcomes are most easily assessed through two indicators: the ability of vocational graduates to gain and hold jobs and the success of transfer students in senior institutions (Palmer 1984).

In one of his many studies of the relationship between college choice and college quality, Astin reports that a student must first decide the criteria that constitute quality and then make a choice based upon those criteria. For example, if a student wishes to attend a school that provides opportunity to get involved in campus government, athletics, and honors programs, that student probably...
should avoid large, highly selective universities and should probably attend a less selective, smaller school. Small schools also allow more student involvement in the classroom experience and closer contact with faculty. Conversely, large universities are often highly competitive academically, but offer numerous career advantages to their graduates (Astin 1984).

In his book *Achieving Educational Excellence*, Astin discusses the hierarchical arrangement of institutions of higher education in America today. At the top of this hierarchy, Astin sees most of the major research universities and a number of elite private colleges. Just below these schools are the large selection of less prestigious regional research universities and many liberal arts colleges. The least prestigious group is composed of the community colleges, many state colleges, and a significant number of small private colleges (Astin 1985, 5).

Astin further observes that academic preparation and socioeconomic levels of students are closely associated with the student's choice of a college or university. Studies conducted at the University of California in 1983 found that students with the highest academic averages generally select the most prestigious schools. Also, nearly one-half of the students selecting top-level institutions come from families with annual incomes of $50,000 or higher and less than one-tenth come from families
with annual incomes of $15,000 or less. For students entering the least prestigious institutions, the pattern is reversed. Students from poor families and those whose parents are not well educated are generally deprived of an education from the best institutions. Whether intentional or accidental, these factors are important in the choice process (Astin 1985, 8-10).

That students consider college quality and reputation in their college selection process is well documented in the literature (Piland and Azbell 1984; Cain and McClintock 1984; Sanders 1986). While research continues to determine how leaders of educational institutions perceive the quality of reputations of their own schools and of other colleges, there appears to be little research which establishes how students and prospective students measure the quality of colleges that are in their choice set.

**Purposes of the Modern Community College**

Building upon the early success of two-year colleges in California, Illinois, and other states, modern community leaders offer colleges that assure access to a wide range of programs within their communities. Approximately eighty years after two-year colleges earned the acceptance of their communities, the program frequently described as college-transfer, college-parallel, college-equivalent, or university-parallel remains an important part of the community college. Modern community colleges take pride in
the success with which their courses transfer into the programs of universities (Cohen and Brawer 1982, 285).

Since about 1940, most community colleges have offered programs referred to as terminal, vocational, technical, semiprofessional, occupational, or career programs. Frequently, these terms are combined, resulting in such titles as vocational-technical. Perhaps because the titles identify education at a level less than a baccalaureate degree, vocational programs did not gain immediate popularity. Since the early 1970s, however, enrollment in vocational programs has increased until it has reached about 50 percent of the total enrollment in many community colleges. There appears to be a growing acceptance of vocational programs in community colleges as salaries in fields commonly considered to be vocational have gained parity with many professions requiring four years of education.

Community education is the third major service provided by community colleges. As the broadest function of the community college, this usually includes adult education, continuing education, community services, adult vocational education, and adult basic education. Covering a wide range of goals, community education may take on almost any form: short-term, non-credit, recreational, career enhancement, personal interest, or other. Community
education programs frequently are the result of requests from the community they serve. The participants in community education programs frequently have immediate needs, they usually are not as young as traditional students, they commonly attend on a part-time basis, and they may range in education from high school dropouts to graduates of professional degree programs (Cohen and Brawer 1982, 252).

Community colleges also serve many other community needs. Not the least important of these is a counseling-guidance service, which provides advice and information for students who may not be prepared to face the pressures of either the academic or social life. Because of this lack of preparation of many community college students, this is a very important service. Additionally, most community colleges provide academic advisement, job placement, cultural activities, athletic events, and numerous other activities for residents of the community (Cohen and Brawer 1982).

The major accomplishment of the community college throughout its years of development seems to have been its ability and determination to provide access to those students with little opportunity to attend any other type of college (Heck and Weible 1978, 23). The development of Miami-Dade Community College, one of the most successful community college systems in the nation, is an excellent
example of how access can be provided to the underprivileged student. In the fall of 1960, Miami-Dade admitted a class of 1,428 students, the first integrated class of college students in Florida. Prior to the opening of Miami-Dade, Black students of Florida could attend only two Florida colleges, each more than 200 miles from Miami. Since that time, Miami-Dade has been a model of the "great democratizing force in higher education," providing "equal opportunity for all, regardless of religion, ethnic group, or socio-economic status" (Roueche and Baker 1987, 3).

Writing in the National Forum, George B. Vaughan declares that the public community college is the nation's most successful vehicle in providing open access to higher education. In describing this mission, Vaughan makes the following statement:

Numbering over 1,000, these colleges, with their "open door" admissions policy and comprehensive programs, have been higher education's Ellis Island for enrolling minorities, women, working adults, and others who have lingered on the periphery of higher education's mainstream (Vaughan 1985, 31-32).

Of the many studies performed to determine how students from various groups differ in their patterns of post-secondary schooling, the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 is one of the most significant. Following an initial survey, follow-up data were obtained on participants each year until 1977. The study involved
over 23,000 students from all racial, social, educational, and economic groups (Clowes and Levin 1980, 24).

Some of the findings of the Longitudinal Study seem to contradict the observations of Rouche, Vaughan, and others. For example, one of the findings of the study was that more than one-half of the students who attend community colleges come from middle-class American society rather than from the lower class. The study also reveals that Blacks, when they have a choice, will attend four-year institutions rather than community colleges. The most discouraging finding, however, is that neither the two-year nor the four-year colleges were doing a satisfactory job of serving the educational needs of the lowest socioeconomic segment of society. Those students simply do not attend colleges of any kind (Clowes and Levin 1980; Peng, Bailey, and Ekland 1977, 5).

Addressing some of the questions raised in the Longitudinal Study, Vaughan identified two serious threats to the ability of community colleges to provide access to potential students from the lower socioeconomic group. The first is the reduction in federal financial aid, which has caused a decline in the number of Hispanics and Blacks who attend college. At a time when ethnic minorities are beginning to overcome barriers to jobs and education, a new federal direction seems destined to eliminate many minority
individuals from leadership positions, condemning them to the lowest socioeconomic class (Vaughan 1985).

The second threat is the failure of community college leaders to communicate accurately and convincingly the mission of the two-year college in such a way that business and political leaders will be persuaded to restore previous aid and other forms of support. Failing to understand the needs of economically disadvantaged students, legislators have continued to reduce aid. Community colleges have attempted to recover lost revenue by increasing tuition costs, further increasing the difficulty for poor students to attend college (Vaughan 1985, 33).

**College Choice in Community Colleges**

An Educational Resources Information Center search of the literature revealed few studies of the college selection process that have been performed to determine why students choose to attend community colleges. Several reasons seem to exist for this absence of research. First, community colleges historically have had adequate enrollment, frequently more than they could handle, so there has been no apparent need for research. Second, community colleges always have operated on tight budgets, so they never have been oriented toward institutional research, but have directed all their efforts into the teaching process. Some research into this area has been done, however.
One significant study was performed at Amarillo College in 1978. Amarillo College, which enrolls approximately 20,000 students annually, is in Amarillo, Texas, a city of almost 200,000, located in the Texas Panhandle. Specifically, it is in the extreme southern part of Potter County, near the northern border of Randall County. The school is a comprehensive community college, with extensive offerings in both university-parallel and vocational-technical programs (Student profile fall 1978, 1980).

The purposes of the 1978 study of Amarillo College were to determine (1) selected demographic and socio-economic characteristics of Amarillo College students; (2) selected academic background characteristics, enrollment classification, and educational goals of students; (3) students' reasons for choosing Amarillo College and for choosing their major programs; (4) students' perceptions of Amarillo College and of their chances of achieving their goals; (5) the percentage of students participating in extra-curricular activities; and (6) differences among student subgroups (i.e., curricular areas, full-time or part-time, day or evening, ethnic origin, sex, and age).

