

Education Students as Consumers: Choice of a University Education

BEVERLY J. PAIN*

ABSTRACT

This study examined the university student-institutional relationship within a consumer behavior framework, which portrays the student as a consumer of the educational services offered by a university. The research examined some of the characteristics of full-time university students registered in the College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, and selected aspects of the decision process employed by these students when they made the decision to attend university for the academic year under study. Students did search for information, with the amount of search declining from first through fourth year. University students were the most used source of information. The most used evaluative criteria were the college program and previous investment in the program. No students felt that someone else had made the decision for them and approximately 68% were satisfied, at the end of the academic year, with their decision to attend.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude porte sur l'étudiant d'université et ses relations institutionnelles en tant que consommateur. Elle dépeint l'étudiant comme un consommateur de services éducationnels offerts par une université. Cette recherche examine quelques caractéristiques des étudiants à plein temps inscrits au Collège d'Éducation à l'Université de Saskatchewan, ainsi que certains aspects de leur processus décisionnel au moment de s'inscrire à l'université pendant l'année choisie pour cette étude. Les étudiants recherchaient en effet de l'information, dans une proportion décroissante cependant de la première année à la quatrième année. Les étudiants d'université ont été la source d'information la plus importante. Les critères d'évaluation les plus utilisés étaient le programme du collège et leur engagement antérieur dans ce programme. Aucun étudiant ne pensait que quelqu'un d'autre avait pris la décision à sa place et environ 68% étaient satisfaits, à la fin de cette année universitaire, de leur décision de s'inscrire.

*College of Home Economics, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 0W0

In the past decade there has been a change in the traditional student-institutional relationship (Huddleston, 1980; Stark, 1977). In the traditional relationship the educational industry received overwhelming support and little public criticism. The service offered was assumed to be desirable (Stark, Davidson, Leahy, & Gschwender, 1977) and generally the students accepted the service as something they should consume (Kotler, 1975).

Fissures in the traditional relationship developed in the 1960s, a period characterized by student unrest, changes in family life styles and social values (Huddleston, 1980), and the general growth of the consumerism movement (Packer, 1980). These fissures deepened through the 1970s, a decade during which there was tremendous growth in the educational industry and a subsequent increase in postsecondary educational options (Chapman & Gill, 1981; Halstead, 1979; Packer, 1978). This growth of options coincided with, among other factors, a diminishing number of high school graduates (Centra, 1980; Nielson, 1980; Packer, 1980). These factors coupled with many other such dynamic factors have been described by Lucas (1979) as unprecedented in our history, have all contributed to the severing of many of the traditional student-institutional ties.

Since 1973 the "student as consumer" has received a great deal of attention and support from various segments in our society (Halliburton, 1978; Moye, 1977; Packer, 1978; Swagler, 1978; Stark & Griffith, 1979). This terminology portrays a student engaging in an exchange process with an educational institution. This designation recognizes the reciprocity of the new relationship which is being forged between the student and the institution. Given the current state of education it is important to consider the student from the relatively new perspective as a consumer engaged in an exchange process with an educational institution, thereby providing institutions with an alternative mode in which to examine and redefine the student-institutional relationship. Two research studies within a Canadian context which have utilized this new perspective are those reported by Church and Gellingham (1985) and Pain (1984).

To better understand this new relationship it is necessary to have some knowledge of both the students who are engaging in this exchange relationship today and the process by which these students make their decision to attend a particular postsecondary educational institution. The purpose of this study was to examine the current student-institutional relationship within a consumer behavior framework, with the Engel-Kollat-Blackwell (EKB) Theory of Consumer of Behavior (Engel, Blackwell & Kollat, 1978) providing the conceptual framework for the research. The EKB model of consumer behavior highlights the decision-making process. This decision-making process is based on John Dewey's steps in problem solving (Engel, Blackwell & Kollat, 1978). This process identifies the stages of problem recognition, search, alternative evaluation, choice, and outcomes.

