1-1-2014

Factors that Influence a High School Student's College Choice in a Rural Area in Mississippi

Amanda Lanier Walton

Factors that influence a high school student's college choice in a rural area in Mississippi

By

Amanda Lanier Walton

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Community College Leadership
in the Department of Leadership and Foundations

Mississippi State, Mississippi

December 2014

Factors that influence a high school student's college choice in a rural area in Mississippi

By

Amanda Lanier Walton

Approved:

_____

Stephanie B. King
(Major Professor)

_____

William M. Wiseman
(Committee Member)

_____

Arthur D. Stumpf
(Committee Member)

_____

James E. Davis
(Committee Member/Graduate Coordinator)

_____

Richard L. Blackbourn
Dean
College of Education

Name: Amanda Lanier Walton

Date of Degree: December 13, 2014

Institution: Mississippi State University

Major Field: Community College Leadership

Major Professor: Stephanie King

Title of Study: Factors that influence a high school student's college choice in a rural area in Mississippi

Pages in Study: 117

Candidate for Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The objective of this study is to determine the factors that affect recruitment in community colleges and how community colleges can be competitive in the recruitment process. In recent years, community colleges have become more competitive in their tuition rates, course schedules, program offerings, and athletics. Therefore, community college recruiters are given the difficult task of vying for top students and athletes.

Additionally, with the current economic situation, more students are returning to school to acquire an education or a trade so that they can have an advantage when applying for jobs. As a result, colleges are challenged to find more ways to attract students to their school.

The research was conducted using a questionnaire that surveyed high school seniors over the age of 18 in order to determine what factors come into play when they make their choice of college to attend. Cost of attendance, course offerings and schedules, program availability, influence of others, location of the college, family income, and scholarships and financial were investigated.

The top 3 college choice factors, as determined by this study, were financial aid, cost of college, and interest in particular major or study. Family income is associated with most of the college choice influences, as it is listed as having a significant influence on 8 of the 11 college choice factors listed in this study. Students' GPA is associated with 5 of the 11 college choice factors. Finally, students' ACT and Parent Education are significant to four of the eleven college choice factors listed in this study. On the opposite end of the spectrum, gender and race are seldom associated with college factors.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this to my daughter, Madalyn, and my mom, Linda, who are my two biggest fans.

Philippians 1:3 “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the people who made this degree possible. First and foremost, I thank my heavenly Father, who has blessed me greater than I could have ever imagined or deserved. Through His mercy and grace, all things are possible. Thank you, Lord, for using me as an example of this and for making this degree part of Your bigger plan for me. Jeremiah 29:11

Next, I would like to acknowledge my precious Maddie. You make me a better person in every way imaginable. I would not be who I am without you. Thank you for loving me unconditionally and pushing me to always do better and be better. I love you more because I am bigger.

To my mama, Linda: this accomplishment is ours. Thank you for always being my biggest fan and encouraging me to chase my dreams. Garth Brooks said it pretty well when he sang: "Then you looked into my heart, and you found a melody. And if there ever was somebody who made me believe in me: it was you." Thank you for not only believing in me, but also making me believe in myself. You are the standard to which I hold everyone else. I love you so very much.

To my daddy, Mark: thank you simply for being the person that you are. I love you more than you will ever know.

Sandra and Delbert Walton: they say it takes a village to raise a child. I am glad that you are both part of my village. Thank you for always helping me with Maddie so that I could go to school and pursue this dream. I love you both.

Thank you Robert Parker for your advice when I almost pulled my hair out over my statistics and Dr. Erik Allen for graciously letting me use your survey instrument.

Last, but certainly not least: I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge my committee. Dr. Stephanie King, Dr. Dan Stumpf, Dr. Marty Wiseman, and Dr. Ed Davis: thank you all for your help and encouragement through this entire program. I have learned more from each of you than you could imagine. Dr. King, you are possibly the best chairperson in the entire world. I can say, without any reservation, that I would not have made it here without you, and for that, I am forever grateful.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In White House's (2013) press release entitled *Building American skills through community colleges,* President Barack Obama set two national goals to accomplish by 2020: (a) The United States of America will have the highest percentage of college graduates in the world, and (b) community colleges will produce five million additional graduates ("The White House", 2013). If these goals are realized, funding for Pell Grants has the potential to double to meet students' needs and the largest tax credit, known as the American Opportunity Tax Credit, will triple ("The White House", 2013). As a result, students will have many more opportunities to attend colleges and universities. This increase in opportunities will challenge community colleges to become more competitive in recruiting students because findings of a recent student conducted by the Education Policy Center at the University of Alabama indicate that the number of students who received Pell Grants almost doubled between the 2008 and 2010 school years, and as a result, community college enrollments rose (Katsinas, Davis, Koh, & Grant, 2012).

According to Svenson and Salo (2007), each year thousands of high school students complete college admission applications with anticipation as one of the most momentous and meaningful decision of their lives. With the number of college and universities in the United States reaching close to 4,000, the decision of where to apply

has become an overwhelming task for students and parents. Each must decide what institutional characteristics are important to them individually and which of these characteristics will influence the college they will attend. As a result, colleges are challenged to find more ways to attract students to their school. Due to the desirability of successfully recruiting students at the community college level, it is worthwhile to determine why students choose to enroll in a particular college (Svenson & Salo, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

In the past, there has been a considerable amount of research investigating college choice factors for students who are contemplating enrolling in higher education (Chapman, 1981; Hanson & Litten, 1982; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hoyt & Brown, 2003; Jackson, 1982; Lee & Chatfield, 2011; McCullough, 2010; Ming, 2010). However, most of this research focuses directly on students who plan to obtain a bachelor's degree or enroll in universities immediately out of high school and forego attending a community college. Additionally, previous research has rarely investigated college choice factors for students who choose to attend a community college or university by surveying students before they graduate high school and enroll in a community college or four year university and, therefore, information is limited. The problem of this study is to ascertain the factors that influence a high school student's decision to attend a community college.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to survey high school students in a rural, five-county district of a Mississippi community college, in order to discover factors that influenced students to attend a community college.

Research Questions

The following research questions will help the researcher examine the factors that determine what college a student chooses to attend in an effort to improve recruiting for community colleges in the state of Mississippi:

1. To what extent do financial aid, institutional scholarships, or the receipt of both or neither affect a student's college choice?
2. To what extent does the cost of attendance affect a student's college choice?
3. To what extent does family income affect a student's college choice?
4. To what extent does the influence of others (e.g. family, friends, teachers, and counselors) affect a student's college choice?
5. To what extent do the location and geographic region of a community college affect a student's college choice?
6. To what extent does program availability affect a student's college choice?
7. To what extent do course offerings and schedules affect a student's college choice?

Operational Definitions

1. Community college—a two-year accredited institution of higher education that offers one-year and two-year vocational certificates and two-year career technical and academic programs of study (Vaughn, 2000).
2. Cost of attendance—the amount that it will cost a student to attend college. The cost of attendance can include tuition, fees, room, board, the cost of books, supplies, transportation, loan fees, miscellaneous expenses associated with school, and dependent care (*How aid is calculated*, 2014).
3. Course offerings and schedules— classes that are offered at community colleges and universities consisting of traditional classroom lecture and/or lab, online, afternoon, evening, and weekend settings that could be offered during fall, spring, and summer full terms and short terms. Most classes are scheduled on a need basis or basis on the availability of an instructor (Furukawa, 2011).
4. Family characteristics—includes parental education, family alumnus, parental role in paying for college, and family income as related to where the student attends college and how the student pays for college (Furukawa, 2011).
5. Financial aid—funding that is provided by federal and state government agencies and by the college that a student is attending to assist the student with educational expenses (*Financial aid terms*, 2014).

6. Influence of others—parents, guardians, siblings, friends, teachers, counselors or any persons that play a significant role in impacts where a student decides to attend college (Furukawa, 2011).
7. Location and geographic region of the community college—campus location in correlation to how close the campus is to a student's house or place of employment (Noel-Levitz, Inc., 2012).
8. Program availability—majors and programs of study that are offered at colleges and universities in traditional classroom lecture and/or lab, online, afternoon, evening, and weekend class settings (Furukawa, 2011).
9. Recruitment—the entire process of encouraging prospective students to attend a college (Schoenherr, 2009).
10. Scholarships—a grant or payment made to support a student's education, awarded on the basis of academic or other achievement or financial need that is not required to be repaid (*Financial aid terms*, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

The theory to be used in this study is the Jackson Combined Model (Jackson, 1982). This theory was developed by Jackson and was used to study the numerous factors that influence if a student goes to college and why he or she chooses a particular college to attend. As applied in this study, this theory holds that independent variables financial aid and institutional scholarships, cost of attendance, family characteristics, influence of others, location and geographic region of the college, program availability, and course offerings and schedules are expected to influence or explain the dependent variable of college choice (Jackson, 1982).

Overview of Methods

The independent variables were based on Jackson's (1982) theory and previous research findings in the literature and grouped according to: (1) family characteristics, such as ethnicity, gender, parents' education level, and family income; (2) institutional characteristics, such as financial aid and scholarship, location, program and course offerings, and cost of attendance considerations; and (3) the influence of others, including parents, friends, siblings, and high school counselors (Schoenherr, 2009). This study surveyed high school students in a rural Mississippi community college's five county district to determine what factors influenced their decision of which college to attend.

Delimitations

This study was subjected to the following limitations:

1. This study was limited to the students and counselors in high schools in one community college's five county district.
2. This study was limited to high school seniors.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant and useful because it can provide two-year colleges with vital information relating to the factors that influence a student's decision to enroll in a 2-year college. These results can assist community college personnel to better understand the enrollment at a particular community college based on a student's characteristics, including campus location(s), cost of attendance, available programs, course schedules, influence of others, family characteristics, and the receipt of financial aid and institutional scholarships. The data collected can also assist community college personnel implement

interventions for high school students who may want to pursue a college degree, but may not have the financial means to do so. Finally, the results of this study can be used to make students more aware of factors that are important to investigate before making a decision on the best college to attend.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The areas that may influence college choice are numerous and dependent upon the characteristics of the students on which previous research has been conducted. Therefore, several models of both the choice process and the background of college choice influences exist. However, this study focuses on the college choice process, which has been acknowledged by Bergerson (2010) as "the process through which students decide whether and where to go to college" (Bergerson, 2010, p. 133).

The purpose of this study is to examine factors that influence students' choice of college. This chapter will review related literature of factors that can influence a students' choice of college and also give an overview of the history of and enrollment in community colleges in Mississippi. Financial aid; cost of attendance; parental influence; influence of friends, siblings and high school counselors; location; and demographics will all be explored. This research also attempts to describe the characteristics and behaviors of students and why they value certain factors over others. Finally, the review of the literature is then divided into two major categories about college choice: college models and areas that may influence college choice.

History of Community Colleges in Mississippi

The community college system in Mississippi unofficially began in 1908 as an unexpected movement when the Mississippi Legislature passed a law that allowed the establishment of agricultural high schools (Fatherree, 2010). Junior colleges were spreading all throughout the United States; however, Mississippi was far behind because the state as a whole consisted primarily of farmers who were uneducated and lived in rural areas. Additionally, during this time, high schools were still segregated.

In 1924, Mississippi legislators made the decision to allow the segregated, agricultural high schools to offer college credit classes. This curriculum became so popular that 12 high schools throughout Mississippi began offering these classes. As a result, the Public Junior College Law of 1928 was passed (Fatherree, 2010). This law afforded the agricultural high schools in Mississippi to include the first two years of college work. Also in 1928, Mississippi was the first state to establish a junior college system advisory board (Young, 1972). A statute authorized the establishment of the junior college system in Mississippi and was stated as follows:

> That junior colleges consisting of the work of freshman and sophomore years will be organized for the purpose of providing such courses as will make the studies of the Agriculture High Schools and Junior Colleges a connected and correlated whole, a complete unit of educational work. These courses shall consist of agriculture, including household arts; commercial branches including banking, accountancy and transportation; and the mechanical arts, such as carpentry, masonry, painting, shop in iron and wood and repairing and constructing of motor vehicles. Whenever it is practical, instruction shall also be given in

> teacher training, music, and public speaking. Insofar as possible, the Junior Colleges shall offer a complete course of instruction so that their graduates may immediately thereafter enter professional schools if they so elect (Young, 1972, p. 101).

With students able to complete a college degree while in high schools, Mississippi legislators agreed that there must be an agency to see to it that the proper curriculum was being taught. Therefore, on April 26, 1928, the State Commission of Junior Colleges was formed to oversee both high schools offering college curriculums and junior colleges. With the establishment of the State Commission of Junior Colleges, state allotted funds for junior colleges, and the establishment of junior college districts, Mississippi officially became the first state system of junior colleges in the United States (Fatherree, 2010).

In 1987, each junior college, with the exception of Jones County Junior College, changed its name from junior college to community college because each served their communities in numerous capacities and the term junior college no longer was appropriate (Fatherree, 2010). Presently, there are 15 community and junior colleges in the state of Mississippi.