Information for the study came from two sources. Data on 4,500 Amarillo College students were obtained directly from college student record files. An additional 3,000 students responded to a survey conducted by the college.
The study revealed that approximately 78 percent of the college's enrollment came from Randall and Potter Counties. An additional 10 percent came from other areas of Texas, and 12 percent came from various locations across the nation. Students from Potter and Randall Counties are largely part-time students; fewer than one-half attend on a full-time basis. The students from the immediate area—the Texas Panhandle students—are more likely to be enrolled in vocational-technical programs, while those from other parts of the state are more often full-time students in traditional university-parallel programs. The average age for Amarillo College students is twenty-four years. Sixty percent of the total enrollment attends on a part-time basis. Fifty-three percent are women, over one-half are married, and 86 percent are white.

Students at Amarillo College learn about the college in conventional ways. According to the study, friends and other students and parents and relatives are the most influential groups in providing information about the college. Others who exert some influence are employees and the news media. Approximately one-third of those surveyed reported that they would not have attended any college if Amarillo College were not available. The groups reporting greatest dependence on Amarillo College for access to education were part-time students, women, older students, and vocational-technical students.
The study asked each respondent to identify the most important reasons for attending Amarillo College. Respondents were allowed to choose more than one reason from a list of ten. The five most frequently selected reasons were low cost, programs offered, geographic location, high quality instruction, and transferability of courses.

Table 3 displays, by attendance patterns, the reasons given by students for attending Amarillo College.

TABLE 3
REASONS FOR ATTENDING AMARILLO COLLEGE BY ATTENDANCE PATTERNS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Part-Time</th>
<th>Full-Time</th>
<th>Day Only</th>
<th>Evening Only</th>
<th>Day and Evening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Cost</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs Offered</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographic Location</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Quality Instruction</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferability of Credits</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 4 displays, by curricular group, the reasons given by students for attending Amarillo College.
### TABLE 4

**REASONS FOR ATTENDING AMARILLO COLLEGE BY CURRICULAR GROUP**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Arts &amp; Sciences</th>
<th>Bio-Med.</th>
<th>Technology</th>
<th>Voc. Arts</th>
<th>All Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Cost</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs Offered</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographic Location</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Quality Instruction</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferability of Credits</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


This survey clearly suggests that community college students use college selection criteria that differ from those reported in surveys of four-year colleges and universities.

In an unpublished research paper, Thomas E. Carden sought to determine whether new students differ in their reasons for initially attending Piedmont Technical Institute because of race, gender, or age. The study was done at Piedmont Technical Institute, a two-year college, in Roxboro, North Carolina, in 1978 (Carden 1978).
This project involved the administration of a questionnaire to all new students enrolled in campus orientation courses. The survey asked students to identify their reasons for attending the school. The author refers to these reasons as patronage factors, which he defines as features of an institution given by students as a reason for attending the school. Some of the more important patronage factors were size and location of the school, the reputation of the school's instructional programs, the cost of attendance, and the overall image of the school.

The study was concerned only with the manner in which specific groups of students reacted to these patronage factors; it did not attempt to determine the relative importance of each factor. Carden used chi-square at the .01 level of significance to analyze the data. The only significant one of the three factors under study (age, race, and gender) was the age of participants. Older students, those thirty-six years and older, were found to be the most atypical group. Gender was found to be the least significant factor.

Based upon the study, three recommendations were made to the college: (1) newly designed recruitment materials should take age differences of potential students into consideration, (2) new recruitment materials should include significant patronage factors, and (3) a campaign should be initiated to improve the image of the college (Carden 1978).
In 1986, Digby conducted a study of the factors which influence adult enrollment in Fayetteville Technical Institute, a two-year vocational school in North Carolina. The author used a questionnaire to gain information from 119 students selected randomly from day and evening accounting classes. From his research, Digby established that the typical student at Fayetteville was a twenty-seven year old married female, who was enrolled for the opportunity of obtaining a better job (Digby 1986).

In addition to obtaining general information about students, the research identified several reasons why adult students at Fayetteville chose to continue their education. In rank order from most important to least important, the reasons were to get a better job, to earn more money, to gain a general education, to learn more things of interest, to contribute more to society, and to become more cultured. The study also identified the following reasons for students selecting this specific school. Listed in rank order, the reasons were course availability, cost of attending, location of the school, availability of financial assistance, quality of instruction, presence of an open-door admissions policy, and availability of a job placement service.

Based upon the findings of his research, Digby made the following recommendations for improvements in Fayetteville's operations: (1) Closely investigate the
need for college-sponsored day-care services to assist the many mothers attending classes. (2) Provide the faculty with available information concerning the educational levels of current students. This information should be used in counseling and academic advising. (3) Examine the need for a program to help the large number of retiring military personnel in the area in their transition to civilian life. (4) Study the need for increased use of computers in all college programs (Digby 1986).

Heck and Weible conducted a survey of 487 students on the Mansfield Campus of Ohio State University in an effort to identify students' reasons for choosing the two-year commuter college and to assess the variances between their perceptions of the real and the desirable campus environment. The environmental variables included self-concept, human relations, career decision-making, academic concerns, and student support services (Heck and Weible 1978).

According to the study, students chose this two-year regional college primarily because of financial considerations, geographic location, and the ability of the college to meet individual needs. Less important reasons for the choice were campus size, friends in the area, influence of parents and influence of high school counselors.

The study also revealed several conditions and services that the students considered unsatisfactory. These items, which were considered serious enough to cause students to
question their decisions to attend the college, were as follows: (1) the failure of their opinions to be accepted by peers and faculty, (2) the lack of freedom to ask questions and to express opinions in class, (3) uncertainty about career choices, (4) concerns for grades and scholastic ability, (5) the inaccessibility of instructors, and (6) the poor quality of academic advisement and personal counseling (Heck and Weible 1978).

Catlin conducted a study in 1982 to determine why students applied but did not enroll at Harper Community College, Palatine, Illinois. In a survey of 160 respondents, the most frequent reason for non-attendance was the decision to attend another school (31 percent). Other reasons given were career indecision (14 percent), non-availability of specific courses or programs (13 percent), and the decision to accept a full-time job (11 percent) (Catlin 1983).

In 1983, McMaster conducted a similar study at Mercer County Community College to determine why some students who made application did not complete admissions procedures and enroll in classes. Based on data obtained from 228 respondents to the survey, the major factors influencing respondents' decisions not to enroll were job and family responsibilities (24 percent), distance of the school from home (14 percent), non-availability of courses or programs (11 percent), and non-availability of financial aid (8 percent) (McMaster 1983).
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodology used to conduct this study. This chapter includes a description of the survey instrument, procedures used to establish validity and reliability, subjects, data gathering methods, and procedures for analyzing data. The study involved the administering of questionnaires to first-semester freshman students in three small, rural community colleges in North Texas: Vernon Regional Junior College, Grayson College, and Clarendon College.

The Vernon campus of Vernon Regional Junior College is located in the north central part of Texas, about fifty miles west of Wichita Falls. Grayson College is located in Denison, about 180 miles east of the Vernon campus. Clarendon College is located in Clarendon, approximately 120 miles west of the Vernon campus. The locations of the three campuses provided an opportunity to determine possible influences of geographical location upon college selection.

The Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was designed to measure the college selection criteria of respondents and to provide a
means of comparing specific demographic groups according to how they responded to questions.

Content validity of the survey instrument was established by asking several highly qualified educators to evaluate the survey instrument, paying close attention to the appropriateness, value, and adequacy of each part (Bailey 1982, 69-70). This panel of experts consisted primarily of instructors, administrators, and counselors from community colleges in North Texas. However, one panelist is an administrator in a community college in southwestern Oklahoma, and one is a teacher in a large high school in North Texas. Each panelist was asked to evaluate the questionnaire and to either approve or reject each item on the questionnaire. Each panelist also was asked to provide recommendations for improvements to the survey instrument. Suggested improvements for items were requested, even if a panelist did not reject an item, but only wished to modify or reword it.

Although individual panelists did provide suggestions for changes in the wording of some questions, no item was rejected by the panel. Suggestions for changes were expressed only as ideas to be considered, not as serious objections to the content of the questionnaire.