This research examined some of the characteristics of university students and their decision-making process through the conceptualization of the student as consumer. As this approach is very broad in context, the study focused on three

stages of consumer decision-making: search; alternative evaluation; and outcomes. Students were categorized by year of enrollment in the program in which they were registered, and each year of enrollment was considered as a separate exchange process. Relationships between these stages of consumer decision-making and year of enrollment in the program were examined to determine if the process of decision-making was the same for each year or if it differed by year of enrollment. This paper focuses on a part of this study which examined the students who were consumers of the educational service offered by the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

METHODOLOGY

Data for the study was collected during March and April, 1982 via a questionnaire which was developed for the study. The questionnaire was constructed based on the relevant literature and research findings which pertained to the selected aspects of the decision process which were designated for exploration in this study. The questions relating to the demographic data were incorporated whenever possible in the form utilized by the office of Institutional Planning, University of Alberta, in their student characteristics questionnaire, which was designed for use with full-time undergraduates (Davidson & Bryan, 1980). The decision to maintain the same format whenever possible was made in collaboration with P.R. Davidson in the interest of developing demographic profiles of commonalities and differences of students in their respective colleges (faculties) on the two campuses. The population for the study consisted of all full-time undergraduates at the College of Education, University of Saskatchewan who were in residence during March and April, 1982.

Due to technical difficulties involved in accessing names of students by year of enrollment, the initial intention of using a random sample of students by year of enrollment was abandoned, and replaced by intact classes which were considered to be core classes. The questionnaire was administered by the researcher in 27 classes during March and April, 1982. The respondents (N = 514) represented 33% of the total population of full-time students.

Data analyses were accomplished using the *Statistical Package for the Social Science* (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner, & Bent, 1975) and included descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage distributions), cross-tabulations and chi-square, and discriminant analysis.

RESULTS

Student Characteristics

Age and sex. The age range was 18–54 years of age with 87.6% of the respondents in the 18–24 years of age classification. As one might expect, there was a significant difference in the age classifications by year of enrollment. The majority (82.7%) of students in the study were female.

Marital status, children and child care. The breakdown by marital status indicated that 86.0% were single, 11.1% were married or living common-law and 2.9% had been previously married. The first year students had the lowest percentage of marrieds and the fourth years the largest percentage. Of the respondents 5.3% had children that were classified as dependent, and 9.8% had some child care responsibilities.

Grade 12 average. The majority of students (89.4%) had grade 12 averages of 70% and above with 48.1% of the students entering with averages of 80% and over. There was no significant difference in students' grade 12 averages by year of enrollment.

Entry. Over half of the students in first (62.3%) and second (54.3%) year entered university the year they completed their grade 12. For the first year students 82.1% entered within a year of completing grade 12. Due to the categories utilized in the study the same degree of accuracy cannot be obtained for the upper years.

Size of high school attended, size of area lived in during high school and distance of permanent residence from University of Saskatchewan. The size of high school classifications used in the study corresponded to those used by Pain (Wagner, 1975). The classifications for area size were based on the size of cities classifications utilized by the Government of Saskatchewan Highways and Transportation Department for up to 5,000 population and the over 5,000 breakdown on actual city size. Distance classifications were established to approximate travel times by car to the university with consideration given for travel time within the city: 0–39 km for travel time up to one hour; 40–119 km for travel time up to 2 hours; 120–239 km for travel time between one quarter and one half day; 240–559 km for one half to one full day; and 560 km and over to represent long distance travel. These results were presented in Table 1. There was no significant difference by year of enrollment.

Accommodation. The self-contained rental unit provided accommodation for 57% of the students, the parental home for 19.5%, and room and board accommodation for 13.2%. Approximately half (49.2%) of the students shared their accommodation with other university students. There was a significant difference by year of enrollment with only 35.1% of the fourth years sharing accommodation.

Gross income. Not all students reported their gross income (N = 499). Incomes of under \$7,000 were reported by 80.0% of the students with 70.7% of the students reporting incomes of under \$5,000.