History of Enrollment in Community Colleges

Enrollment in higher education across the United States has increased dramatically over the last 30 years, according to the U.S. Department of Education (2012). In 1970, 8 million people were enrolled in colleges throughout the United States. By 1990, there were 8.7 million people enrolled in 4-year colleges and universities while 5.6 million were enrolled in 2-year colleges. At present, there are over 20 million students enrolled in college with 11 million people enrolled at the 4-year university level,

and over 9 million people enrolled in 2-year colleges (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). According to Bailey et al. (2004), community colleges enroll 42 % of all postsecondary students. As a result of this enrollment, there were more students in college in 2004 than at any other time in the history of higher education in the United States (Bailey et al., 2004).

According to Betts and McFarland (1995), community college enrollments have always tended to show an increase as the economy worsens. Additionally, previous research has indicated that community college enrollments tend to rise as industry conditions weaken and unemployment rates rise (Betts & McFarland, 1995). One reason for this is that community colleges are less expensive than 4-year institutions — they average $6,750 per year (including tuition, fees, and room and board) in the net price for full-time students, compared with $9,800 for four-year public colleges and $21,240 for four-year private colleges (College Board, 2009).

However, even though the nation as a whole is showing an increase in enrollment in community college, Mississippi has shown a decrease over the past three years according to data released by the Community College Board (State Board of Community and Junior Colleges, 2014). Table 1 indicates the fall 2012 Demographics in Mississippi's Community Colleges.

Table 1

Fall 2012 Demographics Mississippi's Community Colleges

Average Student Age	24.4
Female Students	62.2%
White Students	54.1%
African-American Students	40.9%
In-State Students	96.6%
Students Admitted with HS Diploma	63.1%
Full Time Students	73.5%
Students in Academic Curriculum	73.4%
Freshman Students	41.6%
Average ACT Score	18.5

Table 2 indicates the enrollment numbers of fall 2012 compared to fall 2011 for the community colleges in Mississippi. Each experienced a decrease in enrollment, with the exception of Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College (SBCJC, 2014).

Table 2

MCCB Enrollment Comparison Fall 2012 to Fall 2011

District	Fall 2012	Fall 2011	Diff	Percentage	Fall 2012	Fall 2011	Diff	Percentage
Coahoma	2,203	2,819	-616	-21.90%	935.3	1184.1	-248.8	-21%
Copiah-Lincoln	3,303	3,583	-280	-7.80%	1411.6	1527.6	-116.1	-7.60%
East Central	2,500	2668	-168	-6.30%	1411.6	1136.6	-60.2	-5.30%
East MS	4,691	4,837	-146	-3.00%	1890.4	1931.1	-40.6	-2.10%
Hinds	11,664	12,526	-862	-6.90%	4730.5	5099.3	-368.8	-7.20%
Holmes	6,281	6,419	-138	-2.10%	2551.4	2569	-17.6	-0.70%
Itawamba	5,949	6,899	-517	-11.10%	1865.9	2059.1	-193.2	-9.40%
Jones	4,158	4,675	-950	-13.80%	2518.5	2855.9	-337.40	-11.80%
MS Delta	3,054	3,200	-146	-4.60%	1279.7	1329.3	-49.6	-3.70%
MS Gulf Coast	10,098	9,948	150	1.50%	3965.2	3940.4	24.8	0.60%
Northeast MS	3,390	3,622	-232	-6.40%	1529	1650.3	-121.3	-7.40%
Northwest MS	7,976	8,013	-37	-0.50%	3172.3	3208.5	-36.1	-1.10%
Pearl River	4,605	4,969	-364	-7.30%	1846.9	2027.7	-180.8	-8.90%
Southwest MS	2,046	2,089	-43	-2.10%	932.9	940.7	-7.8	-0.80%
System Total	75,660	80,285	-4625	-5.80%	31,199.30	33,081.80	-1882.5	-5.70%

Theoretical Model Background

Introduction

Two-year colleges have become the institutions of choice for individuals who enroll in public higher education. In 2003, for example, 43% of all students in public institutions attended 2-year colleges (Profile of Undergraduate Students, 2007). The two primary factors that influence students' decisions to enroll in a 2-year college are cost and location (Somers, Haines, & Keene, 2006); however, there may be other significant factors to consider when assessing a student's college choice decision.

Most college choice models define specific characteristics as well as significant influences that are important to students when choosing a college to attend. In 2012, Noel-Levitz, Inc. conducted a student satisfaction survey that asked the question, "What were the most important factors in why you attend a community college?" The data

revealed that cost (83.%), financial aid (79.4%), academic reputation (73.7%), size of institution (51.3%), opportunity to play sports (21.9%), recommend from family (48.4%), geographic setting (58.5%), campus appearance (55.0%), and personalized attention prior to enrollment (61.0%) were each a significant influence on the college that a student chose to attend (Noel-Levitz, Inc. 2012). Figure 1 indicates the different factors that influenced first year community college students' college choice according to Noel- Levitz's National Research Report of 2012.

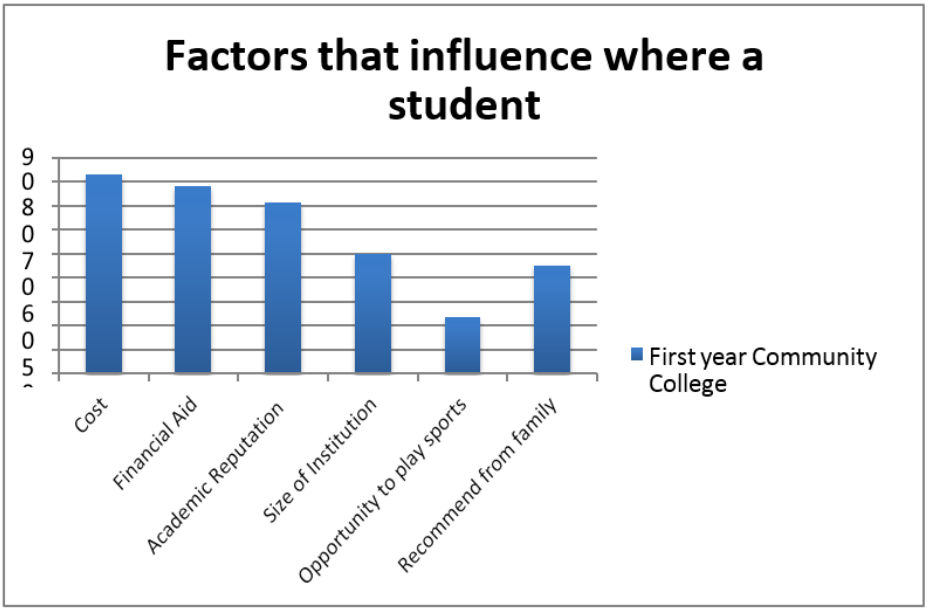

Figure 1. Noel-Levitz 2012 National Research Report

(Factors that influence what a student attends community college)

The college decision-making process seemingly has always been complicated. Many education researchers have discussed how the college that a student attends has great bearing on their future (Svenson & Salo, 2007). Not surprisingly, as more high school graduates began pursuing postsecondary education, the process by which students

made their selections came under greater examination. This was particularly true beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, when many of the existing models of college choice were introduced. The four most common models of college choice were developed by Jackson (1982), Chapman (1981), Hanson and Litten (1982), and Hossler and Gallagher (1987). Jackson's model is investigated for this study and discussed in this chapter.

Much research examined the influence of student background in the college choice process. The background variables comprise much of the research related to the status attainment framework based on sociological theory (Bergerson, 2009). Race and ethnicity (Manski & Wise, 1983), parents' education (Manski & Wise, 1983), family income (St. John, 1990), and academic achievement (St. John, 1990) were some of the variables common to much of this literature. This framework comprised a great deal of the college choice literature from 1970 through the 1980s. In the 1980s colleges and universities began to strategically plan and market to prospective new freshmen in a more quantitative and data-driven way known as enrollment management. During the evolution of enrollment management as a discipline, several researchers examined college choice combining the econometric and the status-attainment research. Jackson (1982), Chapman (1986), Hanson and Litten (1982), and Hossler and Gallagher (1987) provided different versions of a combined framework.

In 1982, Jackson proposed a model for college choice that focused on students' background characteristics and their educational achievements as they related to their choice of a postsecondary institution (Jackson, 1982). Based on prior work from both econometric and sociological or status-attainment college choice research, Jackson

posited three phases in which students engage during their college selection process: preference, exclusion, and evaluation.

The preference phase resembles the traditional sociological view of the college choice process with a focus on aspirations and academic achievement, while the exclusion and evaluation phases mimic the economic view with analysis of resources and the development of a rating scheme.

Chapman's (1981) model advanced understanding by examining not only the student's perspective in the selection process, but also the institutional perspective. The model suggests that the college choice process is made up of five stages: pre-search, search, applications, choice, and matriculation. According to Chapman, in order for the student to develop his or her general expectation of college life, student characteristics such as SES and educational aspirations must connect with significant persons (parents, friends, or high school personnel), college characteristics, and college efforts to communicate.

The third combined model was proposed by Hanson and Litten (1982). College aspirations, searching, information-gathering, applying, and enrolling were parts of their five step model. One of the nuances of the Hanson and Litten model was the consideration of financial aid policy within the decision process. This model could also be considered a cross between the Jackson (1982) model and the Chapman (1981) model. For this study, Jackson's model will be investigated and implemented.

Jackson's Combined Model

In 1982, Jackson proposed a model for college choice that focused on students' background characteristics and their educational achievements as they related to their

choice of a postsecondary institution (Jackson, 1982). Jackson (1982) created a model that had a traditional three-phase design: preferences, exclusion, and evaluation. In Jackson's model, the first stage, preferences, includes areas of influence such as family, friends, personal aspirations, and academic achievement. Additionally, Jackson' first stage suggests that sociological variables (educational aspirations and achievement) have the greatest influence on a student's decision to attend college. Hence, students who do well in high school tend to aspire to go to college or develop a preference for college. The second phase of exclusion uses more economic factors including factors of cost that cause students to exclude institutions from their list of potential colleges. This phase of the model tends to introduce the economic influences of college choice. This includes the cost of attendance and the amount of financial assistance provided by the institution. Included in this phase is the geographic location of the institution as it can be directly tied with cost factors. This stage of exclusion begins the use of resources provided by the institution that may help inform students about their choices. "Students exclude colleges as unfeasible based on partial information when more information would lead them to do otherwise, and quite reasonably they do not consider colleges unknown to them or about which they can obtain no information" (Jackson, 1982, p. 241). The third phase of evaluation under Jackson's model is where students evaluate their options and ultimately make a final decision on the college that they will attend. This final phase includes the development of a personal rating scheme to rank institutions and make a decision that makes the most sense and that they feel will be the best fit for them. Figure 2 is Jackson's combined model.

Figure 2. Jackson's Combined Model

(Adapted from Jackson, 1981)

The Areas of Influence of College Choice

There are many factors that influence the college a student chooses to attend. Cost, financial aid, and academic reputation were the top enrollment factors across all postsecondary institutions, including community colleges and universities (Noel-Levitz, Inc., 2012). Noel-Levitz, Inc., (2012) indicated that all factors drastically increased in importance for students who were making the decision to attend community colleges from the 1994-1995 college year to the 2009-2010 college year. Financial aid showed the largest increase with 8.7 %, followed by the prospect to play a sport (8.1 %) and the influence of family and friends at 7.8 % (Noel-Levitz, Inc., 2012).

In addition to surveying first-year college students about the factors that influenced the decision to attend the college that they are currently attending, Noel-Levitz, Inc., (2012) also polled students to see how the different factors influenced their first-choice, second-choice, and third-choice of college to attend (Noel-Levitz, Inc., 2012). Table 3 indicates the importance of each factor of first-choice and second- or third-choice of colleges to attend.

Table 3

Noel-Levitz 2012 National Research Report: Community Colleges: First year students, first choice vs. first year students, second- and third-choice campus

Enrollment factors	First choice	Second or Third Choice
Cost	83.00%	82.90%
Financial Aid	79.40%	75.70%
Academic reputation	73.70%	66.30%
Size of institution	51.30%	47.00%
Opportunity to play sports	21.90%	27.10%
Recommendations from family	48.40%	39.20%
Geographic setting	58.50%	50.70%
Campus appearance	55.00%	50.80%
Personalized attention prior to enrollment	61.00%	55.30%

The following sections examine in detail the variables that research has shown to be most important in influencing the decision to attend a 2-year college. Variables include environmental influences, such as family characteristics, influences of family, friends, high school guidance counselors, and teachers; as well as institutional characteristics such as location, tuition, program availability, courses offerings, and financial aid.

Cost of Attendance

One of the most frequently cited articles on college cost is the meta-analysis by Leslie and Brinkman (1987). The authors examined over 25 experimental studies that included data on the relationship of price to college enrollment. As a result of the analysis, Leslie and Brinkman found that "enrollment declines when prices are raised (negative coefficients) and increases when prices are lowered" (Leslie & Brinkman, 1987, p. 2). More recently some research has specifically examined the impact of price

sensitivity on attendance at a community college (Heller, 1996; Kane, 1995; St. John, 1990). In 1995, Kane examined the difference in state subsidies and possible impacts on state 2- and 4-year enrollment, using data from several different surveys. He concluded the following:

> States with high public tuition levels have lower college entry rates, the gap in enrollment between high and low-income youth is wider in high-tuition states, and within-state tuition hikes lead to lower enrollment rates and wider gaps between high and low-income youth (Kane, 1995, p. 142).