The reliability of the survey instrument was measured using the test-retest technique (Borg 1981, 100). The instrument was administered to a class of students at
VRJC's Wichita Falls campus during the fall semester of 1988. Three weeks later the instrument was administered again to the same class. All students were present for both testing sessions. The statistical formula to determine the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was applied to the data. This mathematical treatment is used to determine the correlation between two variables or two sets of measures for the same group of individuals. The degree of relationship is expressed as a number \( r \), the correlation coefficient (Thomas and Young 1986, 107-109). The results of the analysis of the research data revealed a correlation coefficient of .83.

Ferguson states that additional understanding of the correlation coefficient is achieved by determining \( r^2 \), which is the proportion of the variance of one variable that can be predicted from the variance of another. Ferguson further states that \( r^2 \) is a more accurate measure of the degree of relationship represented by a correlation coefficient than is the correlation coefficient itself. In this study, the correlation coefficient of .83 can be squared to produce a variance of approximately .69, which results in a 69 percent association between the scores on the first test and those on the second (Ferguson 1981, 128-130).
Subjects

One of the major challenges of the study was that of finding similar subjects at three schools with numerous similarities but some differences. For example, although all three schools are relatively small and rural, Clarendon College is somewhat smaller than Vernon Regional Junior College and considerably smaller than Grayson College. Also, the districts served by each college differ somewhat. While Clarendon serves an eight-county district with no cities larger than 30,000 in population, Vernon serves a district of twelve counties with only Wichita Falls (population 100,000) having a relatively large population. Grayson serves a district of only two counties, but enrolls significant numbers of students from Southern Oklahoma and from the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area.

On each of the three campuses, a college administrator was contacted and the nature of the study was explained. The administrators agreed to participate and to coordinate the study with instructors, students, and other personnel who would be involved on their respective campuses. Phil Shirley, Dean of Instruction, served as the coordinator on the Clarendon campus, and Paul Bowers, Director of Counseling, served on the Grayson campus.

The decision was made to sample approximately 100 students from each of the three campuses, providing a database of approximately 300 students for the study. The
survey was further restricted to students in first-semester freshman English classes on the home campus of each school. Since students in virtually all degree programs at community colleges must take at least one English class, the English classes were considered to be representative of students in the schools' degree programs.

**Procedures for Collecting Data**

Since Clarendon College has a relatively small total enrollment, the decision was made to survey all students in first-semester freshman English classes. Approximately one week prior to the administering of the questionnaire, English instructors were contacted and informed about the survey. All the teachers agreed to assist in the study.

At the time the study was administered at Clarendon, the designated classroom for each English class involved in the survey was visited. After being introduced to the class by the English instructor, the researcher explained the purpose of the survey, stressing the confidential treatment of survey results. Students also were informed that participation was strictly voluntary. Although most students were willing to participate, a few refrained.

Of the 122 students enrolled in first-semester freshman English classes at Clarendon College, 95 completed the questionnaire. This number represents almost 30 percent of
the total enrollment on the Clarendon campus. All questionnaires were included in the data base for the study.

On the Vernon campus, 238 students were enrolled in first-semester freshman English classes during the fall semester. In order to select a representative sample of 100 students, class rolls were secured for all sections of first-semester freshman English students. These rolls were edited to delete students who had withdrawn from school or were no longer attending class. The rolls of current students were then combined into one list of all active students in the classes. Each student was assigned a number, beginning with 001 and continuing through the final student on the list.

According to a table of random numbers, a sample of 100 students was selected from the sampling frame. Two lists of first-semester freshman student were then compiled: one list of students who would be part of the study and one list of students who would not participate.

In Vernon, the same method of contacting the English instructors was used as was used at Clarendon. However, there was some concern that there would be difficulty in administering the questionnaire to only selected members of a class. First, some students in the class who were not selected to take part in the survey might wish to do so. Second, some of those chosen to participate might, in the
presence of non-participants, decide not to respond. Therefore, it was decided to sample all present members of the English classes in which selected students were enrolled.

This course of action provided several benefits: all students in the class were engaged in the same activity at the same time, a pool of replacement respondents was available in case selected participants were absent on the day the questionnaire was administered, and additional completed questionnaires were available for possible future research outside the boundaries of this study.

As members of a class completed the survey, the questionnaires were collected and placed in either the group consisting of randomly selected respondents or in the group completed by those students not selected. Great care was exercised to ensure that all completed forms were placed in the appropriate group. English instructors, who were well acquainted with the students, were helpful in this process.

On the Grayson College campus, approximately 500 students were enrolled in first-semester freshman English classes during the 1988 fall semester. With this large number of students, it was impractical to administer a questionnaire to every student. However, it was necessary that the survey be administered to a random sample of students enrolled in the specified English classes.

To select the random sample, the researcher secured class rolls of students enrolled in first-semester freshman English
classes at Grayson College. As at VRJC, class rolls were edited to remove the names of students who had withdrawn. The class rolls were then combined to provide one master list of potential respondents. Students were assigned consecutive numbers as they appeared on the master list. According to a table of random numbers, a sample of 110 students was selected from the sampling frame. Ten additional students were then selected to ensure that at least 100 useable questionnaires would be completed by the students.

The questionnaire was administered by Paul Bowers, Director of Counseling at Grayson College, to the selected students during pre-registration advisement sessions late in the fall semester. All selected students were advised that the purpose of the survey was to secure information, that confidentiality of responses would be ensured, and that participation in the study was voluntary. A total of 102 students completed the questionnaire at Grayson College. These responses were added to the data base.

**Methods for Analyzing Data**

The completed questionnaires from the three colleges were examined to ensure useability. Each questionnaire was assigned an identifying number as required for the computer program adopted. Each questionnaire was coded with a letter
to identify its school in order to facilitate computerization of the data.

The data on the questionnaire were then electronically tallied using the data base software program dBASE III and a personal computer. A data base computer program was written to allow immediate sorting and tabulating of data reported by survey respondents. Appropriate information was arranged on a contingency table, and a chi-square test of independence was used to compare designated groups of respondents. The following research hypotheses were used as guidelines for the data analysis:

**Ho₁**: There will be no significant difference in selection criteria between white students and students from ethnic minorities. The responses of white students from all three colleges were combined and then compared with the responses of all other students from all three colleges. This hypothesis was analyzed using a test of independence.

**Ho₂**: There will be no significant difference in college selection criteria between male and female students. The responses of male students from all three colleges were combined and then compared with the responses of female students from all three colleges. This hypothesis was analyzed using a test of independence.

**Ho₃**: There will be no significant difference in college selection criteria between students under twenty-five years of age and students twenty-five years of age and
older. The responses of students under twenty-five years of age from all three colleges were combined and then compared with the responses of all students twenty-five years old and older. This hypothesis was analyzed using a test of independence.

$H_{04}$: There will be no significant difference in college selection criteria between university-bound students and vocational students. The responses of university-bound students from all three colleges were combined and then compared with the responses of vocational students from all three colleges. This hypothesis was analyzed using a test of independence.

$H_{05}$: There will be no significant difference in college selection criteria between full-time and part-time students. The responses of full-time students from all three colleges were combined and then compared with the responses of part-time students from all three colleges. This hypothesis was analyzed using a test of independence.

Data collected from the study were organized and statistically analyzed and are discussed in Chapter IV. Hypotheses were restated in the null form and tested at the .05 level of significance.

Part III of the survey instrument provided an opportunity for respondents to provide additional data to further explain reasons for choosing a college, to provide different reasons not found on the questionnaire, to provide
recommendations to the colleges, or to provide insight into the college selection process. This information was carefully studied and then organized and evaluated, and is presented in Chapter IV.
CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

This chapter contains an analysis of the data collected from the administration of a questionnaire designed to determine criteria used by freshman students to select a college. The survey instrument was administered to approximately 300 randomly-selected first-semester freshman English students at Vernon Regional Junior College, Clarendon College, and Grayson County College. The data for the study were collected during the 1988 fall semester on the campuses of the three community colleges. The research hypotheses are restated as null hypotheses. The chapter contains a comparison of college selection criteria used by specific groups of students as well as a summary of narrative responses made by students from each college.

Treatment of the Data

In completing Part II of the questionnaire, each respondent evaluated the importance of each of twenty items as a college selection criterion. Students responded by addressing each item on a Likert-type scale by either strongly agreeing (5.0), agreeing (4.0), being undecided (3.0), disagreeing (2.0), or strongly disagreeing (1.0). Respondents could also indicate that an item did not apply,
in which case a value of 0.0 was entered on the scale. A computer program was written to tally the number of responses in each category of each of the twenty items. The program also calculated an average response, or mean, for each item. Responses of 0.0 (did not apply) were not calculated in the mean score for each item, nor were they considered in the computation of chi-square.