Sources of funding. Parents were the most used single source of funding with 65.4% of the students receiving some of their funding from parents. Approximately one third (32.3%) received at least half of their total funding from parents. The second most used source was savings (utilized by 57.6%) followed by employment between university sessions (44.4%), government student loan (25.7%), employment outside University of Saskatchewan while attending

Table 1
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of
Distance of Permanent Residence from U.
of S., Size of Area Lived in During High
School, and Size of High School Attended

Characteristics	Descriptive Statistics	
	N	%
<u>Distance of Permanent Residence from U. of S.</u>		
0 - 39 Km (0-24 miles)	192	37.4
40 - 119 Km (25- 74 miles)	38	7.4
120 - 239 Km (75-149 miles)	90	17.5
240 - 559 Km (150-349 miles)	168	32.7
560 Km + (350 miles +)	25	4.9
TOTAL	513	100.0
<u>Size of Area Student Lived in During High School</u>		
Under 250	94	18.4
250 - 999	71	13.9
1,000 - 4,999	103	20.2
5,000 - 9,999	19	3.7
10,000 - 24,999	69	13.5
25,000 - 99,999	37	7.3
100,000 +	117	22.9
TOTAL	510	100.0
<u>Size of High School Attended</u>		
299 and under	173	34.5
300 - 599	127	25.3
600 - 999	63	12.5
1,000 and over	133	26.5
Other	6	1.2
TOTAL	502	100.0

(19.8%), scholarship or bursary (24.3%), and employment at the University of Saskatchewan while attending (12.8%). The parents were also the largest single source of funding, accounting for 30.6% of the total funding of the students followed by savings which accounted for 19.6%, employment between university sessions with 17.7%, government student loans with 10.5%, employment outside the university while attending with 5.8%, and scholarship/bursary with 4.6%.

Parents' education and occupational status of parents. More students were either able or willing to report the highest educational level and occupational status of their mother compared to their father. These are presented in Table 2.

Parents' social class. To respond to the question regarding what social class the student would place their parents in, students were provided with seven classifications of social class (ranging from upper-upper to lower-lower), a classification to allow students to indicate they did not know where to place their

Table 2
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of
Parental Educational Levels and
Occupational Status

	Father		Mother	
	N	%	N	%
<u>Educational Level</u>				
Grade 6 or less	34	6.9	9	1.8
Grade 7 - 9	142	28.7	83	16.4
Grade 10 - 11	87	17.6	110	21.8
Grade 12	68	13.7	83	16.4
Some Postsecondary	38	7.7	62	12.3
Completed Postsecondary	82	16.6	137	27.1
Some or Completed Postgraduate	44	8.9	21	4.2
TOTAL	495		505	
<u>Occupational Status</u>				
Non-wage Earner	2	.4	187	37.4
Professional/Management	116	24.1	152	30.4
Clerical/Sales/Service	57	11.9	111	22.2
Farming	177	36.8	29	5.8
Self-employed	54	11.2	12	2.4
Trades/Transport	62	12.9	8	1.6
Not Otherwise Classified	13	2.7	1	.2
TOTAL	481		500	

parents, one to indicate that they did not believe that social classes exist, and one open option where the student could write in a response. Twenty-one (4.1%) were non-believers in social class and 15 (2.9%) did not know where to place their parents. The largest classification was middle with 44.0% followed by upper-middle with 33.1%, lower-middle with 8.4%, combined upper classifications with 3.7% and combined lower classifications with 2.5%. Of the 471 students who indicated a social classification for their parents, 88.1% perceived their parents to be middle class or above middle class.

Languages spoken in parental homes. English was the usual language spoken in 96.6% of the parental homes. French was the next most usual language spoken in 2.4% of the parental homes. At least one other language was spoken in 39.0% of the homes with 3.9% indicating that over two languages were spoken. English was spoken in a total of 98.1% of the parental homes, German in 14.3%, Ukrainian in 12.3%, French in 8.9%, Russian in 2.1%, and languages other than the above in 7.0%.