Rouse (1994) examined the effect of price on students' choice to attend a particular 2-year or 4-year school. She found that an 8 % increase in 2-year tuition will decrease the probability of college enrollment by 0.7, with the probability of enrolling in a 2-year school decreasing 0.9 and the likelihood of attending a 4-year college increasing 0.2. An 8 % increase in four-year tuition will decrease the probability of enrolling in college by 0.2, with the probability of 2-year enrollment increasing 0.4 and four-year enrollment dropping 0.6 (Rouse, 1994).

Cost of tuition was an important variable included in much of the previous research on college choice and was included in the model in this research. However, if students factor financial aid into the decision, then federal and state grants, loans, and scholarships also impact the college choice decision.

Financial Aid and Institutional Scholarships

According to Herren, Carmell, & Robertson (2011), "financial incentives such as scholarships, good job opportunities, and potential income is the second most influential factor of college choice" (p. 76). When considering the effect of financial aid on the

decision of what college to attend, the entire package must be considered. For example, as van der Klaauw (2001) points out, if a student athlete has two different colleges in mind to attend, and the financial aid package is an important factor to consider in the decision, the student will likely choose the school that offers more aid to them because of their athletic talent. If the aid is equal from both colleges, the student will likely choose the college that has the best athletic team based on the record of the school (van der Klaauw, 2001).

In 1987, Leslie and Brinkman conducted research to examine how prospective students' consideration of cost, such as an increase in tuition or a decrease in financial aid, would impact their college choice. Their results indicated that some students would forego attending a college or university if the tuition was too expensive to pay and if the financial aid, including grants and scholarships, that they were awarded would not cover their tuition and residential living (Leslie & Brinkman, 1987).

Freeman (1984) attempted to measure the influence of financial aid on the college choice process. He found that the amount of financial aid did seem to influence college choice positively, except for high-income, no-need students (Freeman, 1984). While conducting research, Freeman (1984) found that non-aid based activities like personal letters from the president, an on-campus banquet, and special certificates did appear to influence the choice process. He concluded that non-aid based courtship procedures may be as important as actual financial aid awards.

Family Income

Since the majority of recent high-school graduates are still financially dependent on their parents, family income has been an important variable in the college choice

research. Numerous researchers (Kane, 1995; Paulsen, 1990; St. John, 1991) have explored the relationship between a student's socio-economic status and the ability to attend and pay for college. Additionally, Litten and Brodigan (1982) found that although there are several influences on a student's choice of college, the parental education background, along with the socioeconomic status of the family, played the most significant role in shaping the conduct of students in the college choice process. "Higher levels of parental education led to substantially greater incidence of usage of commercial guidebooks and visits to campus" (Litten & Brodigan, 1982, p. 251). Furthermore, the level of education that one or both parents obtained had a strong influence on whether or not a student decided to attend college. Finally, Dale (2010) determined that parents who had attended college tended to be much more involved in the college decisions of their children than those parents who had not attended college or did not have an older child that had already attended college.

Influence of Family

The family plays a strong role in the college choice process. According to Hossler and Stage (1992), parental encouragement and support were the most influential variables in a student's decision to pursue a college education. Numerous researchers have examined the influences of parents on the college choice process for students (Flint, 1992; Hossler & Stage, 1992; Litten & Brodigan, 1982). However, all of this research focused on students who intended to attend a 4-year university. The first research on parents' influence in the 2-year college choice process came in the late 1980s. In 1989, Smith and Bers researched the impact that parents had on the college selection process for traditionally-aged students attending a 2-year community college in the suburbs of a

large metropolitan area. The researchers examined the parents' academic plans for students, the parents' involvement in the college decision, and the parents' evaluations of the college experience. The researchers found that parents did have an influence on the college choice process for these 2-year-college-bound students. Written information from 2-year colleges and word-of-mouth were key information sources in this process for parents. Smith and Bers (1989) not only determined that cost, convenience, and location were important variables but also found that parents' view of institutional quality and reputation were variables in the selection process (Smith & Bers, 1989).

Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) developed a model of parental influence on the college choice process. They grouped the parental role into three components: influence, encouragement, and support. Hossler et al. (1999) suggested that the parental role in the college decision-making process was substantial. Many parents who are involved in their child's college decision-making process normally set up a savings account for tuition early in the child's life and attend campus visits with the child in order to help the child make the "right" decision of what college to attend (Hossler et al., 1999). In short, the parents are very involved, and, as a result, have a substantial influence on the decision that is made.

Influence of Friends

According to a survey conducted by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1986), of the 1,000 students surveyed, 14 percent of respondents indicated that friends were the second most influential variable in the college choice process. However, parents far outweigh friends as the most important variable influencing a student's college choice. Friends were also reported as a positive influence

on the college selection process, especially when those friends were attending the particular college (Allen, 2007; Rowe, 2007). With friends and peers in the same grade level discussing different facets of college choices, most students are very vocal on why they are attending a particular college, therefore giving information on their choice. This inadvertently plays a factor in influencing others to choose to go to the same college (Kinzie et al., 2004).

Influence of High School Teachers and Guidance Counselors

Erdmann (1983) ranked counselors fifth out of eight influencers that students indicated assisted them in their college search process. In a survey of 1,000 high school seniors, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1986) noted that 73 % of the responding high school seniors used their high school guidance counselor to gain information on college; however, they ranked this interaction as least important in comparison to other sources of information (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1986). While the influence of high school guidance counselors has been addressed in the literature, their impact on the college choice process has declined over time (Rowe, 2007). Additionally, a study by Chapman, Demasi, and O'Brien (1987) reported that students have at least three to five visits with their high school guidance counselors during their junior and senior years to discuss college and financial aid options (Chapman et al., 1987). Therefore, while a high school counselor or teacher may not have as much influence on the college choice process as peers, parents, or family, they still play a tremendous role in helping a student choose what college to attend.

Location and Geographic Region of the Community College

According to Noel-Levitz, Inc., (2012), location of a college is a critical factor that is considered when a student is choosing a college to attend (Noel-Levitz, Inc., 2012). In normal circumstances, students opt to attend community colleges or universities close to home, usually within the state in which they grew up. Research on both two-year and four-year colleges has examined some aspects of location (proximity to home or convenience) as a variable (Bers & Galowich, 2002; Hossler et al., 1999; Smith & Bers, 1989).

Stokes and Somers's (2009) observations indicated that distance from a student's home was an important variable for students attending a two-year college. "Unambiguously, students who travel more than 100 miles from home are 7.1 % less likely to be attending a 2-year college while students traveling less than 30 miles from home to attend college are 3.9 % more likely to attend a 2-year college" (Stokes & Somers, 2009, p. 2).

The geography of a college also has a major impact on the college a student chooses to attend. Students incur expenses to attend some colleges, especially travel or residence costs for distant colleges, or additional tuition costs for out-of-state schools.

Program Availability

Availability of majors or programs are crucial fundamentals to high school students' decisions to attend specific colleges and universities (Cabrera, Burkham, & La Nasa, 2000; Kinzie et al., 2004; McCullough, 2010). The individuality of community college programs such as the 2-year career technical programs and select healthcare

programs attracted some high academic ability students to attend community colleges that have the programs available (Bartini, Hesel, & Pryor, 2008).

Course Offerings and Schedules

As the popularity of postsecondary education increases, it is becoming increasingly necessary to offer classes that are conducive to working adults. A recent survey by Citigroup revealed that 80 % of college students work at least a part time job during their first year of college (Fang, 2013). Additionally, according to Spanard (1990), "most students are part-time, have clear goals, are serious about their studies, are employed, and balance their studies on top of career and family obligations" (p. 321). As a result, many colleges and universities choose to offer more classes that are flexible to accommodate students. Credit by examination, correspondence courses, weekend courses, evening courses, short-term and intensive courses, and online courses are becoming more and more in demand. Most students want to plan their schedule around work schedules and family life, so colleges must find more non-traditional ways to educate students. While traditional day classes are still the favorable choice for traditional aged college students, institutions are beginning to offer more course schedules and offerings to accommodate students who work or have families.

Summary

While college choice literature has addressed both the influences and the process of choice, the studies have tended to focus on either the influences or the process, and not both simultaneously. A comprehensive review of the literature reveals that college choice cannot be predicted by affecting the influences or process, but is a byproduct of the two.

The college choice process tends to be consistent, which allows for a reasonable blend of theory to create the conceptual framework for this study. Additionally, the strong base for the choice process allows researchers to insert influences into various stages of the process.

The review of literature in this study showed there are many factors that can influence a student's decision to attend a specific college. These factors include: financial aid and scholarships; cost of attendance; parental influence; influence of friends siblings and high school counselors; location of the college; program of study; course selection; family income. The researcher examined the literature of these factors and, of all of the factors investigated, financial aid and cost of attendance was the most influential college choice factor in previous research (Herren et al., 2011; Mills, 2004).

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Chapter three details the methods that were used to explore the student experiences in the college choice process. It includes an overview of the design of the study, including the process of selecting individual participants. Chapter three includes a description of the data collection procedures as well as the data analysis techniques. The instrument used to collect the data is discussed. The chapter ends with an explanation of the reliability and validity of the study.

This quantitative study identified the factors that influence students' choice of college within a rural, Mississippi community college's five county district. The following research questions guided the research design:

1. To what extent do financial aid, institutional scholarships, or the receipt of both or neither affect a student's college choice?
2. To what extent does the cost of attendance affect a student's college choice?
3. To what extent does family income affect a student's college choice?
4. To what extent does the influence of others (e.g. family, friends, teachers, and counselors) affect a student's college choice?
5. To what extent do the location and geographic region of a community college affect a student's college choice?

6. To what extent does program availability affect a student's college choice?
7. To what extent do course offerings and schedules affect a student's college choice?

The objective of this study was to examine the factors that determine the college choice for high school students. The selected survey was administered to high school seniors in a rural, Mississippi community college's five county district to collect student responses.

Sample

For this study, students were selected from high schools in a rural Mississippi community college's five county district. The district has a total of 28 high schools and vocational-technical centers. Since surveying every school in the district would produce excessive data, the researcher used cluster random sampling to choose the schools to ask to participate in the research. Cluster random sampling is the "selection of groups of individuals, called clusters, rather than single individuals. All individuals in a cluster are included in the sample; the clusters are preferably selected randomly from the larger population of clusters" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2011, p. 516). Using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, schools were separated into their respective district and listed in alphabetical order. Every third school was chosen to participate in this study, for a total of six schools selected. After the researcher received IRB permission as well as permission from the principals of the selected schools, seniors who are at least 18 years old from the selected high schools were asked to complete the questionnaire. The students participating were given a brief purpose of the study that was being conducted. The students who were willing to participate completed the survey.

Instrumentation

Background

"Research is a viable approach to a problem only when there are data to support it" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p. 94). Nesbary (1999) defines survey research as "the process of collecting representative sample data from a larger population and using the sample to infer attributes of the population" (Nesbary, 1999, p. 10). The main purpose of a survey is to estimate, with significant precision, the percentage of population that has a specific attribute by collecting data from a small portion of the total population (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2000). The researcher wanted to determine what students consider when deciding on the college they will attend.

Selection

The survey instrument (see Appendix C) used in this study was developed by Allen in 2007 in order to "identify the factors that influenced students' choice of college at the University of Illinois, Saint Louis University, Washington University in St. Louis, the University of Missouri, and Southern Illinois University Carbondale" (Allen, 2007, p. 39-40). The questionnaire was adapted by asking relevant questions to answer research questions specific to this study. The instrument was chosen because of its simplicity and thoroughness to answer the research questions in this study. The research tool was an 11-item Likert-type survey with demographic information and open ended questions developed by a researcher who wanted to gather similar data as the researcher. The survey was designed to establish the reasons that students chose to attend public community colleges.

Coding was used in the analysis of the open-ended response items on the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, which are defined as "data analysis techniques that enable the researcher to meaningfully describe data with numerical indices or in graphic form" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2011, p. 15), were used to arrange the information into various categories. Pattern coding was utilized to determine emerging themes from the data. Demographic information was used to analyze data and to see if there were differences among the students based on demographic characteristics (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Validity and Reliability

An instrument is valid if it measures what it is intended to measure and accurately achieves the purpose for which it was designed (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2000). Wallen and Fraenkel emphasize that validity is a matter of degree and discussion should focus on how valid a test is, not whether it is valid or not. No test instrument is perfectly valid. Additionally, the researcher needs some kind of assurance that the instrument being used will result in accurate conclusions (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2000). Although, validity is more important than reliability, reliability needs to be addressed. Wallen and Fraenkel state that reliability relates to the consistency of the data collected (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2000).

According to the Allen (2007), the questionnaire was developed based on Rea and Parker's (1992) guiding principles for questionnaire design. The questionnaire was constructed by Allen (2007) for previous research investigating college choice factors and was used by permission of the author. The questionnaire was analyzed by Allen (2007) for validity and reliability by testing it before initially administering it to students for research purposes. The pilot survey was given to two students from Washington University in St. Louis and two students from Southern Illinois University Carbondale (Allen, 2007). The analysis proved both reliable and valid for the research that Allen conducted.