The statistical procedure used to analyze these data was the test of independence application of chi-square, as described by Ferguson. The formula \((C-1) \times (R-1) = DF\) was used to determine the degrees of freedom for each comparison of groups (Ferguson 1981, 207-210). This formula was applied to data under investigation to determine the degrees of freedom in the following manner:

\[
(C-1) \times (R-1) = DF \text{ (degrees of freedom)}
\]

\[
(5-1) \times (2-1) = 4 \text{ degrees of freedom}
\]

For all data, a level of significance of .05 was used. According to Thomas and Young, a level of .05 and four degrees of freedom give a critical chi-square value of 9.488. In each statistical comparison to be made in this study, there are five columns and two rows of data; therefore, the same degrees of freedom and the same critical value of chi-square apply. Items to be retained must have a numerical value that is less than the critical value of
chi-square, and items to be rejected must have a number value equal to or greater than the critical value of chi-square (Thomas and Young 1986, 189-195).

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

A total of 295 students completed useable questionnaires for this portion of the survey. Of that total, 249 (84.4 percent) were whites and 46 (15.6 percent) were members of ethnic minorities.

Table 5 presents means and chi-squares for each of the twenty items studied under this hypothesis. In response to Item 1, which sought to identify the influence of parents on college choice, white students had a mean of 3.09, and minority students had a mean of 2.90. These results indicate that parental influence upon college choice was very weak for white students and even weaker for minority students.

An application for the formula used to perform a test of independence on the responses of the two groups gave a chi-square of 2.410 for Item 1. Since this value is less than the critical value of chi-square for four degrees of freedom, this item of the hypothesis is retained. There was no significant difference in the influence exerted by the parents of members of the two groups, as perceived by respondents.
### TABLE 5

**MEANS AND CHI-SQUARE SCORES DETERMINED IN COMPARISON OF WHITE AND MINORITY STUDENTS' REASONS FOR SELECTING A COLLEGE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean (Whites)</th>
<th>Mean (Minorities)</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>2.410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>9.742*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>5.951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>4.490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>1.030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>5.762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>7.440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>7.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>13.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>1.350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>14.561*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>1.600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>3.720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>9.290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>7.650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>4.390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>2.821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>22.430*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>4.760</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Item rejected; value of chi-square is above the critical value of 9.488.*
Item 2 sought to determine the influence of high school counselors on college choice. The average response, or mean, of whites to this item was 1.91, while responses of minority students had a mean of 2.00. These low average responses indicate that high school counselors were considered unimportant by both groups. A comparison of the responses of the two groups has a chi-square of 1.351. This value is lower than the critical value needed to reject this item of the hypothesis. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the way the two groups viewed the importance of high school counselors in the college selection process. This item of the hypothesis is retained.

In response to Item 3, which asked about the influence of close friends, white respondents gave a mean response of 2.47, while the mean response of minority students was 2.92. These responses indicate that the influence of friends was somewhat less than that of parents but greater than that of counselors. A comparison of the two groups gave a chi-square of 9.742, which is greater than the critical value of chi-square. The two groups did not place equal value on the influence of close friends in formulating college choice. This item of the hypothesis is rejected.

Items 4, 5, 6, and 7 asked the importance of various forms of written and spoken communication upon the college selection process. Specifically, Item 4 dealt with the college catalog, Item 5 with other college literature, Item
6 with personal communication from instructors, and Item 7 with advertisements in news media. For both groups, the college catalog was considered most important, with whites giving it an average value of 2.89 and minorities giving it 2.58. Conversely, advertisement in news media was considered least important to both groups.

Chi-squares, which were computed for each of these items, provided values of 5.951 for Item 4, 4.490 for Item 5, 1.030 for Item 6, and 5.762 for Item 7. Since none of these values reached the critical value of chi-square, all four items of Hypothesis I are retained.

Items 8 and 9 asked respondents to evaluate the importance of quality, as it relates to both instruction and instructors. Item 8, concerning instructional programs, received a mean response of 3.20 from white students and 2.90 from minority students. Item 9, concerning the importance of high quality instructors, showed similar results: 3.06 from white respondents and 2.83 from minorities. These responses show almost no importance attached to this item by white students and none by minorities. Chi-squares of 7.44 and 7.01 indicate no significant differences between the two groups. This item of the hypothesis is retained.

The two groups responded somewhat differently when asked to evaluate the importance of intercollegiate athletics (Item 10) to their college choice patterns. While white students' responses had a mean of only 2.28, minority
students produced a mean of 2.95. When submitted to a test of independence, data from the two groups produced a chi-square of 13.00, indicating some differences in the degree of importance of this item as a college selection criterion. This item of the hypothesis is rejected.

The availability of specific programs of study (Item 11) was indicated as important by both white respondents, with a mean of 3.60, and minority students, with a mean of 3.51. Further, the two groups placed similar value on this item, as indicated by a chi-square of 1.35. This item of Hypothesis 1 is retained.

Item 12, the cost of tuition and fees, also had considerable value to both groups. The responses of whites averaged 4.17 and those of minorities averaged 3.65. These means were among the highest produced by either group, indicating the degree of importance placed upon this item. However, even though important to both groups, this item was viewed somewhat differently by those groups, because a comparison produced a chi-square of 14.561. This item of the hypothesis is rejected.

Responses to Item 13, financial aid, indicated that this item was important to both white students (mean of 3.62) and minorities (mean of 3.51). Further statistical comparisons revealed a chi-square of 1.600. This item of the hypothesis is retained.
The availability of on-campus housing (Item 14) was determined to be relatively unimportant, as both groups had means well below 3.00. A chi-square of 3.72 indicated that the two groups viewed this item similarly. This item of the hypothesis is retained.

A study of the importance of the small size of the college (Item 15) and the importance of small classes (Item 16) indicated some disagreement between the groups of respondents but not disagreement significant enough to cause rejection of these items. Item 15 was relatively important to both groups, with responses from whites having a mean of 3.73 and those from minorities having 3.35. Item 16 had identical responses from both groups. Item 15 produced a chi-square of 9.29 and Item 16 had 7.65. Both items of the hypothesis are retained.

Items 17 and 18, both concerning the quality of campus life, were relatively unimportant to both groups of respondents. Item 17, dealing with the importance of the co-ed ratio on campus, received a chi-square of 4.390, and Item 18, concerning the attractiveness of the college campus, received a chi-square of 2.821. Both Item 17 and Item 18 of this hypothesis are retained.

The importance of the location of the college campus (Item 19) was evaluated very differently by the two groups. White students gave this item a mean of 4.21, but minority students gave it a much lower average of 3.30. A comparison
of responses gave a chi-square of 22.43, which easily results in the rejection of this item of the hypothesis.

Item 20 asked students to evaluate the importance of a friendly atmosphere on campus. Both groups considered this item to be important. White students gave it a mean of 3.61 and minority students gave it 3.56. When submitted to a test of independence, the responses of the two groups gave a chi-square of 4.76, retaining this item of the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2

This hypothesis compared responses of males with those of females. Useable questionnaires returned by respondents were equally divided, one-half coming from each.

Table 6 presents means and chi-squares for each of the twenty items studied under this hypothesis. In response to Item 1, the influence of parents, neither males nor females considered it a very important factor, giving it means of 3.06 and 3.04, respectively. When compared, the data produced a chi-square of 2.537. This value is insufficient to reject this item of the hypothesis, so it is retained.

Item 2 asked respondents to evaluate the influence of high school counselors. According to the results produced by the questionnaire, neither group judged counselors to be important in the college selection process. A study of males' responses revealed a mean of 2.04, while females averaged 1.79. A comparison of the data using chi-square
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean (Males)</th>
<th>Mean (Females)</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>2.537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>11.651*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>2.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2.78</td>
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*Item rejected; value of chi-square is above the critical value of 9.488.
produced a value of 11.651, which exceeds the critical value of chi-square. This item of the hypothesis is rejected, indicating that males and females had differing opinions concerning the influence of counselors.