Students' languages. For 97.2% of the students, English was their most fluent language. For languages spoken, other than English: French was spoken by 27.2%, German by 7.4%, Ukrainian by 6.0%, Russian by 0.1%, and languages

other than the above by 3.9% of the students. For languages read, other than English, 34.0% of the students read French, 5.6% read German, 4.9% read Ukrainian, and 2.5% read other languages.

Search

This is the second stage in the decision process. It follows problem recognition in the decision process and it "refers to the process whereby the consumer seeks information to learn about the advantages and disadvantages of the various alternatives to satisfy a problem that has become recognized" (Engel et al., 1978).

First considered the career. There was no significant difference by year of enrollment as to when the students first considered teaching as a career possibility. Prior to grade 9, 11.8% had considered the career, 11.2% considered it first during grades 9–10, 21.4% during grade 11, 27.8% during grade 12, and 18.8% first considered it after leaving high school.

Engaged in search. When the students were asked if they were active in their search for information regarding their decision to attend for the 1981–1982 academic year the majority of students (92.0%) indicated they had been actively involved in search. The type of search differed by year of enrollment and was significant at the .0001 level. More first years engaged in search considered active and very active. This declined through second, third and fourth years, with fourth years having the largest percentage not engaged in search.

Sources of information. Students were questioned as to the source of their information regarding their decision to attend for the 1981–1982 academic year. Twenty-four sources were included with three "other" options provided for the student to specify sources not listed. The mean for the number of sources used was 4.8. There was a significant difference in the number of sources used by year of enrollment. The first years utilized the most sources with a mean use of 7.0 followed by second years with a mean use of 4.3, third years with 3.9, and fourth years with 3.4.

The five most used sources were: university students (used by 64.0%); parents/spouse (used by 56.6%); printed material from the university (used by 55.3%); friends (used by 46.9%); and university faculty (used by 37.9%). To examine the use by year of enrollment the sources of information were subjected to a step-wise discriminant analysis. The results suggest that considerable discriminating power exists in the variables being used (Wilks' lambda = 0.44). Because of the low significance of the chi-square associated with the second function, the analysis was confined to an examination of the first function. The source of high school personnel with a standardized discriminant function coefficient (SDFC) of 0.659 was the most influential source of determining the discrimination among the years of enrollment. This source was used by 73.8% of the first years, followed by 14.9% of the second years, 5.2% of the third years, and 4.1% of the fourth years. This source ranked seventh in terms of most used (used by 27.6% of all the students in the study).

Alternative Evaluation

This is the third stage in the decision process and is a "process that consists of the comparison of various alternatives for purchase and consumption against those criteria or product attributes felt by the consumer to be important in the decision" (Engel et al., 1978). It is here that the evaluative criteria play an important role. Engel et al. (1978) contend that "the two most important characteristics of evaluative criteria include the number used in reaching a decision and the relative strength (salience) of each."

Evaluative criteria used. The students were provided with a list of 36 evaluative criteria with an opportunity to add to this list and were asked to check only those that they considered important when they made their decision to attend for the 1981-1982 academic year. The mean for the number of criteria used was 6.9, the mode was 5 and the range 0-28. For the number of criteria used there was no significant difference by year of enrollment. The most used criterion was the college program, which was used by 53.3% of the students, and in second place was previous investment in the program used by 52.1% (note: this criterion was used by 72.6% of the students in second year and up). The third most used criterion was the basic cost of attending (46.3%), followed by location of the university (42.2%), and availability of jobs after graduation (40.7%). These findings support the work of Yarger, Howey and Joyce (1977) when they conducted a national survey of preservice teachers in the United States. They reported that the reasons for attendance were: the program available; the cost; convenience to home; and a belief that they could obtain a job on graduation.

