Factors and Influences Contributing to the College Selection Decision of High Achieving High School Seniors

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Abstract
The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of how high achieving high school seniors navigate the college search process and ultimately make a decision to attend a particular institution. Specifically, it considered how institutional reputation contributes within the search process and how students consider the influence of others such as parents, friends, etc. Students enrolled in AP or Honors courses at three private and one charter school in southwestern Indiana were administered the College Exploration Questionnaire (CEQ) in the final weeks of their senior year. The CEQ measured the level of importance students placed on various academic and non-academic factors of college. It also identified the top three reasons why a student selected a public or private institution. Based on a sample of 114 students, 67% indicated they planned to attend a public institution and 33% a private institution. Both groups placed the highest degree of importance on the quality of the academic program and identified it as the number one reason for selecting a particular institution. However, further analysis of the data revealed that students selecting private colleges placed a higher level of importance on three academic elements associated with academic quality: student/faculty ratio, international emphasis in the curriculum, and academic support services. In addition, students selecting private colleges placed a higher level of importance on the values promoted by the institution than those promoted by their counterparts. Students selecting public institutions considered cost to be more important in their final decision and also placed a higher value of importance on location, winning athletic programs, and their friends' opinions of the institution. This research found that students selecting public and private institutions place varying degrees of importance on elements comprising institutional reputation. It also found that the opinion of their peers was significantly more important to students choosing public institutions than those choosing privates. This information can be helpful to enrollment managers and higher education marketers as recruitment and marketing plans are developed for both types of institutions.

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(5) High school vocational courses in a vocational area are influential in student decisions to enter vocational teacher education in that area; this influence varies significantly among
vocational areas.

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