Responses to Item 3 on the questionnaire indicated that the influence of close friends was insignificant to males (mean of 2.62) and to females (mean of 2.47). A chi-square of 2.006 indicates that both sexes had similar opinions of the value of this influence. This item of the hypothesis is retained.

Items 4, 5, 6, and 7, which examined opinions concerning the value of colleges' communication with students, all received low indications of importance by respondents of both sexes. Item 4, the value of college catalogs, received the highest means, 2.78 for males and 2.95 for females.

Item 5, college brochures and other such publications; Item 6, personal letters from faculty members; and Item 7, advertisements in news media all received mean responses of less than 2.60. Chi-square for these items ranged from a low of 2.95 for Item 7 to a high of 8.713 for Item 6. Since these values for all four items are below the critical value of chi-square, no significant difference in the responses of males and females was found for these items. These items of the hypothesis are retained.

Items 8 and 9, concerning the importance of high quality instruction and high quality instructors,
respectively, did not produce data to indicate that students considered them significant factors in formulating a college choice. The highest mean of the groups was 3.27, which was produced by responses of males for a strong instructional program. The chi-square for Item 8 was 1.327 and for Item 9 was .840. These low values strongly indicate that both sexes agreed concerning the relative unimportance of both items. These items of Hypothesis 2 are retained.

Item 10, which addressed the importance of the colleges' history of success in intercollegiate sports, received a mean of only 2.53 from male respondents. Females rated the item even lower, with a mean of 2.22. A chi-square of 5.495 confirmed general agreement between the two groups. This item of the hypothesis is retained.

Item 11 received almost the same average value from each sex, 3.59 from males and 3.60 from females. These means for Item 11, which concerns the importance of the availability of specific programs of study, indicated that this item had considerable importance to each group. In addition, a chi-square of 3.681 indicated no significant difference in the way males and females regarded this item. This item of the hypothesis is retained.

There was virtually no difference in the responses given by males and females to Item 12, concerning the importance of the cost of attending college. Males' mean of 4.05 and females' mean of 4.12 were among the highest means
produced by respondents, indicating the high degree of importance placed on this item. A chi-square of 3.093 resulted from analysis of these data. This item of the hypothesis is retained.

When asked to evaluate the importance of financial aid (Item 13), the two groups responded somewhat differently. Responses of females had a mean of 3.86, while responses of males had a much lower mean of 3.33. A statistical comparison of data provided a chi-square of 16.285, confirming that a significant difference exists in how males and females view this item. This item of the hypothesis is rejected.

The availability of on-campus housing (Item 14) did not appear to be important to either group of respondents. Males' responses averaged 2.59 and females' responses averaged 2.62. Comparison of the data yielded a chi-square of 6.325. There is no significant difference in the importance of this item to the two groups of respondents; therefore the item is retained.

The importance of the size of the college (Item 15) and the size of individual classes (Item 16), was viewed somewhat differently by the two groups. Males' responses had means of 3.59 for Item 15 and 3.55 for Item 16. Females responded with an average of 3.76 for Item 15 and 3.79 for Item 16. Further comparison yielded a chi-square of 10.916 for Item 15 and 13.758 for Item 16. These results indicate that males and females did not place similar values on the
importance of these two items. Items 15 and 16 of Hypothesis 2 are rejected.

Item 17 was not considered to be important by either male or female respondents. Responses of males gave it a mean of 2.43 and those of females gave it 2.57. A comparison of data provided by the two groups revealed a chi-square of 1.986. There was no apparent difference in the way each group of respondents viewed the importance of this item. This item of the hypothesis is retained.

Items 18, 19, and 20 all concerned the importance of the characteristics of the college campus itself. Item 18 compared attitudes about the importance of the physical attractiveness of the campus. Since the average response was below 2.85 for each sex, this was not an important item. Item 19 asked respondents to establish the importance of the geographical location of the campus. Both groups considered this item to be very important, with an average value of 3.93 for males and 4.24 for females. Item 20, the friendly atmosphere on campus, was also somewhat important to both groups. In response to this item, males produced a mean of 3.49 and females produced 3.69. Chi-squares for these three items were 2.003 for Item 18, 9.001 for Item 19, and 5.034 for Item 20. These values indicate no significant difference in the attitudes of the two groups to any of the three items. All three items of this hypothesis are retained.
Hypothesis 3

A total of 296 students completed useable questionnaires for this portion of the survey. Of that total, 212 respondents (71.6 percent) were under twenty-five years of age, and 84 (28.4 percent) were twenty-five years old and older. In discussions about these two groups, students under twenty-five years of age are referred to as younger students or respondents, and those twenty-five years old or older are referred to as older students.

Table 7 presents means and chi-squares for each of the twenty items studied under this hypothesis. In response to Item 1, the influence of parents, the two groups gave somewhat different responses. Older students produced a mean of 2.17, and younger students responded with a mean of 3.26. When tested statistically, the data yielded a chi-square of 31.761, indicating a significant difference in the way younger students and older students viewed this item. This item of the hypothesis is rejected.

Items 2 and 3 evaluated the importance of two potentially influential groups upon college choice: high school counselors and close friends. An analysis of responses given by responding students indicated that neither of these influences was significant to either set of respondents. The highest average response by either group was 2.56, given by younger students to Item 3. A comparison of the responses to Item 2 gave a chi-square of 4.131, and those for Item
TABLE 7

MEANS AND CHI-SQUARE SCORES DETERMINED IN COMPARISON OF OLDER AND YOUNGER STUDENTS' REASONS FOR SELECTING A COLLEGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean (Older)</th>
<th>Mean (Younger)</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
</tr>
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<td>2.81</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>2.507</td>
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<td>1.73</td>
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</tr>
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<td>2.93</td>
<td>15.834*</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2.88</td>
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<td>3.93</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
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<td>3.64</td>
<td>2.102</td>
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*Item rejected; value of chi-square is above the critical value of 9.488.
3 gave a chi-square of .355. Both of these items of Hypothesis 3 are retained.

Responses to Items 4 and 5 indicated that college publications—catalogs and program brochures—did not have profound influence on college choice. Means for these items ranged from a high of 3.03 by older students for Item 4 to 2.44 by the same group for Item 5. An analysis of all responses to these two items by both groups yielded chi-squares of 6.225 for Item 4 and 2.507 for Item 5. Both of these items of the hypothesis are retained.

Personal correspondence from instructors (Item 6) proved unimportant to both groups of respondents. However, the groups differed in the degree to which the item was unimportant. Younger students gave it a mean value of 2.51, while older responses gave it a very low 1.73. A chi-square of 16.111 resulted from a comparison of these data. This item of the hypothesis is rejected.

Item 7, advertisements in news media, also was unimportant to both groups of students, with older students averaging 1.96 and younger students averaging 2.04. A chi-square of 5.22 indicated that the two groups agreed on this item. This item of the hypothesis is retained.

The reputation of the colleges' instructional programs (Item 8) and the high quality of instructors (Item 9) both held some value to respondents. Older students' responses gave means of 3.45 for Item 8 and 3.32 for Item 9. Younger
students' answers gave lower means of 3.06 and 2.93 for the same two items, indicating that these two items were less important for this group. The indication that the two groups viewed these items differently was confirmed by chi-squares of 15.166 for Item 8 and 15.834 for Item 9. Both items of the hypothesis are rejected.

Also rejected with a chi-square of 19.204 was Item 10, the influence of the colleges' past success in intercollegiate athletics. Younger students gave this item a mean of 2.59 and older students gave it 1.67. While neither group considered this an important factor, there were considerable differences in their responses.

Responses to Item 11 indicated that both groups selected colleges because of the availability of specific programs of study. Older students appeared to place more value on this item, with a mean of 4.09. Younger students saw it as less important, with an average of 3.40. Upon comparison, the data produced a chi-square of 23.942. This item of Hypothesis 3 is rejected.

Item 12, the cost of attending college, was important to both groups of respondents. In response to this item, older students produced a mean of 3.66. Responses of younger students gave a much higher mean of 4.24. A test of independence produced a chi-square of 19.99. This item of the hypothesis is rejected.
Younger and older students agreed on the importance of the availability of financial aid (Item 13). Older students' responses gave it a mean of 3.54, and those of younger ones gave it 3.61. The data that produced these values also produced a chi-square of 2.437. This item of the hypothesis is retained.