Due to the controversy over whether or not it is necessary to introduce a separate measure of attribute importance (Engel et al., 1978) the students were asked to rank the criteria they considered most important. Up to five criteria were to be considered. In the analysis, the criteria were then ranked according to the number of times they were listed within the importance ranking. The first five placements in terms of the importance ranking were the same as the first five placements in terms of usage, with the reversal of first and second positions whereby the criterion of previous investment in the program preceded the criterion of program by 0.2%.

A step-wise discriminant analysis was conducted to examine the use of evaluative criteria by year of enrollment. The results suggest that considerable discriminating power exists in the variables being used (Wilks' lambda = 0.380). For the first function the criterion of previous investment in the program (SDFC = -0.779) was the most influential in making the discrimination with the next most influential being location (SDFC = 0.298). The use of the previous investment in the program criterion increased from first through fourth year (first year = 7.6%; second year = 57.7%; third year = 77.7%; fourth year = 83.7%). For the criterion of location there was a decrease in the number of students using this criterion from first through fourth year (first year = 64.8%; second year = 37.1%; third year = 34.5%; and fourth year = 25.5%).

Choice

Choice involves the selection and purchase of an alternative (Engel et al., 1978).

Who made the decision. For the students in the College of Education, 77.0% of the students indicated they made the decision by themselves and 23.0% indicated the decision was made jointly. None of the respondents felt that someone else had made the decision for them. There was no significant difference by year of enrollment.

Outcomes

This is the last stage in the decision process. "Choice can have two outcomes: satisfaction or dissatisfaction and post-decision dissonance" (Engel et al., 1978). The Delighted-Terrible (D-T) Scale (Andrews and Withey, 1976) was used to determine the degree of satisfaction that the students were experiencing. Westbrook (1980) examined the suitability of the use of the D-T Scale and concluded it was a suitable measure of consumer satisfaction, and that the findings from the study should not only encourage the use of the D-T Scale but also allay concerns about the quality of this satisfaction measurement.

Outcomes of choice. The students were asked to use the D-T Scale to indicate how they felt about their decisions to attend the College at the beginning of the year (October), in the middle of the year (December), and how they were feeling at the time of the questionnaire which was administered near the end of the year (late March and early April). Students are reported as satisfied if they responded feeling delighted, pleased or mostly satisfied, and are reported as dissatisfied if they responded as feeling mostly dissatisfied, unhappy or terrible. The mixed category has the students who felt about equally satisfied and dissatisfied, thereby experiencing post-decision dissonance.

For all three time periods the satisfied category had the largest number of students (62.6% and over for all three periods) followed by the mixed category and then the dissatisfied category. Significant differences were found to exist between the year of enrollment and degree of satisfaction for the beginning and the end of the academic year. At the beginning of the academic year the second and third years were the most satisfied (with 83.5% and 80.9%, respectively), the first years had the highest percentage reporting mixed feelings (28.7%), and the fourth years had the highest percentage of dissatisfied students (10.8%). At the end of the academic year the first year students had the highest percentage of satisfied students (78.9%) followed by fourth year students (73.3%). The second and third year students had the highest percentage reporting of mixed feelings (29.4% and 27.7%), and third year students had the highest percentage of dissatisfied students (12.8%).

Dissonance resolution. The respondents were asked if there was anything students could do to clarify whether or not they had made a correct decision with respect to college choice. Of the respondents 2.5% felt there was nothing students

could do, 38.1% were not sure, and 59.3% indicated that students could do something to clarify the decision.

DISCUSSION

Student Profile

The following profile of the education students emerged from the study. Approximately eight out of every ten students were women; nine out of ten students were not married; nine out of ten students had entered university with a grade 12 average of 70% or higher; four out of ten had mothers with some postsecondary education; close to five out of every ten students had a permanent residence within 120 km of the university, making a daily commute possible; six out of ten students lived in self-contained rental accommodation; and five out of ten students shared accommodation with other university students. As well, the College of Education was drawing students primarily from the traditional student sector with respect to being 24 years of age or under, with approximately nine out of every ten students in this range. As this study involved only full-time university students, further research is required to determine if the part-time student group differs in these respects.