Data Gathering Procedures

Prior to the beginning of the data collection, approval from Mississippi State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human subjects was received by the researcher. The approval letter is located in Appendix C. Questionnaires were administered to high school students between May 1, 2014 and May 31, 2014. The questionnaire consisted of questions concerning demographic and academic information about the students being surveyed. The majority of the items on the questionnaire used a Likert-scale to gauge the importance of various factors. The remaining three questions were open-ended and asked the participant to express their views regarding the college selection process. According to Allen (2007), the questionnaire is simple and concise and on average takes no longer than 10 minutes to complete.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The average score on each Likert-scale item was calculated to determine the Importance of the factor for that particular item. Each item was assigned a response of very important (5), important (4), neither important nor unimportant (3), unimportant (2), or very unimportant (1).

The completed questionnaires were analyzed and scored by the researcher. The responses were compiled and analyzed descriptively using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Frequency and percentage tables were generated using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 22. The data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Coding was used in the analysis of the open-ended response items on the questionnaire. Descriptive coding was used to arrange the information into various categories and pattern coding was used to determine emerging themes (Allen, 2007).

The 11 Likert responses along with other demographic data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet for each respondent and converted to the SPSS database for analysis. To test for an association between the demographic variables (i.e. gender, race, ACT, GPA, combined family income, and the highest level of education of the students' parents) with the 11 factors of interest, the researcher used two tests. To gain a better understanding of the data produced by these two tests, the researcher consulted the lead statistics instructor at East Central Community College. The instructor suggested Robert Parker's statistical expertise to explain the data produced to the researcher, as he is a

graduate of Mississippi State University with a Master's Degree in Math and is currently in the Statistics Ph.D. program at the University of Florida.

The first test, the Pearson Chi-Squared Test of Independence, was used to compare the nominal demographic variables, gender and race, to the factors of interest. Due to the large number of cells with zero count, the p-value was simulated using a monte-carlo approach. Small p-values indicate that the two factors are not independent. When the conclusion is drawn that the factors are not independent, the researcher can look at the Pearson standardized residuals to determine how they are associated. A negative residual indicates that there were fewer observed in that cell than was expected and a positive residual indicates that there were more observed in that cell than expected under independence (R. Parker, personal communication, August 29, 2014).

The second test used was the Goodman-Kruskal gamma. The output of this test gives the estimated gamma along with the standard error and a 95% confidence interval for gamma. The interpretation of this test is very much the same as the correlation, r. If gamma is positive, this indicates that a person higher in one factor tends to also be in higher levels of the other factor. If gamma is negative, this indicates that people in higher levels of one factor tend to be in lower levels of the other factor (R. Parker, personal communication, August 29, 2014).

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This study was conducted to examine and identify the factors that were most significant to students when choosing a college. Students from a rural Mississippi community college's five-county district were surveyed to gain a better understanding of factors that played an important role for students during the college selection process.

Relationship of Research and Purpose

The purpose of the research was to examine and identify the factors that influence students' choice of college. The research answers the following questions:

1. To what extent do financial aid, institutional scholarships, or the receipt of both or neither affect a student's college choice?
2. To what extent does the cost of attendance affect a student's college choice?
3. To what extent does family income affect a student's college choice?
4. To what extent does the influence of others (e.g. family, friends, teachers, and counselors) affect a student's college choice?
5. To what extent do the location and geographic region of a community college affect a student's college choice?
6. To what extent does program availability affect a student's college choice?

7. To what extent do course offerings and schedules affect a student's college choice?

This chapter establishes a brief synopsis of the problem for this study, identifies the populations surveyed, and presents the results of the completed study. Results are presented for the seven research questions individually. The data collected will be presented along with a discussion of the statistical analysis.

Demographic Information

In order to present the most accurate representation of the data, student demographic information was obtained from 114 participants when they completed the college choice questionnaire. These data displayed in the following tables will give the reader a better understanding of the composition of the students included in the study. Average age, gender, race, grade point average, ACT/SAT score, type of high school attended, household income, and parental education were documented.

Table 4 shows the distribution of the participants based on their demographic characteristics. There were 49 male students (42.98%) and 65 female students (57.02%). All 114 students (100%) were in the 18 or older age group. There were no participants younger than 18 years of age. There were 66 (57.89%) participants who were White, 38 (33.34%) were African American, Black, 3 (2.63%) were American Indian, 4 (3.51%) were Hispanic/Mexican, 2 (1.75%) were Asian, 1 (.89%) student was multiracial, and there were no participants who listed their ethnic background as other. There was 1 participant (0.88%) who had less than a 1.0 Grade Point Average (GPA), 2 (1.75%) had a GPA of 1.0-2.0, 42 (36.84%) had a GPA of 2.1-3.0, and 69 participants (60.52%) had a GPA of 3.1-4.0. There were no participants who had higher than a 4.0 GPA. There were

no participants who had 12 or less on their ACT. There were 12 participants (10.53%) scored 13-15 on their ACT, 51 participants (44.74%) scored 16-19 on their ACT, 35 participants (30.70%) scored 20-23 on their ACT, 12 participants (10.53%) scored 24-27 on their ACT, 3 participants (2.63%) scored 28-30 on their ACT, and 1 participant (0.88%) scored higher than 30 on the ACT. All 114 participants (100%) attended a public high school and no participants attended a private high school. Of the participants surveyed, 35 (30.70%) have a total household income of less than $25,000, 52 (45.61%) have a total household income of $25,001-$50,000, 17 (14.91%) have a total household income of $50,001-$75,000, 5 (4.39%) have a total household income of $75,001-$100,000, and 5 (4.39%) have a total household income of greater than $100,000. Finally, 13 participants (11.40%), when asked about the parent or guardian with the highest level of education, have a parent with less than a high school education, 46 (40.35%) have a parent who is a high school graduate, 24 (21.05%) have a parent with some college, 18 (15.79%) have a parent with an associate's degree, 8 (7.02%) have a parent with a bachelor's degree, and 5 (4.39%) have a parent with a graduate degree.

Table 4

Frequency and Percentage of Students Grouped by Demographics

Gender Group	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Male	49	42.98%
Female	65	57.02%
Age Group	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
18 years of age of older	114	100%
Younger than 18 years of age	0	0.00%
Race Group	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
White	66	57.89%
African American, Black	38	33.34%
American Indian	3	2.63%
Hispanic/Mexican	4	3.51%
Asian	2	1.75%
Multiracial	1	0.89%
Other	0	0.0%
GPA Group	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Less than 1.0	1	0.88%
1.0-2.0	2	1.75%
2.1-3.0	42	36.84%
3.1-4.0	69	60.52%
4.0 or higher	0	0.00%

Factors Related to College Choice

The participants were asked to rank factors that influence their college choice using Likert scale answers Very Important (VI), Important (I), Neither Important nor Unimportant (N), Unimportant (U), Very Unimportant (VU). The following factors were addressed: financial aid, cost of college, interested in particular major or program, scholarships, course selection, location of the college, family income, parental influence, influence of high school counselor, influence of siblings, and influence of friends. Table 5 details the average score and ranking of the 11 factors based on the answers of the participants.

Table 5

Average Score and Ranking of the Eleven Factors of Interest

Factors	VI	I	N	U	VU	Average Score	Ranking
financial aid	92	17	3	1	1	4.72	1
cost of college	82	30	1	1	0	4.69	2
Interest in particular program	76	32	4	1	1	4.58	3
scholarships	74	28	9	2	1	4.5	4
course selection	58	44	9	3	0	4.38	5
location of college	55	33	16	10	0	4.17	6
family income	63	30	16	4	1	4.05	7
parental influence	44	38	25	6	1	4.04	8
influence of high school counselor	39	37	23	8	7	3.82	9
influence of siblings	41	23	35	9	6	3.74	10
influence of friends	34	30	36	8	6	3.68	11

Table 6 details the relative frequency of all eleven factors of interest that were investigated in this study. Each factor is categorized under Very Important (VI), Important (I), Neither Important of Unimportant (N), Unimportant (U), or Very Unimportant (VU).

Table 6

Relative Frequency of Eleven Factors of Interest

Financial Aid	**Relative Frequency**
Very Important	0.7193
Important	0.2632
Neither Important or Unimportant	0.0088
Unimportant	0.0088
Very Unimportant	0.000
Scholarships	**Relative Frequency**
Very Important	0.6491
Important	0.2456
Neither Important or Unimportant	0.0789

Table 6 (continued)

Unimportant	0.0175
Very Unimportant	0.0088
Cost of College	Relative Frequency
Very Important	0.7193
Important	0.2632
Neither Important or Unimportant	0.0088
Unimportant	0.0088
Very Unimportant	0.000
Family Income	Relative Frequency
Very Important	0.5526
Important	0.2532
Neither Important or Unimportant	0.1404
Unimportant	0.0351
Very Unimportant	0.008
Influence of Parents	Relative Frequency
Very Important	0.3947
Important	0.3333
Neither Important or Unimportant	0.2105
Unimportant	0.0426
Very Unimportant	0.0088
Influence of Friends	Relative Frequency
Very Important	0.2982
Important	0.0702
Neither Important or Unimportant	0.3158
Unimportant	0.2632
Very Unimportant	0.0526
Influence of Siblings	Relative Frequency
Very Important	0.3596
Important	0.0789
Neither Important or Unimportant	0.3070
Unimportant	0.2018
Very Unimportant	0.0526
Influence of High School Counselors	Relative Frequency
Very Important	0.3421
Important	0.3158
Neither Important or Unimportant	0.2018
Unimportant	0.0789
Very Unimportant	0.0614
Location of College	Relative Frequency
Very Important	0.4825
Important	.02895
Neither Important or Unimportant	0.1404
Unimportant	0.0877

Table 6 (continued)

Very Unimportant	0.000
Program or Major Availability	Relative Frequency
Very Important	0.6667
Important	0.2807
Neither Important or Unimportant	0.0351
Unimportant	0.0088
Very Unimportant	0.0088
Influence of Course Selection	Relative Frequency
Very Important	0.5088
Important	0.0263
Neither Important or Unimportant	0.0789
Unimportant	0.3860
Very Unimportant	0.0000

Research Question One

Research question one asked: To what extent do financial aid, institutional scholarships, or the receipt of both or neither affect a student's college choice?

According to the survey results, the most influential factor when choosing a college was the availability of financial aid. Of the 114 participants, 92 believed that financial aid was a very important factor while 17 participants said it was an important factor. The data reported in Table 5 revealed that financial aid had an average ranking of 4.72 with five being the highest possible score.

One participant stated that financial aid "made the choice for me. I have to go to college where me and my parents can afford for me to go and that means me getting as many scholarships and grants as I possibly can." Another student offered, "It is expensive to go to college and every little bit of financial aid helps. I don't want to be in debt with I leave junior college." Many of the participants in this study agreed that more scholarships and grants would be helpful to students when making the decision of what

college to choose to attend. Finally, one participant stated frankly that she would not be able to attend college if she had to pay tuition costs out of pocket. She chose a college that offered the biggest "bang for her buck" (i.e. lowest tuition costs) and where she could use MTAG and Pell Grants.

There were no associations between the importance of financial aid and gender or race. There were associations between the importance of financial aid and GPA, ACT, family income, or parent education.

Gender versus financial aid

The data signify that the results for gender versus the influence of financial aid yielded $p = 0.8601$, $X^2=1.826$, and df = NA. Since the $p > 0.05$, the data indicates that these two factors are not dependent and that there is no association between gender and the influence of financial aid on college choice.

Race versus financial aid

The data signify that the results for race versus influence of financial aid yielded $p = 0.5492$, $X^2 = 12.72$, and df = NA. Since the $p > 0.05$, the data concludes that these two factors are not dependent. Therefore, it is concluded that there is no association between race and the influence of financial aid on college choice.

GPA versus financial aid

The data for GPA versus the influence of financial aid yielded Gamma = -0.595, SD = 0.204, 95% CI [-0.995, -0.196]. As a result of the gamma being negative, this indicates that the participants with lower GPA felt that financial aid was more influential

on their college choice than the participants with higher GPA. The relative frequency is detailed in Table 7.

Table 7

GPA versus Financial Aid relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Less than 1.0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00
1.1-2.0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00
2.1-3.0	0.00	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.92
3.1-4.0	0.03	0.00	0.01	0.22	0.74

ACT versus financial aid

The data for ACT versus the influence of financial aid yielded Gamma = -0.356, SD = 0.161, and 95% CI [-0.672, -0.041]. As a result of the gamma being negative, this indicates that the participants with lower ACT scores felt that financial aid was more influential on their college choice than the participants with higher ACT. The relative frequency is detailed in Table 8.

Table 8

ACT versus Financial Aid relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Less than 12	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00
13-15	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.00	0.93
16-19	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.14	0.84
20-23	0.03	0.00	0.00	0.28	0.69
24-27	0.08	0.08	0.00	0.08	0.75
29-30	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
31 or higher	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00

Combined family income versus financial aid

The data for combined family income versus the influence of financial aid yielded Gamma = -0.5, SD = 0.122, and 95% CI [-0.74, -0.26]. As a result of the gamma being negative, this is a strong indication that the participants with lower combined family income felt that financial aid was more influential on their college choice than the participants with a higher combined family income. The relative frequency is detailed in Table 9.