Item 14 allowed students to evaluate the importance of the availability of college housing to the college choice process. In assessing this item, older students' answers had a mean of 1.52, while those of younger students had a mean of 2.81. Although both averages were low, indicating a view that this item was unimportant, the two responses were somewhat different. That difference was verified by a chi-square of 24.357. This item of Hypothesis 3 is rejected.

The two groups of respondents also showed difference in the ways they viewed the importance of the size of the school (Item 15) and the size of classes (Item 16). Older students were consistent in their evaluations, producing means of 3.13 for Item 15 and 3.07 for Item 16. Younger students responded with equally consistent means of 3.86 and 3.88 for the two items. As indicated by these values, the size of the institutions and the size of classes were more important to younger students than to older ones. These data produced chi-squares of 16.690 (Item 15) and 27.599
(Item 16). Based on these values of chi-square, both items of this hypothesis are rejected.

Item 17 assessed the importance of the co-ed ratio on campus. Both groups of respondents gave this item low mean scores. However, a chi-square of 6.254 showed that both younger and older students substantially agreed on this item. This item of the hypothesis is retained.

Item 18, the importance of the attractiveness of the college campus, had low mean scores in both groups. Younger students responded with a mean of 2.88 and older ones with a mean of 2.41. A test of data provided a chi-square of 10.633, indicating a difference in the way the two groups regarded the item. This item of the hypothesis is rejected.

The location of the college (Item 19) proved to be one of the most influential items for both groups of respondents. Older students gave it a mean score of 4.47 and younger students gave it a considerably lower, but still significant, average score of 3.93. The value of chi-square, using the available data, was 12.003. Since this value is greater than the critical value of chi-square, this item of the hypothesis is rejected.

Item 20 asked students to evaluate the importance of a friendly atmosphere on campus. Both groups placed a moderately high value on this item; however, neither group gave it a mean score of more than 3.65. A comparison of the data
gave a chi-square of 2.102, so this item of the hypothesis is retained.

Hypothesis 4

A total of 297 students completed useable questionnaires for this portion of the survey. Of that total, 182 (61.3 percent) were students who had chosen university-parallel programs of study. These students are referred to as academic students in this discussion. The remaining 115 students (38.7 percent) were students who had chosen programs of study which would prepare them for entry into the work force within one or two years. These students are referred to as vocational students.

Table 8 presents means and chi-squares for each of the twenty items studied under this hypothesis. Item 1 measured the influence of parents on college choice. In addressing this item, academic and vocational students produced means of 3.35 and 2.50, respectively. When submitted to examination by chi-square, the data yielded a value of 25.388, which confirms that the two groups had substantially different opinions concerning the importance of parental influence. This item of the hypothesis is rejected.

Items 2 and 3 assessed the influence of specific groups other than parents upon the selection process. Item 2, concerning high school counselors, was not an important factor to either group, receiving means of 2.00 from
TABLE 8
MEANS AND CHI-SQUARE SCORES DETERMINED IN COMPARISON OF ACADEMIC AND VOCATIONAL STUDENTS' REASONS FOR SELECTING A COLLEGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean (Academic)</th>
<th>Mean (Vocational)</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
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<td>3.40</td>
<td>5.359</td>
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</table>

*Item rejected; value of chi-square is above the critical value of 9.488.
academic students and 1.74 from those with vocational majors. Item 3, the influence of close friends, got a mean score of 2.70 from academic students and 2.29 from vocational students. When tested by chi-square, Item 2 produced a value of 3.763, and Item 3 gave a value of 9.548. According to these values, there is little difference in the way the two groups view the importance of high school counselors. However, the two groups placed different values on the influence of close friends. Item 2 of Hypothesis 4 is retained, and Item 3 is rejected.

The influence of various sources of information was measured by the next four items. The highest mean score for any of these items (2.93) was produced by responses of vocational students to Item 4, the college catalog. The lowest mean (1.95) came from responses of academic students to Item 7, advertisements in news media. These responses indicate that the three colleges' attempts to communicate with students have not been considered successful by the students. When tested by chi-square, the four items produced various results. Item 4 and Item 6 yielded chi-squares of 20.103 and 14.413 respectively. Based upon the results, Items 4 and 6 of this hypothesis are rejected and Items 5 and 7, with chi-squares of 5.771 and 3.530, are retained.

The presence of strong instructional programs (Item 8) and the high quality of faculty (Item 9) held little
importance for the two groups of respondents. Academic students produced means of 3.14 for Item 8 and 2.99 for Item 9, and vocational students produced slightly higher means of 3.22 and 3.12 for the same items. A test of independence yielded chi-squares of 3.321 for Item 8 and 3.855 for Item 9. Based upon these values, vocational and academic students placed similar values on Items 8 and 9 as college selection criteria. Both items of the hypothesis are retained.

The colleges' history of success in intercollegiate sports (Item 10) was unimportant to both vocational and academic students. However, an examination of mean scores revealed 1.95 for vocational students and 2.63 for academic students. The difference in these means was confirmed by a chi-square of 14.732. This item of the hypothesis is rejected.

The availability of specific programs of study (Item 11) was relatively important to both academic and vocational respondents. Academic students responded with a mean of 3.46 and vocational students with a mean of 3.80. Although both values were well above the undecided category, they differed considerably. The difference in these values was evidenced by a chi-square of 12.210. There was a significant difference in how students responded to this item. This item of the hypothesis is rejected.

The findings regarding Item 12, the costs of college
groups of respondents found this item to be important, there was considerable difference in the degree of importance. While academic students gave Item 12 a mean of 4.28, vocational students gave a lower value of 3.77. The data that yielded these results also yielded a chi-square of 17.524. The data indicate that academic and vocational students did not place similar importance on this item. This item of Hypothesis 4 is rejected.

Both groups of respondents recognized the value of the availability of financial aid programs (Item 13) to their college selection process. Vocational students gave this item a mean score of 3.40, and academic students responded with a somewhat higher value of 3.71. The comparison of these data by chi-square yielded a value of 4.026, indicating no significant difference in how the two groups viewed this item. This item of the hypothesis is retained.

Item 14, the availability of on-campus housing, was not considered an important selection criterion by either vocational or academic respondents. Vocational students gave this item an average response of 1.96, and academic respondents gave it 2.86, almost one whole point higher. When given a test of independence, a chi-square of 16.947 was produced. Since there were differences in the importance of this item to the groups under comparison, this item of Hypothesis 4 is rejected.
Academic and vocational students expressed major disagreement on the importance of Item 15, the small size of the school, and Item 16, the availability of small classes. For academic students, the means of both items were slightly over 4.00. For vocational students, the means were slightly over 3.00. This difference of almost one point represents a major difference of opinion concerning these items, a difference that was supported by chi-squares of 27.139 for Item 15 and 33.741 for Item 16. Both items of Hypothesis 4 are rejected.

As with other groups, these respondents saw no importance in the co-ed ratio on campus (Item 17). Academic and vocational students averaged 2.59 and 2.33 respectively. In addition, a chi-square of 4.276 supported the hypothesis that no significant difference existed in the importance of this item. This item of the hypothesis is retained.

Academic respondents indicated that the physical attractiveness of the campus (Item 18) held little importance to them, showing a mean of 2.94. Vocational students considered it even less important, showing a mean of 2.46. This difference of opinion concerning the item—significant only in degree—was supported by a chi-square of 10.316. This item of Hypothesis 4 is rejected.

Item 19, the location of the college close to home, was important to both groups of students, as each group gave it means of over 4.00. A chi-square of 8.094, which is below
the critical value of chi-square, indicated no significant difference in the way the two groups regarded this item. This item of the hypothesis is retained.

Academic and vocational students valued a friendly atmosphere on campus. This item, Item 20, received means of 3.71 and 3.40 from academic and vocational students respectively. The data that produced these averages also produced a chi-square of 4.359, indicating that the two groups placed approximately equal importance on this item. This item of the hypothesis is retained.

Hypothesis 5

A total of 297 students completed useable questionnaires for this portion of the survey. Of that total, 247 (83.2 percent) were full-time students, defined as students having twelve semester hours of work or more. The remaining 50 students (16.8 percent) were part-time students, those taking fewer than twelve semester hours of work. Table 9 presents means and chi-squares for the twenty items studied.