Further research is in order to determine if lower socio-economic groups are represented, given: that parents were providing 30.6% of the students' total funding; that 72.1% of the students had a father in occupations that were farming related, professional/management related, or self-employed, all of which have the potential for higher incomes; that 0.4% of the fathers were non-wage earners when the unemployment rate for men in Saskatchewan was 6.8% (Statistics Canada, 1982); that 62.6% of the mothers were employed with 30.4% in professional/managerial related professions; and that 88.1% of the students classified their parents as middle class or above middle class. Perhaps it is not a myth but a reality that only the children of the relatively affluent are attending university. With the basic cost of attending being the third most used evaluative criterion for these students who were in attendance, it is imperative that further research is undertaken with individuals who considered attending but did not do so to determine if cost as an evaluative criterion was one of the determining factors in the decision.

Students, however, did not appear to be affluent. The majority of students were existing on incomes which were considered to be below the low income cut-off line, and therefore in "straightened circumstances" (Statistics Canada, 1981). Further efforts should be directed toward making available to students both a wider range of options regarding the financing of a university education and increased opportunities to obtain funding from options currently in place but available to only a limited number of students. For example, government student loans provided only 10.5% of the total funding for the students in the College of Education. Further usage of this source needs to be explored. Another source that needs developing is that of the scholarship/bursary which provided only 4.6% of the total funding for students in the College of Education. In particular the

professional associations should be encouraged to become more active in the provision of such funding for undergraduates. One source that was utilized, that of savings, needs further study to determine the period of time over which the savings were accumulated and the source from which savings were obtained. With 37.2% of first years and 45.7% of second years out of high school for at least one year prior to attending perhaps some students are finding it necessary to work for a year or two in order to accumulate the savings necessary to finance their education. Others may find it necessary to interrupt their program and work for a period of time to provide the necessary financing. Further research is needed to determine if such conditions exist. Over half of the students indicated they were not employed between university sessions. Further research is required to determine if this is by choice. Even taking into account that some students may work on the family farm in return for university support and not consider this as employment cannot account for the large number of students reporting unemployment. This points to the need for more job creation programs, or perhaps a tri-semester system so not all students are competing for jobs at the same time.

It appears that students were not maintaining the second language of their parents unless they were French speaking. German and Ukrainian usage has decreased by half whereas the use of French has experienced a major increase. This would be attributed primarily to the consumption of elementary-secondary educational services; it appears that despite Saskatchewan's multi-lingual stance, the most used second language option is French.

Search for Information

Approximately half of the students first considered the career possibilities of the College during grades 11 and 12, with one-fifth of the students first considering the career after leaving high school. This latter group is often neglected in marketing efforts. The first year students engaged more actively in searching for information than any other year and used more sources of information. Although the search for information declines from first through fourth year, universities must not use this information to justify focusing exclusively on providing information to incoming first year students. Given that the majority of students, regardless of their year of enrollment, had been actively involved in a search for information regarding their decision to attend for that year, and the finding that university students were the most used source of information, universities must be prepared to keep enrolled students well informed. Efforts to help students become both informed users and informed disseminators of information may be the best way to assure informed, more satisfied consumers of university programs.

Now that the sources of information which are utilized by students have been identified, further research is required to identify patterns of usage. The use of university students as a source of information requires further research to determine whether or not the students, used as a source of information, were service specific (other students registered in the same college).

Based on the findings that parents as a source of information ranked second in usage for Education students, the university should consider directing promotional activities to the parents of both current and prospective students. As well, further research is required to determine the specific information which parents provide. It would appear from this study that information regarding cost might be one type of information that parents would provide, given that cost as an evaluative criterion placed third in terms of usage by the students in the College of Education. This is supported by the finding that parents of students provided some funding to approximately two-thirds of the students and were also the largest suppliers of funding. This, coupled with the knowledge that it may be the perceived cost and not the actual cost which keeps potential students from becoming consumers of the service (Elsworth & Day, 1983; Nelson, 1978; Pain, 1981) makes it important to consider both parents as a source of information and the criterion of cost as areas requiring further research.