Table 9

Combined family income versus financial aid relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Less than $25,000	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.97
$25,001-$50,000	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.16	0.79
$50,001-$75,000	0.00	0.00	0.04	0.31	0.65
$75,001-$100,000	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.14	0.86
Greater than $100,000	0.40	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.60

Highest level of education of parents versus financial aid

The data for highest level of education of parents versus the influence of financial aid yielded Gamma = -0.308, SD = 0.153, and 95% CI [-0.608, -0.008]. As a result of the gamma being negative, this indicates that the participants with parents who are less educated felt that financial aid was more influential on their college choice than the participants with parents who had a higher education level. The relative frequency is detailed in Table 10.

Table 10

Highest Level of Education of Parents versus Financial Aid relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Less than High School	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.93
High School Graduate	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.14	0.83
Some College	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.13	0.83
Associates Degree	0.05	0.00	0.05	0.14	0.76
Bachelor's Degree	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00
Graduate Degree	0.20	0.00	0.00	0.60	0.20

Scholarships as a College Choice Factor

Of the 114 participants, 74 felt that scholarships were a very important factor when choosing a college to attend. Of the 114 participants, 28 thought it was important, 9 participants thought that it was neither important nor unimportant, and 3 thought scholarships were unimportant. As a result, scholarships were the fourth most important factor for students when choosing a college to attend. Scholarships had an average score of 4.5 on a five-point scale, as indicated on Table 5.

One participant acknowledged that his choice of school was based solely on a baseball scholarship that he was offered. Another stated that if colleges wanted to market themselves to students more, each one should offer more scholarships and become more competitive with other colleges. To reiterate the importance of financial aid, one student said that his decision to attend junior college was based solely on the fact that the college offered him the most money to attend the college.

There were no associations between the importance of scholarships and gender, race, and GPA. There were associations between the importance of financial aid and ACT, combined family income, and parent's educational level.

Gender versus scholarships

The data signify that the results for gender versus the influence of scholarships yielded $p = 0.2859$, $X^2 = 4.995$, and df = NA. Since the $p > 0.05$, the data conclude that these two factors are not dependent. Therefore, it is concluded that there is no association between gender and the influence of scholarships on college choice.

Race versus scholarships

The data represents that the results for race versus influence of scholarships yielded $p = 0.2004$, $X^2 = 35.42$, and df= NA. Since the $p > 0.05$, the data concludes that these two factors are not dependent. Therefore, it is concluded that there is no association between race and the influence of scholarships on college choice.

GPA versus scholarships

The data for GPA versus the influence of scholarships yielded Gamma = -0.009, SD = 0.179, and 95% CI [-0.361, 0.342] = -0.361. As a result of the gamma being close to zero, this indicates that there is little or no correlation between GPA and scholarships as a factor for college choice.

ACT versus scholarships

The data for ACT versus the influence of scholarships yielded Gamma = 0.1, SD = 0.153, and 95% CI [-0.672, -0.041]. As a result of the gamma being positive, this indicates that the participants with higher ACT scores ranked scholarships higher in importance as a college choice factor than did students with lower ACT scores. The relative frequency is detailed in Table 11.

Table 11

ACT versus Scholarships relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Less than 12	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
13-15	0.00	0.07	0.20	0.13	0.60
16-19	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.27	0.66
20-23	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.28	0.66
24-27	0.08	0.08	0.00	0.17	0.67
29-30	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
31 or higher	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00

Combined family income versus scholarships

The data for combined family income versus the influence scholarships yielded Gamma = -0.222, SD = 0.137, and 95% CI [-0.491, 0.047]. As a result of the gamma being negative, this indicates that the participants with lower combined income ranked scholarships higher than students with higher combined family income as a college choice factor. The relative frequency is detailed in Table 12.

Table 12

Combined family income versus scholarship relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Less than $25,000	0.00	0.00	0.12	0.15	0.73
$25,001-$50,000	0.00	0.02	0.07	0.21	0.70
$50,001-$75,000	0.00	0.00	0.04	0.46	0.50
$75,001-$100,000	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.29	0.71
Greater than $100,000	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.00	0.40

Highest level of education of parents versus scholarships

The data for highest level of education of parents versus the influence of scholarships yielded Gamma = -0.04, SD = 0.131, and 95% CI [-0.296, 0.216]. As a result of the gamma being negative, this indicates that students whose parents have a lower educational level ranked scholarships more important as a college choice factor than students whose parents had a higher educational level. The relative frequency is detailed in Table 13.

Table 13

Highest Level of Education of Parents versus Scholarships relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Less than High School	0.00	0.00	0.13	0.27	0.60
High School Graduate	0.00	0.03	0.07	0.23	0.67
Some College	0.00	0.03	0.07	0.23	0.67
Associates Degree	0.00	0.00	0.10	0.33	0.57
Bachelor's Degree	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.14	0.86
Graduate Degree	0.20	0.00	0.00	0.40	0.40

Research Question Two

Research question two asked:

To what extent does the cost of attendance affect a student's college choice?

The cost of attendance for an institution was the second most influential factor when choosing a college. There were 82 participants who believed that cost was a very important factor while 30 participants felt it was important. There was 1 participant felt it was neither important nor unimportant. Only one participant felt cost was an unimportant or very unimportant factor. Accordingly, cost had an average score of 4 on a 5-point

scale, as indicated in Table 4 and corroborated by the relative frequency described in Table 5.

Numerous participants stated repeatedly that cost of attendance was a major factor in their college choice. "How much a college costs affects if I will get to attend college or not," one participant wrote. "I want the college that I choose to go to to be close enough to my house that I can commute and still be able to afford to go to college. Since I plan to work full time and am paying for college out of my pocket, I want college to be something I can afford," another student stated.

Students gave many reasons that cost was important to them when choosing a college to attend. "Not only do I have to pay tuition, I have to make sure I can pay for gas, food, books, and other stuff that I need to be successful in college. If it costs too much to go to college, I won't be able to go. I will have to get a job first," one said. Another student put it very frankly when she said, "I don't want to go broke going to college."

There were no associations between the importance of cost of college and gender, race. There were associations between the importance of cost of the college and GPA, ACT, combined family income, and parent's educational level.

Gender versus cost of college

The data signify that the results for gender versus the influence of cost of college yielded $p = 0.4363$, $X^2 = 2.765$, and df = NA. Since the $p > 0.05$, the data conclude that these two factors are not dependent. Therefore, it is concluded that there is no association between gender and the influence of cost of the college on college choice.

Race versus cost of college

The data represent that the results for race versus influence of cost of college yielded $p = 0.1614$, $X^2 = 18.73$, and df = NA. Since the $p > 0.05$, the data concludes that these two factors are not dependent. Therefore, it is concluded that there is no association between race and the influence of cost of the college on college choice.

GPA versus cost of college

The data for GPA versus the influence of the cost of college yielded Gamma = -0.448, SD = 0.193, and 95% CI [-0.827, -0.069]. As a result of the gamma being negative, this indicates that participants with a lower GPA ranked the cost of college more important than participants with higher GPA. The relative frequency is detailed in Table 14.

Table 14

GPA versus Cost of College relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Less than 1.0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00
1.1-2.0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.50	0.50
2.1-3.0	0.00	0.03	0.03	0.08	0.87
3.1-4.0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.36	0.64

ACT versus cost of college

The data for ACT versus the influence of the cost of college yielded Gamma = -0.413, SD = 0.148, and 95% CI [-0.704, -0.122]. As a result of the gamma being negative, this indicates that participants with a lower ACT ranked the cost of college

more important than participants with higher ACT. The relative frequency is detailed in Table 15.

Table 15

ACT versus Cost of College relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Less than 12	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
13-15	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.00	0.93
16-19	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.21	0.79
20-23	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.41	0.59
24-27	0.00	0.08	0.00	0.42	0.50
29-30	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
31 or higher	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00

Combined family income versus cost of college

The data for combined family income versus the influence of the cost of college yielded Gamma = -0.341, SD = 0.132, and 95% CI [-0.599, -0.083]. As a result of the gamma being negative, this indicates that participants with a lower combined family income ranked the cost of college more important than participants with higher combined family. The relative frequency is detailed in Table 16.

Table 16

Combined family income versus Cost of College relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Less than $25,000	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.12	0.88
$25,001-$50,000	0.00	0.02	0.02	0.28	0.67
$50,001-$75,000	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.35	0.65
$75,001-$100,000	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.43	0.57
Greater than $100,000	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.40	0.60

Highest level of education of parents versus cost of college

The data for highest level of education of parents versus the influence of the cost of college yielded a gamma statistic = -0.114, SD= 0.114, and 95% CI [-0.397, 0.169]. As a result of the gamma being negative, this indicates that participants with parents who have less education ranked the cost of college slightly more important than participants with parents with a more advanced degree. The relative frequency is detailed in Table 17.

Table 17

Highest level of Education of Parents versus Cost of College relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Less than High School	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.20	0.80
High School Graduate	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.23	0.74
Some College	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.30	0.67
Associates Degree	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.19	0.81
Bachelor's Degree	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.14	0.86
Graduate Degree	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.80	0.20

Research Question Three

Research question three asked:

To what extent does family income affect a student's college choice?

Family income was the seventh most influential factor of college choice among the students surveyed, according to the data in Tables 4 and 5. Of all of the participants surveyed, 63 stated that family income was very important when they determined what college to attend, 30 students indicated that this factor was important to their college choice, 16 participants stated that it was neither important nor unimportant, 4 said it was very unimportant, and 1 participant said it was very unimportant.

One participant stated that her family's combined income determined whether she and her sister would qualify for a Pell Grant. Without that grant, each would not be able to afford to go to college; therefore, family income was "huge" for this family. Another student indicated that he did not rely on his family's income in order to go to college. Student loans and scholarships ensured that he was able to go to college. He said that he did not feel that it was "fair to his family to pay for college. My parents have already paid so much for my high school education, especially since I was in the band. That isn't cheap!"

There were no associations between the importance of family income and race, GPA, ACT, and parent's educational level. There were associations between the importance of family income and gender and combined family income.

Gender versus family income

The data represent that the results for gender versus the influence of family income yielded $p = 0.04248$, $X^2 = 8.509$, and df = NA. Since the $p < 0.05$, the data concludes that these two factors are not independent. Therefore, it is concluded that there is an association between gender and family income. The relative frequency is detailed in Table 18. Table 19 details the ranking of family by gender. Females provided the highest rank for family income, while men had the lowest ranking.

Table 18

Gender versus Family Income relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Female	0.00	0.00	0.15	0.23	0.62
Male	0.02	0.08	0.12	0.31	0.47

Table 19

Rank of the Influence of Family Income by Gender

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Female	-1.1568	-2.3450	0.4778	-0.9045	1.5520
Males	1.1568	2.3450	-0.4778	0.9045	-1.550

Race versus family income

The data represent that the results for race versus the influence of family income yielded $p = 0.1614$, $X^2 = 32.98$, and df = NA. Since the $p > 0.05$, the data concludes that these two factors are not dependent. Therefore, it is determined that there is no association between race and family income.

GPA versus family income

The data for GPA versus the influence of family income yielded Gamma = -0.088, SD=0.163, and 95% CI [-0.408, 0.232]. As a result of the gamma being so close to zero, this indicates that there is little or no correlation between GPA and family income as a college choice factor.

ACT versus family income

The data for ACT versus the influence of family income yielded Gamma = 0.001, SD=0.135, and 95% CI [-0.265, 0.266]. As a result of the gamma being so close to zero, this indicates that there is little or no correlation between ACT and family income as a college choice factor.

Combined family income versus family income

The data for combined family income versus the influence of family income yielded Gamma = -0.324, SD= 0.113, and 95% CI [-0.545, -0.103]. As a result of the gamma being negative, this indicates that students with a lower combined family income view family income as a college choice factor more importantly than students with a higher family income. The relative frequency is detailed in Table 20.

Table 20

Combined Family Income versus Family Income relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Less Than $25,000	0.00	0.00	0.09	0.15	0.76
$25,000-$50,000	0.00	0.02	0.21	0.30	0.47
$50,001-$75,000	0.00	0.08	0.04	0.31	0.58
$75,000-$100,000	0.00	0.00	0.29	0.57	0.14
Greater than $100,000	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.00	0.40

Highest level of education of parents versus family income

The data for highest level of education of parents versus the influence of family income yielded Gamma = -0.025, SD= 0.116, and 95% CI [-0.252, 0.203]. As a result of the gamma being so close to zero, this indicates that there is little or no correlation between the educational level of parents and family income as a college choice factor.

Research Question Four

Research question four asked:

To what extent does the influence of others (e.g. family, friends, teachers, and counselors) affect a student's college choice?

Parental influence had an average score of 4.04 out of a possible score of five points, which was not a very strong score and ranked it 8th out of 11 factors in the study, as illustrated by the frequency count in Tables 4 and 5. Of the 114 participants, 44 said parental influence was a very important factor and 38 participants said it was an important factor. There were 25 participants who said it was neither important nor unimportant in determining a college. There were 6 participants who said it was an unimportant factor and the remaining participant said parental influence was a very unimportant factor.

One participant stated that she thought that her parents were the most influential factor that determined where she went to college because "they want me to succeed. To me, that is the most important thing that determines where I go to college, because I want to make them proud of me." Another participant, who indicated that the location of the college was a big factor for her, also stated that her parents have always been her number one fans and she wanted to do what would be easiest on the family. Creating a financial burden on them would be a deal breaker on her attending college or not.

There were no associations between the importance of influence of parents and gender, race, GPA, ACT, and parent's educational level. There was an association between the importance of influence of parents and parent's educational level.