The first three items of the questionnaire sought to determine the influence of specific individuals or groups of individuals on students' college selection processes. Item 1, the influence of parents, held little importance for either part-time or full-time students, whose responses produced means of 3.21 and 3.02 respectively. Item 2, the influence of high school counselors, exhibited no importance
### Table 9

**Means and Chi-Square Scores Determined in Comparison of Full-Time and Part-Time Students' Reasons for Selecting a College**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean (Full-Time)</th>
<th>Mean (Part-Time)</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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*Item rejected; value of chi-square is above the critical value of 9.488.
to the two groups of respondents. Part-time respondents' answers had a mean of 2.07 compared to 1.90 for full-time students. Item 3 examined the influence of close friends. In response to this item, part-time students averaged 2.86 and full-time students averaged 2.50.

Based on these findings, none of the three items was a significantly important factor in students' efforts to choose a college to attend. Statistical tests using chi-square to compare data submitted by the two groups provided values of 5.329 for Item 1, 5.677 for Item 2, and 11.027 for Item 3. Item 3 was the only item that exceeded the critical value of chi-square. Therefore, Items 1 and 2 are retained, and Item 3 is rejected in this hypothesis.

Items 4 through 7 are similar in that they concern the importance of the colleges' various means of attempting to communicate with students. Of these items, Item 7, advertisements in news media, was least important to both groups of respondents. Part-time respondents gave it a mean response of 2.27 and full-time respondents gave it 1.98. Item 4, information in the college catalog, was most important. Part-time respondents gave it a mean response of 3.13, and full-time respondents gave it 2.82. Responses to Item 5, college brochures and other such literature, and Item 6, personal letters from instructors, were below 2.60. These low mean scores indicate that none of these items was considered of value to the respondents in the college
selection process. Statistical tests of these items produced chi-squares of 4.760 for Item 4, 2.176 for Item 5, 8.448 for Item 6, and 3.931 for Item 7. All these values are smaller than the critical value of chi-square. According to these data, part-time and full-time students had no significant differences in their views on the importance of these four items. These items of Hypothesis 5 are retained.

The strength of the colleges' instructional programs (Item 8) and the quality of the instructional staffs (Item 9) were somewhat important to both part-time and full-time respondents, slightly more so to part-time students. The highest mean (3.50) came from part-time students in response to Item 8. Chi-squares of 5.782 (Item 8) and 7.556 (Item 9) indicated no significant differences in the importance of these items for full-time and part-time students. Both items of the hypothesis are retained.

Item 10, the reputation of the college in intercollegiate sports, held no importance to either group of respondents. Part-time respondents gave this item a mean score of 1.97, and full-time respondents gave it 2.45. A comparison of data using chi-square yielded a value of 8.965, slightly below the critical value of chi-square. This item of the hypothesis is retained.

The availability of specific programs of study (Item 11) was important to both groups, as part-time respondents gave an average score of 3.87, and their full-time
counterparts gave it a 3.54. The comparison of data provided by all respondents yielded a chi-square of 2.917. Since this value is well below the critical value of chi-square, the two groups of respondents placed similar values on the importance of this item. This item of Hypothesis 5 is retained.

Both groups of respondents found the basic cost of college attendance (Item 12) to be an important college selection criterion. Both academic and vocational respondents gave answers producing means of approximately 4.00. However, a test of independence yielded a value of 10.219. These data seem to be contradictory; however, closer examination indicates different distribution patterns in the data accumulated for each group. This item of the hypothesis is rejected.

Item 13, the availability of financial aid, proved to be much more important to full-time students than to those attending part-time. Part-time students responded with a mean of 3.12, but full-time student responses had a mean of 3.66. When compared, the data yielded a chi-square of 10.835, indicating differences in the way the two groups viewed this item. This item of the hypothesis is rejected.

The availability of college housing was not important to the respondents, as both groups produced means of less than 3.00. A test of independence produced a chi-square of 8.884, suggesting that full-time and part-time students had
similar opinions concerning the importance of this item in their college choice. This item is retained.

According to responses, full-time and part-time students held identical opinions concerning the importance of the small size of the school (Item 15) and the availability of small classes (Item 16). Full-time respondents produced a mean of 3.59 for Item 15 and 3.63 for Item 16. Responses of part-time students had a mean of 3.68 for each item. When tested for independence, the data yielded chi-squares of 3.089 for Item 15 and 5.918 for Item 16. Both items of Hypothesis 5 are retained.

The two groups of respondents also agreed on the co-ed ratio on campus (Item 17), which was found to be unimportant as a factor in the college selection process. Part-time students gave this item a mean of 2.39, and those attending full-time responded with an average of 2.51. When compared statistically, the data supplied by each group yielded a chi-square of 1.698, which is well below the critical value of chi-square. This item of the hypothesis is retained.

Item 18, the attractiveness of the campus, was considered inconsequential by both groups of respondents. Part-time and full-time student responses had almost identical means of 2.79 and 2.78, respectively. A chi-square of .741 supports the hypothesis that no difference exists. This item of the hypothesis is retained.
The location of the college (Item 19) remained as important to these two groups of respondents as it was to most of the other groups. It was slightly more important to part-time students than to full-time students. The former produced a mean of 4.33 and the latter a mean of 4.03. These averages were among the highest given for any of the twenty items. A test of independence yielded a chi-square of only 2.365, which is less than the critical value of chi-square. This item of the hypothesis is retained.

Item 20, a friendly atmosphere on campus, held considerable importance to students. Full-time students responded with a mean of 3.61 and part-time students with 3.59. When compared, the data yielded a chi-square of 3.524. These data indicate no significant differences in the two groups' value of this item as a criterion for college choice. This item of the hypothesis is retained.

The third part of the questionnaire was the narrative portion, in which respondents were given the opportunity to address items that were considered important. The major purposes of this part were to allow students to identify college selection criteria which were not included in the twenty items in Part II, to allow students to assess the overall worth of their colleges, and to allow them to make recommendations that would make their colleges better institutions.
At Vernon Regional Junior College, 52 percent of the respondents made comments in the narrative portion of the questionnaire. However, instead of providing new information, almost all respondents restated opinions previously identified in Part II.

An examination of comments made by students from Vernon Regional Junior College shows that 33 percent of the respondents emphasized the importance of the location of the college, and 25 percent recognized the importance of college costs. Other factors identified as important were the high quality of instructors (23 percent), the small size of the school (15 percent), the success of athletic programs (13 percent), the availability of specific instructional programs (12 percent), and the high quality of those programs (10 percent). While these responses provided little new information about college choice, they did reinforce the responses made in Part II.

Students on the Vernon campus offered few suggestions to make the school a better institution. Most suggestions did not address instruction specifically but suggested changes in extracurricular programs. For example, several respondents suggested either generally expanded athletic programs or the addition of specific programs in women's athletics. The few students who made suggestions concerning curricular matters suggested the addition of more night
classes and the adoption of more hands-on approaches to laboratories.

Sixty-five percent of the respondents from Clarendon College completed Part III of the questionnaire. One characteristic of the students from Clarendon that differed from the students from the other two colleges was their extreme loyalty to Clarendon. While an occasional student from the other schools addressed such loyalty, many of those from Clarendon did so.

Like students from Vernon Regional Junior College, those from Clarendon reaffirmed many opinions expressed in Part II of the questionnaire. The small size of the institution was the favorable characteristic most frequently mentioned by Clarendon students, as 17 percent listed this item. Other influences that were identified as important were the high quality of instructors (15 percent), the location of the school (13 percent), a friendly atmosphere on the campus (13 percent), and the availability of specific programs of instruction (13 percent). Somewhat surprisingly, the availability of small classes and the cost of attendance received relatively little mention; only 6 percent of the respondents chose these two factors.

Very few reasons for attending the school other than those previously identified were mentioned by these respondents. However, some students stated that the availability of both academic and athletic scholarships was a factor.
Several students mentioned that family traditions of parents and siblings attending the college in the past were important to their decisions to attend. Still others cited the presence of a strong, traditional rodeo club (an extracurricular activity, not an academic or athletic program on this campus) as a strong inducement.