For the College of Education, high school personnel are used as a source of information by 73.8% of the first year students. The college needs to actively maintain this link and keep high school personnel cognizant, particularly of information relating to the criteria seen as important by first year students. It also appears that the use of high school personnel may have extended beyond being a source of general career information. Such individuals would provide both role models for, and information specific to, the career they are engaged in. Further research is needed to determine if in fact this is the type of information students are obtaining from this source.

Evaluative Criteria Usage

As a relatively large number of evaluative criteria were used (mean = 6.9) and as the number of evaluative criteria used did not differ significantly by year of enrollment, this supports the contention that the decision to become a consumer of an educational service is a high involvement decision for each year of enrollment (Engel & Blackwell, 1982). This study did not support the need for a separate measure of attribute importance, as the top five placements in terms of criteria considered most important were the same as the top five placements for most used.

It is important that the College in its promotional activities stress the evaluative criteria that were found to be the most salient. These criteria included the college program, previous investment in the program, the basic cost of attending, location, and job availability. The promotional activities directed toward potential first years should stress the location and the promotion activities directed at second years through fourth years should stress the student's previous investment in the program. The use of such research in the promotion of programs is supported by Brown (1980).

The university now needs to undertake an audit of its publications to ensure that information is included relating to the criteria considered to be important for the students in the College of Education, and make revisions as required. The auditing

of college publications is supported by Dominik, Johnson, Chapman and Griffith (1980) and Stark and Marchese (1978).

With the college program ranking in first place for evaluative criteria usage, the University of Saskatchewan needs to ascertain exactly what information students wish to have regarding the college program. Further research which could culminate in the production of an information package on "Everything you ever wanted to know about the College program in ..." is needed. With the use of the criterion of previous investment in the program increasing from second through fourth year, and its high user rate, it would also seem to be an area worth further study to determine, for example, whether or not taking a number of first year university classes off campus would also support this pattern.

Who Made the Decision to Attend

Based on the results of this study it would appear that students are actively involved in the decision to become consumers of postsecondary educational services and are making their own decisions to attend. Slightly over three quarters of the students made the decision entirely on their own while the remainder of the students made the decision jointly. This finding is consistent with what one would expect in regard to making decisions which are found to be high involvement decisions.

Outcomes

With the consumption of this service there was a wide range in degree of satisfaction experienced by the consumers. Further research is required to examine more closely the degree of satisfaction that students are experiencing. Some questions that should be considered include the following: Do the students who are not satisfied with their decision have any characteristics in common across all years of enrollment? For example, are these students using different sources of information, different evaluative criteria, experiencing unique difficulties? How do these students engage in dissonance resolution?

The EKB model, though useful in the examination of the questions posed in this study, does not provide for adequate flexibility to analyse the interaction patterns of joint decision-making. One or more parallel structures which could be superimposed with allowances for interactions between the parallel structures with joint "collectors" at each stage would be amenable for this type of analysis. With the findings of this study indicating that approximately 25% of the students made the decision jointly, such a modification would provide direction for further research in the area.

The decision to engage in a specific exchange process is an important decision, for the student is faced with a vast array of educational opportunities, and the costs in both human and non-human currency which are associated with inappropriate choices are borne by both the student and the institution. This study provided base line data which can be utilized by the College of Education in policy development

and planning with respect to improving both the student-institutional exchange relationship and the quality of life of the student. The study provides: a more accurate description of the characteristics of the current students; a better understanding of the sources of information used by students and the evaluative criteria employed by students, thereby providing the potential for increasing the efficacy of the university's marketing function; the opportunity to provide current and potential students with salient information, thereby increasing the likelihood of enrolling and retaining a more satisfied student population; and direction for further research.

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