Gender versus influence of parents

The data indicate that the results for gender versus the influence of parents yielded $p = 0.2554$, $X^2 = 5.245$, and df =NA. Since the $p > 0.05$, the data conclude that these two factors are not dependent. Therefore, it is determined that there is little or no association between gender and the influence of parents on college choice.

Race versus influence of parents

The data represent that the results for race versus the influence of parents yielded a $p = 0.1624$, $X^2 = 30.57$, and df =NA. Since the $p > 0.05$, the data conclude that these two factors are not dependent. Therefore, it is determined that there is little or no association between race and the influence of parents on college choice.

GPA versus influence of parents

The data for GPA versus the influence of parents yielded Gamma = -0.036, SD= 0.152, and 95% CI [-0.333, 0.261]. As a result of the gamma being so close to zero, this indicates that there is little or no correlation between GPA and influence of parents as a college choice factor.

ACT versus influence of parents

The data for ACT versus the influence of parents yielded Gamma = -0.08, SD= 0.124, and 95% CI [-0.323, 0.163]. As a result of the gamma being so close to zero, this indicates that there is little or no correlation between ACT and influence of parents as a college choice factor.

Combined family income versus influence of Parents

The data for combined family income versus the influence of parents yielded Gamma = -0.354, SD = 0.1, and 95% CI [-0.551, -0.158]. As a result of the gamma being negative, this indicates that participants with lower combined family income said that the influence of their parents was more important on their college choice than students with a higher combined family income. The relative frequency is detailed in Table 21.

Table 21

Combined family income versus Influence of Parents relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Less than $25,000	0.00	0.00	0.18	0.21	0.61
$25,001-$50,000	0.00	0.02	0.28	0.38	0.38
$50,001-$75,000	0.00	0.00	0.29	0.71	0.00
$75,001-$100,000	0.00	0.00	0.29	0.71	0.00
Greater than $100,000	0.20	0.20	0.40	0.20	0.00

Highest level of education of parents versus influence of parents

The data for highest level of education of parents versus the influence of parents yielded Gamma = -0.025, SD = 0.116, and 95% CI [-0.252, 0.203]. As a result of the gamma being so close to zero, this indicates that there is little or no correlation between the highest educational level of the participants' parents and the influence of parents as a college choice factor.

Influence of Friends as a College Choice Factor

The influence of friends on a student's college choice was the least important factor indicated by the participants in this study. This factor scored an average ranking of 3.68 on a 5-point scale, according to Table 4 and the relative frequency revealed in Table 5. Of the 114 participants, 34 indicated that the influence of friends on their college choice was very important, 30 participants indicated that it was important, 36 participants stated that it was neither important nor unimportant, 8 participants felt that it was unimportant, and 6 participants stated that it was very unimportant.

One participant indicated on one of the open-ended questions that her college choice was based solely on if her friends were going to the college that she was. "Who

wants to go to a college where you don't know anyone? Not me." Another student speculated that most students go to the closest college to home because that's where most of the people from high school would be attending. "It's not quite as scary going to college if you know that you will know some people that are going there too. I know that is a big reason I am going where I am to college."

There were no associations between the importance of influence of friends and gender, race, GPA, ACT, and parent's educational level. There was an association between the importance of financial aid and combined family income.

Gender versus influence of friends

The data represent that the results for gender versus the influence of friends yielded a $p = 0.2889$, $X^2 = 5.183$, and df =NA. Since the $p > 0.05$, the data conclude that these two factors are not dependent. Therefore, it is determined that there is little or no association between gender and the influence of friends on college choice.

Race of influence of friends

The data represent that the results for race versus the influence of friends yielded a $p = 0.1634$, $X^2 = 32.75$, and df =NA. Since the $p > 0.05$, the data conclude that these two factors are not dependent. Therefore, it is determined that there is no association between race and the influence of friends on college choice.

GPA versus the influence of friends

The data for GPA versus the influence of friends yielded Gamma = -0.008, SD = 0.142, and 95% CI [-0.287, 0.271]. As a result of the gamma being so close to zero, this

indicates that there is little or no correlation between GPA and the influence of friends as a college choice factor.

ACT versus influence of friends

The data for ACT versus the influence of friends yielded Gamma = -0.015, SD = 0.115, and 95% CI [-0.242, 0.211]. As a result of the gamma being so close to zero, this indicates that there is little or no correlation between ACT and the influence of friends as a college choice factor.

Combined family income versus influence of friends

The data for combined family income versus the influence of friends yielded Gamma = -218, SD = 0.104, and 95% CI [-0.422, -0.013]. As a result of the gamma being negative, this indicates that the participants who have a lower combined family income ranked the influence of friends slightly higher than participants who had a lower combined family income. The relative frequency is detailed in Table 22.

Table 22

Combined family income versus influence of friends relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Less than $25,000	0.03	0.00	0.33	0.27	0.36
$25,001-$50,000	0.05	0.02	0.40	0.26	0.28
$50,001-$75,000	0.04	0.15	0.19	0.23	0.38
$75,001-$100,000	0.00	0.43	0.14	0.43	0.00
Greater than $100,000	0.40	0.00	0.40	0.20	0.00

Highest level of education of parents versus influence of friends

The data for highest level of education of parents versus the influence of friends yielded Gamma = -0.01, SD = 0.108, and 95% CI [-0.223, 0.202]. As a result of the gamma being so close to zero, this indicates that there is little or no correlation between highest level of education of parents and the influence of friends as a college choice factor.

Influence of Siblings as a College Choice Factor

This study revealed that the influence of siblings was the 10th most important factor out of 11 factors that determines where a student attends college. This factor had an average score of 3.74 on a 5-point scale, according to Table 4. Of the 114 participants, 41 stated that it was a very important when determining what college to attend, while 23 said that is was an important factor to consider when choosing a college. 35 participants said the influence of siblings was neither important nor unimportant, 9 stated that is was unimportant, while 6 participants indicated that was very unimportant.

Only one participant addressed the fact that she is attending a college because her brother attended there as well. She said that the university she chose to attend has not always been chosen by her family, but she and her brother are fans of the college because of their athletics and she planned to room with her brother once they were both in school there. She speculated that it would be cheaper on her parents if they had to fund one apartment for the both of them. Additionally, she was excited about attending college football games together as a family. Finally, she indicated that it would make the transition to college easier for her because someone that she was accustomed to already would be there and be familiar with the campus and help her find her classes.

There were no associations between the importance of influence of siblings and gender, GPA, ACT, and combined family income. There were associations between the importance of the influence of siblings and race, combined family income.

Gender versus the influence of siblings

The data represent that the results for gender versus the influence of siblings yielded a $p = 0.1755$, $X^2 = 6.672$, and df = NA. Since the $p > 0.05$, the data conclude that these two factors are not dependent. Therefore, it is determined that there is little or no association between gender and the influence of siblings on college choice.

Race versus the influence of siblings

The data in Table 23 represents that the results for race versus the influence of siblings yielded a $p = 0.02899$, $X^2 = 43.38$, and df =NA. Since the $p < 0.05$, the data concludes that these two factors are not independent. Therefore, it can be assumed that there is some association between race and the influence of siblings on college choice. Table 23 details the relative frequency and Table 24 details the ranking of influence of siblings by race. African Americans had the highest rank for the influence of siblings, while multiracial had the lowest ranking.

Table 23

Race versus Influence of Siblings relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
African American, Black	0.00	0.03	0.36	0.15	0.46
American Indian	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.50
Asian	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Hispanic/Mexican	0.00	0.00	0.50	0.25	0.25
Multiracial	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00
Other	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00
White	0.06	0.12	0.25	0.25	0.32

Table 24

Rank of the Influence of Siblings by Race

	VU	U	N	I	VI
African American, Black	-1.8148	-1.5220	0.8673	-0.9191	1.6347
American Indian	2.8585	-0.4177	-0.9497	-0.7173	0.4173
Asian	4.2614	-0.2941	-0.6685	-0.5050	-0.7527
Hispanic/Mexican	-0.4799	-0.5961	0.8518	0.2448	-0.4652
Multiracial	-0.3363	-0.4177	2.1436	-0.7173	-1.0693
Other	-0.2367	-0.2941	1.5090	-0.5050	-0.7527
White	0.4905	2.0125	-1.6227	1.3605	-0.9372

GPA versus influence of siblings

The data for GPA versus the influence of siblings yielded Gamma = -0.082, SD = 0.142, and 95% CI [-0.36, 0.195]. As a result of the gamma being so close to zero, this indicates that there is little or no correlation between GPA and the influence of siblings as a college choice factor.

ACT versus influence of siblings

The data for ACT versus the influence of siblings yielded Gamma = -0.095, SD = 0.119, and 95% CI [-0.328, 0.139]. As a result of the gamma being so close to zero, this indicates that there is little or no correlation between ACT and the influence of siblings as a college choice factor.

Combined family income versus influence of siblings

The data for combined family income versus the influence of siblings yielded Gamma = -0.216, SD = 0.106, and 95% CI [-0.423, -0.009]. As a result of the gamma being negative, this indicates participants with a lower combined family income indicated that the influence of siblings is more important than participants with a higher combined family income. The relative frequency is detailed in Table 25.

Table 25

Combined family income versus influence of siblings relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Less than $25,000	0.06	0.00	0.27	0.18	0.48
$25,001-$50,000	0.02	0.09	0.40	0.19	0.30
$50,001-$75,000	0.08	0.04	0.19	0.27	0.42
$75,001-$100,000	0.14	0.29	0.14	0.29	0.14
Greater than $100,000	0.00	0.40	0.60	0.00	0.00

Highest level of education of parents versus influence of siblings

The data for highest level of education of parent versus the influence of siblings yielded Gamma = -0.047, SD = 0.106, and 95% CI [-0.255, 0.161]. As a result of the gamma being so close to zero, this indicates that there is little or no correlation between

the highest level of education of parents and influence of siblings as a college choice factor.

Influence of High School Counselors as a College Choice Factor

The influence of a high school counselor was the 9th most important factor indicated in the results of this research, as indicated on Table 5. This factor had an average score of 3.82 on a 5-point scale. There were 39 participants who indicated that the influence of their high school counselor was very important on their decision on what college to attend, 37 indicated that this factor was important, 23 stated that it was neither important nor unimportant, 8 said that it was unimportant, while 7 stated that this factor was very unimportant.

There were no associations between the importance of influence of high school counselors and gender, ACT, and parent's educational level. There was an association between the influence of high school counselors and race, GPA, and combined family income.

Gender versus the influence of high school counselor

The data represent that the results for gender versus the influence of high school counselor yielded $p = 0.1755$, $X^2 = 6.672$, and df =NA. Since the $p > 0.05$, the data conclude that these two factors are not dependent. Therefore, it is determined that there is no association between gender and the influence of high school counselors on college choice.

Race versus the influence of high school counselor

The data represent that the results for race versus the influence of high school counselor yielded a $p = 0.02099$, $X^2 = 45.06$, and df =NA. Since the $p < 0.05$, the data conclude that these two factors are not independent. Therefore, it is concluded that there is an association between race and the influence of high school counselors on the college choice. Table 26 details the relative frequency and Table 27 details the ranking of influence of high school counselors by race. African Americans had the highest rank for the influence of high school counselors, while multiracial and whites had the lowest ranking.

Table 26

Race versus the Influence of High School Counselor relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
African American, Black	0.00	0.10	0.18	0.28	0.44
American Indian	0.50	0.00	0.50	0.00	0.00
Asian	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Hispanic/Mexican	0.00	0.25	0.25	0.00	0.50
Multiracial	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00
Other	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00
White	0.08	0.06	0.17	0.38	0.31

Table 27

Rank of the Influence of High School Counselor by Race

	VU	U	N	I	VI
African American, Black	-1.9693	0.6743	-0.4272	-0.5588	1.5222
American Indian	2.6067	-0.4177	1.0604	-0.9693	-1.0289
Asian	3.9270	-0.2941	-0.5050	-0.6824	-0.7243
Hispanic/Mexican	-0.5208	1.2915	0.2448	-1.3832	0.6776
Multiracial	-0.3649	-0.4177	2.8380	-0.9693	-1.0289
Other	-0.2569	-0.2941	1.9979	-0.6824	-0.7243
White	0.7950	-0.7939	-0.9966	1.8208	0.8920

GPA versus influence of high school counselors

The data for GPA versus the influence of high school counselors yielded Gamma = -0.164, SD = 0.139, and 95% CI [-0.436, 0.108]. As a result of the gamma being negative, this indicates that participants with lower GPAs ranked the influence of high school counselors slightly higher than students with higher GPAs. The relative frequency is detailed in Table 28.

Table 28

GPA versus Influence of High School Counselors relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Less than 1.0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00
1.1-2.0	0.00	0.00	0.50	0.50	0.00
2.1-3.0	0.05	0.03	0.23	0.28	0.41
3.1-4.0	0.07	0.11	0.18	0.33	0.31

ACT versus the influence of high school counselor

The data for ACT versus the influence of high school counselor yielded Gamma = -0.02, SD = 0.121, and 95% CI [-0.258, 0.217]. As a result of the gamma being so close to zero, this indicates that there is little or no correlation between ACT and the influence of high school counselor as a college choice factor.