Clarendon College students had several recommendations for change. Like those from Vernon students, most recommendations concerned extracurricular activities rather than academic programs. Several of these recommendations indicated that Clarendon students felt a conflict between a love of their small school and a dissatisfaction with the small town in which the school is located. Many students identified a need to expand the activities program on campus to provide entertainment and recreation not available in the small town of Clarendon.

While several students recommended that the present practice of awarding scholarships for basketball be suspended, others recommended that other scholarship sports be added to the existing program. Finally, numerous students expressed the desire that the existing rodeo club be expanded into a scholarship-supported, intercollegiate rodeo program.

The few suggestions or recommendations which concerned academic programs included more night, summer, and
off-campus classes to be offered. Also, there were requests for more vocational courses and programs.

Thirty-six percent of the respondents from Grayson College completed Part III of the questionnaire. As with both Vernon and Clarendon Colleges, most responses on Part III of the questionnaire merely reinforced opinions expressed on Part II.

The most frequently listed reason for attending Grayson College was the convenience of its location. This factor was listed by 39 percent of those expressing a view. Other influences that were identified as important were the availability of programs (28 percent), the cost of attendance (14 percent), the availability of financial aid (14 percent), the high quality of instructors (11 percent), and a friendly atmosphere on campus (11 percent).

Students at Grayson College suggested several changes to improve the school. One recommendation, which was suggested by several students, was the addition of recreational opportunities. Another suggestion was that the school make better use of special programs, such as the Job Training Partnership Act and the Single Parents' Program. A few students also recommended expansion of the school's scholarship athletic program, including the addition of intercollegiate football. Finally, students recommended an intensified effort to advertise the school and its programs.
CHAPTER V

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

Findings

Using the hypotheses as guidelines, the following findings were identified in this study.

1. The subjects from all three colleges found the following influences important to their college selection process: the availability of specific courses of study, the cost of attendance, the availability of financial aid programs, the small size of the colleges, the availability of small classes, the location of the colleges, and a friendly atmosphere on campus.

2. A comparison of the influences on college choice between whites and minority respondents revealed significant differences in these students' appraisal of the importance of the influence of close friends, the past success of the college in intercollegiate athletics, the cost of attendance, and the location of the college.

3. A comparison of the influences on college choice between male and female respondents revealed significant differences in students' opinions of the importance of high
school counselors, the availability of financial aid pro-
grams, the small size of the college, the availability of
small classes, and the co-ed ratios on campus.

4. A comparison of the influences on college choice
between students under twenty-five years of age and those
twenty-five years old and older revealed significant differ-
ences in their opinions regarding the influence of parents,
personal letters from instructors, availability of strong
instructional programs, the reputation of instructors, the
past success of the college in intercollegiate athletics,
the availability of specific instructional programs, the
cost of attendance, the availability of college housing, the
small size of the schools, the availability of small
classes, the attractiveness of the campuses, and the loca-
tion of the colleges.

5. A comparison of the influences on college choice
between university-bound students and vocational students
revealed significant differences in student attitudes toward
the categories of parents, close friends, information in the
college catalog, personal letters from instructors, the past
success of the college in intercollegiate athletics, the
availability of specific instructional programs, the cost of
attendance, the availability of college housing, the small
size of the school, the availability of small classes, and
the attractiveness of the campus.
6. A comparison of the influences on college choice between full-time and part-time students revealed significant differences in students' opinions of the importance of close friends, the cost of attendance and the availability of financial aid.

Conclusions

Using the findings as guidelines, the following conclusions were drawn from the study.

1. Based upon this study, it can be concluded that different groups of students have different reasons for attending colleges. These differences do much to determine whether specific groups attend a particular college, whether these students are satisfied with their selections, and whether they are successful at their colleges of choice. With a thorough understanding of the needs of different groups of students, colleges can more successfully satisfy the needs of their student populations.

2. It can be further concluded that, in order to serve the needs of currently enrolled students and to successfully compete for a decreasing number of traditional high school graduates, small rural community colleges must be able to identify special groups of students and to fill their needs.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made as a result of the findings and conclusions of this study.
1. The information gathered in this study should be used in the formulation of future marketing plans at the schools studied. As new marketing plans are developed, the needs and interests of special groups of potential students should be recognized and addressed. In this process, all forms of college communication with students should be studied closely to identify and correct the weaknesses perceived by several groups of students. In an effort to attract students who might benefit from attendance at a small rural community college, these colleges should emphasize the school characteristics found most desirable by most groups of students. Special recruitment plans should be developed for certain targeted groups, such as older students and racial minorities.

2. The information gathered in this study should be made available to other community colleges in North Texas.

3. This study should be replicated using different groups of college students. For example, the following groups might be considered: adult vocational students, students in various age groups (thirty-five to forty-four years old, forty-five to fifty-four years old, etc.), vocational students in certificate programs, black students, Hispanic students, Asian students, and students in developmental programs. Certain ones of these groups could be compared with each other and with groups included in the original study.
4. The study should be replicated using high school seniors as research subjects.

5. The study should be replicated on a yearly basis at each of the three participating colleges. Record of the studies should be maintained and compared over several years to determine possible trends and changes.

6. Small rural community colleges in the Southwest should form a more effective network to share information about recruitment, retention, and other topics relevant to this study.
APPENDIX
QUESTIONNAIRE
Student Choice of College

The purpose of this study is to determine the major factors which influence students' choice of colleges. A thorough understanding of these factors will allow college officials to expand and improve services to students. Please help us by providing accurate, honest, complete responses to each of the items on this questionnaire. Although the results of this survey will be compiled and published, individual questionnaires will be handled with strict confidentiality.

Part I. General Information. Please provide the following information which will allow a comparison of students by category.

a. College name and location______________________________

b. Your sex: ___Male ___Female

c. What is your age? _____

d. What is your class load?
   ____Fewer than 12 semester hours
   ____12 semester hours or more

e. To which ethnic group do you belong?
   ____Caucasian (white)
   ____Black
   ____Hispanic
   ____American Indian
   ____Asian
   ____Other (specify)______________________________

f. What is your college major?______________________________

Part II. Survey Items. Each of the following items is written as a positive statement. Please respond to each one according to how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement. Please read each statement carefully, think about it, and then respond by circling the number that best represents your preferred response. The following responses are possible: 5, Strongly Agree (SA); 4, Agree (A); 3, Undecided (U); 2, Disagree (D); 1, Strongly Disagree (SD); N/A, does not apply.
1. My parents influenced my decision to attend this college.

2. My high school counselor influenced my decision to attend this college.

3. My close friends influenced my decision to attend this college.

4. Information in the college catalog influenced my decision to attend this college.

5. Other college literature, such as program brochures, influenced my decision to attend this college.

6. Personal letters from instructors influenced my decision to attend this college.

7. Advertisements in news media influenced my decision to attend this college.

8. The college's reputation for having a strong instructional program influenced my decision to attend this college.

9. The high quality of instructors influenced my decision to attend this college.

10. The past success of the college in inter-collegiate athletics influenced my decision to attend this college.

11. The availability of specific courses of study (programs) influenced my decision to attend this college.

12. The low cost of tuition and fees influenced my decision to attend this college.

13. The availability of financial aid (Pell Grants, work-study, scholarships, student loans, etc) influenced my decision to attend this college.
14. The availability of on-campus housing (dorms) influenced my decision to attend this college. 5 4 3 2 1 N/A

15. The small size of the school influenced my decision to attend this college. 5 4 3 2 1 N/A

16. The availability of small classes influenced my decision to attend this college. 5 4 3 2 1 N/A

17. The co-ed ratio (ratio of men-to-women) influenced my decision to attend this college. 5 4 3 2 1 N/A

18. The attractiveness of the campus influenced my decision to attend this college. 5 4 3 2 1 N/A

19. The location of this college near my home (hometown) influenced my decision to attend this college. 5 4 3 2 1 N/A

20. The friendly atmosphere on this campus influenced my decision to attend this college. 5 4 3 2 1 N/A

Part III. Comments. In the following space, make any comments concerning factors which attracted you to this college, or make any recommendations that you believe would make this college more attractive to students. Please continue on the back of this page, if necessary.


May, Joe, Executive Dean of Instruction, Vernon Regional Junior College. 1988. Interview by author.


Shirley, Phil, Dean of Instruction, Clarendon College. 1988. Interview by author.