Combined family income versus influence of high school counselor

The data for combined family income versus the influence of high school counselor yielded Gamma = -0.284, SD= 0.101, and 95% CI [-0.483, -0.086]. As a result of the gamma being negative, this indicates that the participants with lower ACT scores ranked the influence of high school counselors higher than students with higher ACT scores. The relative frequency is detailed in Table 29.

Table 29

Combined family income versus influence of High School Counselor relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Less than $25,000	0.03	0.03	0.15	0.30	0.48
$25,001-$50,000	0.05	0.07	0.30	0.28	0.30
$50,001-$75,000	0.08	0.04	0.12	0.38	0.38
$75,001-$100,000	0.00	0.29	0.14	0.57	0.00
Greater than $100,000	0.40	0.40	0.20	0.00	0.00

Highest level of education of parents versus influence of high school counselors

The data for highest level of education of parents versus the influence of high school counselors yielded Gamma = -0.011, SD = 0.107, and 95% CI [-0.221, 0.198]. As a result of the gamma being so close to zero, this indicates that there is little or no

correlation between the educational level of the participants' parents and the influence of high school counselors as a college choice factor.

Research Question Five

Research question five asked: *To what extent do the location and geographic region of a community college affect a student's college choice?* The location and geographic region of a community college was the 6th most influential factor to a student when determining what college to attend, as indicated by Table 5. This factor had an average score of 4.17 on a 5-point scale. There were 55 participants who indicated that the location and geographic region of the college was a very important factor when choosing the college they planned to attend, while 33 participants said that it was important, 16 said that it was neither important nor unimportant, and 10 stated that it was unimportant.

Student after student notated in the open-ended questions on the questionnaire that they wanted to go to a college that is close to home. A comment noted by one student noted that moving away from home for the first time was a huge step, and he wanted to make sure that he would be ok without his mom taking care of him. "She has cooked for me ever since I was born, and I am scared to get too far away from that," he said. Another student said that she planned to carpool every day; therefore, she and her friends needed to enroll in a college that was in close proximity of their homes. "Gas is so expensive. I am so glad that we have a community college close by." Yet another student stated that he did not own a vehicle, so his parents would have to drop him off every day. As a result, the location of the college played an important factor on the

college that he chose to attend. Finally, one student said, "I'm going to be investing my life for 4 years and I want to be in a location where I see it as fun and friendly."

There were no associations between the importance of the location of the college and gender, race, ACT, combined family income, and parent's educational level. There was an association between the importance of the location of the college and GPA.

Gender versus the location of the college

The data represent that the results for gender versus the influence of the location of the college yielded $p = 0.4823$, $X^2 = 2.569$, and df =NA. Since the $p > 0.05$, the data conclude that these two factors are not dependent. Therefore, it is determined that there is no association between gender and the location of the college as a college choice factor.

Race versus the location of the college

The data represent that the results for race versus the influence of the location of the college yielded $p = 0.3008$, $X^2 = 20.26$, and df =NA. Since the $p > 0.05$, the data conclude that these two factors are not dependent. Therefore, it is determined that there is little or no association between race and the location of the college as a college choice factor.

GPA versus location of the college

The data for GPA versus the influence of the location of the college yielded a Gamma= 0.166, a SD = 0.143, and 95% CI [-0.114, 0.447]. As a result of the gamma being positive, this indicates that the participants with higher GPA ranked the location of

the college higher than students with a lower GPA. The relative frequency is detailed in Table 30.

Table 30

GPA versus Location of the College relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Less than 1.0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00
1.1-2.0	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
2.1-3.0	0.00	0.10	0.18	0.31	0.41
3.1-4.0	0.00	0.08	0.12	0.26	0.53

ACT versus location of the college

The data for ACT versus the influence of the location of the college yielded a Gamma = 0.069, SD = 0.134, and 95% CI [-0.193, 0.332]. As a result of the gamma being so close to zero, this indicates that there is little or no correlation between ACT and the location of the college as a college choice factor.

Combined family income versus location of the college

The data for combined family income versus the influence of the location of the college yielded Gamma = 0.099, SD=0.132, and 95% CI [–0.161, 0.358]. As a result of the gamma being so close to zero, this indicates that there is little or no correlation between combined family income and the location of the college as a college choice factor.

Highest level of education of parents versus location of the college

The data for the highest level of education of parents versus the influence of the location of the college yielded a Gamma = -0.017, SD = 0.111, and 95% CI [-0.234, 0.2]. As a result of the gamma being so close to zero, this indicates that there is little or no correlation between the educational level of the participants' parents and the location of the college as a college choice factor.

Research Question Six

Research question six asked:

To what extent does program availability affect a student's college choice?

Program availability was the 3rd most important factor influencing the college that the students surveyed chose to attend. This factor had an average score of 4.58 on a 5-point scale, according to Table 5. There were 76 participants who indicated that interest in a particular program or major was very important in their college choice, 32 participants said that it was important, 4 said that it was neither important not unimportant, 1 participant indicated that it was unimportant, and 1 participant said that it was very unimportant.

The opened ended questions at the end of the questionnaire indicated that programs of study were huge parts of the participants' decision of college. One participant said that she wanted to go into the medical field; another stated that she wanted to be nurse. Another participant said that he wanted to learn a trade and it was offered at his local community college and it was affordable, so he decided to enroll at that college. Yet another participant wanted to go into criminal justice. Finally, a participant stated that she wanted to play softball at a college that also offered her

program of study. Each one of these students had to choose a college that would best suit his or her career choice. Thus, program availability played an important factor in college choice.

There were no associations between the importance of program availability and race, combined family income, and parent's educational level. There were associations between the importance of program availability and gender, GPA, and ACT.

Gender versus the influence of program or major availability

The data represent that the p-value for gender versus the influence of program or major availability yielded $p = 0.003498$, $X^2 = 13.41$, and df = NA. Since the $p < 0.05$, the data conclude that these two factors are not independent. Therefore, it is concluded that there is an association between gender and the influence of program or major availability on a college choice. Table 31 represents the relative frequency and Table 32 represents the ranking of influence of program or major availability by gender. Females provided the highest rank for program availability, while males provided the lowest ranking.

Table 31

Gender versus the Influence of Program or Major Availability relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Female	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.22	0.78
Male	0.02	0.02	0.08	0.37	0.51

Table 32

Rank of influence of program or major availability by gender

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Female	-1.157	-1.157	-2.345	-1.788	3.077
Male	1.157	1.157	2.345	1.788	-3.077

Race versus program or major availability

The data represent that the results for race versus the influence of program or major availability yielded $p = 0.7446$, X-Squared = 9.424, and df =NA. Since $p > 0.05$, the data conclude that these two factors are not dependent. Therefore, it is determined that there is little or no direct correlation between race and program or major availability when a student chooses a college to attend.

GPA versus program or major availability

The data for GPA versus the influence of program or major availability yielded Gamma = -0.304, SD = 0.165, and 95% CI [-0.02, 0.629]. As a result of the gamma being positive, this indicates that students with a higher GPA ranked the availability of programs or majors at a college more important than students who had a lower GPA. The relative frequency is detailed in Table 33.

Table 33

GPA versus Program or Major Availability relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Less than 1.0	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00
1.1-2.0	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
2.1-3.0	0.00	0.03	0.05	0.33	0.59
3.1-4.0	0.01	0.00	0.03	0.24	0.72

ACT versus program or major availability

The data for ACT versus the influence of program or major availability yielded Gamma = 0.149, SD= 0.16, and 95% CI [-0.164, 0.461]. As a result of the gamma being positive, this indicates that students with a higher ACT ranked program or major availability higher than students with a lower ACT. The relative frequency is detailed in Table 34.

Table 34

ACT versus Program or Major Availability relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Less than 12	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
13-15	0.00	0.13	0.27	0.07	0.53
16-19	0.00	0.07	0.14	0.31	0.55
20-23	0.00	0.00	0.14	0.31	0.55
24-27	0.00	0.33	0.00	0.25	0.42
29-30	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
31 or higher	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00

Combined family income versus program or major Availability

The data for combined family income versus the influence of program or major availability yielded Gamma = -0.095, SD = 0.146, and 95% CI [-0.381, 0.191]. As a result of the gamma being so close to zero, this indicates that there is little or no correlation between combined family income and program or major availability as a college choice factor.

Highest level of education of parents versus program or major availability

The data for highest level of education of parents versus the influence of program or major availability yielded Gamma = 0.099, SD =0.138, and 95% CI [-0.172, 0.37]. As a result of the gamma being so close to zero, this indicates that there is little or no correlation between highest level of education of parents and program or major availability as a college choice factor.

Research Question Seven

Research question seven asked:

To what extent do course offerings and schedules affect a student's college choice?

Course offerings and schedules was the 5th most important factor in this study, with an average score of 4.38 on a 5-point scale. There were 58 participants who indicated that the course selection that an institution offers is very important on their college choice; 44 students stated that course selection is important to the college selection process, and 9 students said that this factor was neither important nor

unimportant in their college decision, and 3 participants indicated that this factor was unimportant.

One participant stated that she "didn't want huge classes. My high school was very small and I don't think I make good grades in a big class and with a professor who doesn't know my name. I think that junior colleges have more classes and fewer students and that is why I chose to go to a junior college and not a university." Another stated that she had a child and needed to plan her classes around child-care for her child.

There were no associations between the importance of course offerings and gender, race, GPA, and ACT. There were associations between the importance of course offerings and combined family income and parent's educational level.

Gender versus the influence of course selection

The data represent that the results for gender versus the influence of course selection yielded $p = 0.1779$, $X^2 = 5.165$, and df =NA. Since the $p > 0.05$, the data conclude that these two factors are not dependent. Therefore, it is determined that there is no association between gender and course selection on college choice.

Race versus the influence of course selection

The data represent that the results for race versus the influence of course selection yielded $p = 0.7986$, $X^2 = 9.61$, and df =NA. Since the $p > 0.05$, the data conclude that these two factors are not dependent. Therefore, it is determined that there is no association between race and course selection on college choice.

GPA versus the Influence of Course Selection

The data for GPA versus course selection yielded Gamma = -0.032, SD = 0.166, and 95% CI [-0.357, 0.294]. As a result of the gamma being so close to zero, this indicates that there is little or no correlation between GPA and course selection in college choice factors.

ACT versus course selection

The data for ACT versus the influence of course selection yielded Gamma = -0.054, SD = 0.142, and 95% CI [-0.331, 0.224]. As a result of the gamma being so close to zero, this indicates that there is little or no correlation between ACT and course selection in college choice factors.

Combined family income versus course selection

The data for combined family income versus the influence of course selection yielded Gamma = -0.128, SD = 0.129, and 95% CI [-0.38, 0.124]. As a result of the gamma being negative, this indicates that the participants with less combined family income ranked course selection higher than students with higher combined family income. The relative frequency is detailed in Table 35.

Table 35

Combined family income versus Course Selection relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Less than $25,000	0.00	0.00	0.12	0.33	0.55
$25,001-$50,000	0.00	0.02	0.05	0.42	0.51
$50,001-$75,000	0.00	0.04	0.08	0.27	0.62
$75,001-$100,000	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.86	0.14
Greater than $100,000	0.00	0.20	0.20	0.40	0.20

Highest level of education of parents versus course selection

The data for highest level of education of parents versus the influence of course selection yielded Gamma = -0.125, SD = 0.121, and 95% CI [-0.363, 0.112]. As a result of the gamma being negative, this indicates that students with parents with a lower educational level ranked course selection higher than students with parents who have higher educational level. The relative frequency is detailed in Table 36.

Table 36

Highest Level of Education of Parents versus Course Selection relative frequency

	VU	U	N	I	VI
Less than High School	0.00	0.00	0.13	0.33	0.53
High School Graduate	0.00	0.03	0.06	0.34	0.57
Some College	0.00	0.03	0.07	0.40	0.50
Associates Degree	0.00	0.00	0.10	0.48	0.43
Bachelor's Degree	0.00	0.14	0.00	0.43	0.43
Graduate Degree	0.00	0.00	0.20	0.40	0.40

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter includes a summary of the study, conclusions, and recommendations based on the results. The summary states the purpose of the study and describes the procedures used in collecting the data. The conclusions answer the research questions based on the findings. Recommendations for further research are given.

1. To what extent do financial aid, institutional scholarships, or the receipt of both or neither affect a student's college choice?
2. To what extent does the cost of attendance affect a student's college choice?
3. To what extent does family income affect a student's college choice?
4. To what extent does the influence of others (e.g. family, friends, and counselors) affect a student's college choice?
5. To what extent do the location and geographic region of a community college affect a student's college choice?
6. To what extent does program availability affect a student's college choice?
7. To what extent do course offerings and schedules affect a student's college choice?

Summary of the Findings and Conclusions

The following conclusions are based on the results of the study conducted with regard to the factors that influence college choice:

Research Question 1: To what extent do financial aid, institutional scholarships, or the receipt of both or neither affect a student's college choice?

Overall, students view financial aid as the most influential factor that influences where they will attend college. Of all of the participants who participated (*n=114),* 92 students stated that financial aid is very important to their college choice. Seventy-four students indicated that scholarships are very important to their college choice decision. Additionally, students with lower GPAs and ACT scores felt that financial aid is more influential on their college choice than students who have higher GPAs and ACT scores.

Students who have lower combined family income and parents with a lower educational level view financial aid more importantly as a college choice factor than students who come from families with a higher combined family income and parents with higher education level.

Scholarships were the 4th most important college choice factor indicated in this study. Of all of the participants who participated (*n=114),* 74 students indicated that scholarships are very important to their college choice decision. The students who felt scholarships were most beneficial were students with higher ACT scores. Students with an ACT of 31 or higher had a relative frequency of 1.00 on Very Important, whereas the students who scored less than 12 had a relative frequency of 0.00 when asked if scholarships were very important to their college choice decision.

Finally, students whose parents have a lower combined family income and parents with a lower educational level view scholarships as more important than do students with a higher combined family income and whose parents have a higher educational level.

Conclusion #1: Financial aid and scholarships are extremely important factors for both low and high achieving students when they are considering which college to attend.

Research Question 2: To what extent does the cost of attendance affect a student's college choice?

Overall, students felt that cost of attendance was important to their college choice. Of all of the participants who participated (*n=114),* 82 listed cost of college as very important. Additionally, cost of college was the second most influential factor on where a student attends college. However, the students with lower GPAs and ACT scores view cost of college more importantly as a college choice factor than students with higher GPAs and ACT scores. Additionally, students with a lower combined family income and whose parents have a lower educational level view cost of college as a more influential college choice factor than do students with higher combined family income and whose parents have a higher educational level.

Conclusion #2: While cost of college was an important factor listed for college choice, students who perform lower and have lower income and parents with lower educational levels view cost of college more importantly than the other students who participated in this study.

Research Question 3: To what extent does family income affect a student's college choice?

Overall, students were neutral about the effect of family income on college choice. The data revealed that family income was the seventh most influential factor on college choice. Additionally, females view family income as a more important college factor than do males. The data revealed that when asked to what extent family income affected their college decision, females produced a relative frequency of 0.67 on the answer Very Important, while males produced a relative frequency of 0.42 on the answer Very Important.

Finally, students who have a lower combined income view family income as a more influential college choice factor than students who have a higher combined income. Students with a combined income of less than $25,000 had a relative frequency of 0.76 on the answer Very Important when asked how important family income was on their college decision. Students with a combined income of over $100,000 had a relative frequency of 0.40 on the same question.

Conclusion #3: Students, for the most part, do not take into account their family income when deciding what college to attend. However, females and students who have a low combined income tend to view family income more importantly as a college choice factor than do other students.

Research Question 4: To what extent does the influence of others (e.g. family, friends, and counselors) affect a student's college choice?

Overall, students view the influence of parents, siblings, friends and high school counselors as the least most influential factors that determines college choice. Only select groups indicated that the influence of others was important on their college choice. For

example, students who have a lower combined family income view the influence of their parents, friends, siblings and high school counselors as more important to their college choice than do students who have a higher combined family income. Second, African Americans view the influence of siblings and high school counselors as more important to their college choice than do any other race. Finally, students who have lower GPAs view the influence of high school counselors as more important on their college choice than do students who have higher GPAs.

Conclusion #4: Students generally do not view the influence of others as important factors as a college choice.

Research Question 5: To what extent do the location and geographic region of a community college affect a student's college choice?

Overall, students view the location or geographic region of the college neutrally, as this factor was ranked 6th in this study. However, in the open ended questions on the questionnaire, many students indicated that they wanted to attend a college close to home to commute or to visit home on the weekends. This may explain why students with lower GPAs view the location of the college as more important on a college choice than students with higher GPAs, because most college and universities require a certain GPA to live in on campus housing.

Conclusion #5: Location of the college is an important college choice factor to students who have a low GPA and for students who commute back and forth to school each day.

Research Question 6: To what extent does program availability affect a student's college choice?

Overall, students view program availability as a college choice factor as important. This factor ranked 3rd by the students who participated in this study. Students with higher GPAs and ACT scores view the availability of programs and majors as a college choice factor as more important than do students with lower GPAs and ACT scores.

Additionally, females view the availability of programs at a college as a college choice factor as more important than do men. On a relative frequency scale, females answered the question to what extent does program availability affect a student's college choice as Very Important 0.78 times, while men had a score of 0.51.

Conclusion #6: Program availability is an important college choice factor among students, specifically females and students who have high GPAs and ACT scores.

Research Question 7: To what extent do course offerings and schedules affect a student's college choice?

Course offerings and schedules was the 5th most important college choice factor. Therefore, most students do not feel that course offerings and schedules are neither important nor unimportant. However, the two group of students who listed that course offerings and schedules were important college choice factors were students whose parents have a lower educational level and students who have lower combined family income.

Conclusion #7: Course offerings and schedules are not viewed as important or unimportant factors to most students' college choice decision.

Discussion of the Findings

Financial Aid and Scholarships

According to Noel-Levitz, Inc., in 2012 financial aid showed the largest increase in the factors that influence a student's college choice (Noel-Levitz, Inc., 2012). The results from the current study clearly indicate that participants, specifically students who have lower ACT scores and GPAs, are extremely interested in the financial aid packages that a school offers, as financial aid was the highest ranked factor for college choice. This was not a surprising finding considering the increasing tuition costs of colleges and universities. This finding also agree with Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) research that revealed that the American philosophy is a deep-rooted belief that higher education is an investment in human capital, which profits individuals who earn college degrees. Most students believe they need to go to college if they want to have a chance of getting a decent job. The postsecondary degree and certificate have taken the place of the high school diploma as a requirement to obtain employment in the United States (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Many students depend on financial aid and scholarships in order to obtain a college education. In previous research, Leslie and Brickman indicated that some students would decline attending certain colleges if the tuition was too expensive and if financial aid would not cover the costs (Leslie & Brinkman, 1987).

The current study indicates that students who score lower on the ACT and have lower GPAs, students whose parents have a lower educational level, and students who have a lower family combined income rank financial aid very important. Additionally, students whose family has a lower combined family income also ranked scholarships

very important. This could be due to the fact that many colleges base scholarships on ACT scores and family income. These students will most likely depend on other methods, such as Pell Grants, student loans, and athletic scholarships, to pay for college. These students may also end up paying out of pocket for their tuition. Therefore, financial aid and scholarships are extremely important factors to consider when choosing a college to attend.

On the other end of the spectrum, students who scored higher on the ACT ranked scholarships and the availability of programs and majors as very important in their college choice. Again, many scholarships are based largely on ACT scores, so the high scorers may decide to attend the college that offers them the most competitive scholarship package. These high achieving students may take this opportunity to not only relieve their parents of the burden of paying for college, but also to attend the college that they want to attend with the scholarships that they earned.

Cost of Attendance

Previous research has indicated "enrollment declines when prices are raised and increases when prices are lowered" (Leslie & Brinkman, 1987, p. 2). The results from the current study support this research. Students with lower GPAs and ACT scores view the cost of the college as an important factor to consider when deciding what college to attend. Additionally, students who have a lower combined family income view cost of college as more influential than do students who have a higher family income.

Family income

Litten and Brodigan (1982) revealed in previous studies that parental education plays a significant role in shaping the conduct of students in the college choice process. The current study furthers these findings by determining that students whose parents have a lower educational level view financial aid, cost of college, and course selection more importantly than students whose parents have a higher educational level. This could be attributed to the fact that since the parents do not have a high level of education, then the student may depend on financial aid to go to college. As a result, the cost of college and the times that a student can attend, such as online and evening classes, is dependent on the financial aid opportunities.

Influence of others

Students view the influence of friends as the least most influential factor that determines college choice, which contradicts the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching survey (1986). This could be attributed to the fact that students want to go somewhere new where they can meet new people. Previous research has indicated that while students use high school counselors as a source of information on colleges, this influence was not as important as other factors (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1986). Rowe (2007) indicated that the influence of high school counselors was declining over time. However, in the current study, the data revealed that students with lower GPAs, students with lower family income, along with African Americans, view the influence of high school counselors as an important factor to consider when deciding what college to attend. Chapman, et al (1987) found that

students visit with their high school counselors three to five times to discuss college and financial aid options.

Additionally, students with lower family income view the influence of their parents as a college choice factor as more important than do students who have higher family income. Hosseler et al. (1999) suggests that students with a lower family income rely on their parents' influence because parents tend to be the ones who pay for college and visit colleges with their children.

Location

According to Noel-Levitz, Inc., (2012), the location of a college is a critical factor that is considered when a student is choosing a college to attend because students normally opt to attend college close to home. The current study adds to this theory by showing that students with lower GPAs view the location of the college as an important factor when deciding what college to attend. This could be, in part, due to the fact that most students with lower GPAs commute or choose not to live in on-campus housing.

Program or Major availability

Bartini et al. (2008) stated that the individuality of community college programs such as 2-year career technical programs and select healthcare programs attracted some high academic ability students to attend community colleges that have programs available. The results of the current study reiterate this sentiment by revealing that students with higher GPAs view the program or availability as important factor that contributes to their decision of college choice

Course selection

Previous research indicates that "most students are part-time, have clear goals, are serious about their studies, are employed, and balance their studies on top of career and family obligations" (Spanard, 1990, p. 321). The results of the current study indicate that flexible course schedules are needed for students who must work a full time job while attending college. Results show that students with a lower combined family income view course selection as a college choice factor as more important than do students with a higher combined family income.

Implications for Practice

The current study can serve as a model for community college and university recruiters and administrators. With the availability of additional information from the current study, community colleges and universities should be able to identify components that assist students with their decision making thought process about college choice. Appropriate recruiting methods and materials can be used to target students who are interested in certain programs. Courses can be offered online and in the evening to accommodate students with lower income who must work to put themselves through school and support themselves. Finally, competitive scholarship and financial aid packages can be offered to students with high GPA and ACT scores, as well as students who need financial assistance.

Limitations of the Study

After conducting the research, limitations became apparent to the researcher. The number of responses from the sample may be small due to the number of participants

surveyed, and the results may have limited generalizability when compared to those of other states. The researcher acknowledges that not every participant in this study will enroll in college. As a result, some of the negative answers could be based on the fact that the student may not attend college and has a negative view on the entire college process, including the factors that influence what college to attend. Additionally, the researcher acknowledges that the college that the students had in mind at the time of the questionnaire being administered may not be the college that the student enrolls in this fall. Finally, the researcher is a recruiter for the college district in which the participants and schools are located. While the participants were told to be completely honest with their answers, it is possible that the students viewed the researcher as a college recruiter and not a person conducting research.

Recommendations

The future research relating to college choice factors will continue to grow in importance due to the increased significance placed on a college education. Future studies regarding the college selection process could help students make a more educated decision regarding choice of college while at the same time enabling institutions to market themselves better to prospective students. Although the results of the current study provided a better understanding of the factors that influenced choice of college among students from a rural community college in Mississippi, more research is needed. After an extensive review of related literature, research, and the current study, four recommendations for future research became apparent. First, the current study was narrowed to a small community college district. Future research could encompass a larger population representing a larger portion of the overall population of the United

States to demonstrate a more thorough understanding of the factors that influence college choice. Secondly, this study did not investigate modern technology, such as college websites, cellular phone applications, radio and television commercials, emails, and text messages and their influence on college choice. Future research could investigate how technology influences a student's college choice. Third, the current research study investigated seven factors that could influence a student's college choice. One factor that was omitted was a college's collegiate record and the availability of specific collegiate programs as a factor of college choice. With a growing emphasis on athletics in colleges and universities, this factor could help not only college recruiters, but also college coaches to recruit the best possible players to their colleges. Finally, a study investigating the importance of the undergraduate college degree would yield valuable results for both community colleges and universities, especially in the workforce education and career technical departments. An in-depth study on the reasons why students choose to go to college would help everyone involved in the college selection process. It would give colleges and universities the opportunity to investigate students' reasons for attending college. These findings would give colleges and universities invaluable information that they could use when constructing promotional materials used in recruitment and allow them to better accommodate a target audience in their districts.

If future research were conducted based on the recommendations listed in this study and paired with the current conclusions, these findings would give colleges and universities vital information that they could use when producing promotional materials used in the recruitment process. These results would also allow institutions of higher

learning to propose new, cutting edge programs and implement strategies to increase retention.

Summary

Chapter V summarized the research study findings and presented conclusions drawn by the researcher. Each of the research questions was examined in more detail. The findings were discussed and conclusions were drawn based on the data. Implications for practice and recommendations for researchers interested in future research relating to the factors that influence a high school student's college choice were discussed. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the study findings and their comparison to other research studies.

REFERENCES

Abston, B. O. (2010). Administrator's perceptions of the enrollment management practices at the comprehensive public associate's colleges in Alabama. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Digital Dissertations and Thesis database. (UMI 3439794)

Allen, E. N. (2007). *An examination of the factors that influence students' choice of college* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI 3280172)

American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Avery, C., & Hoxby, C. M. (2004*). Do and should financial aid packages affect students' college choices?* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. doi: 0-226-35535-7

Bailey, T. R., Alfonso, M., Calcagno, J. C., Jenkins, D., Kienzl G., & Leinbach, T. (2004). *Improving student attainment in community colleges: Institutional characteristics and policies.* Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University. Retrieved from ERIC Database. (ED484348)

Bartini, M., Hesel, R., & Pryor, J. (2008). Research dispels millennial theories: Millennial appear more like than different from their parents' generation. *Student Poll, 6*(2). Retrieved from http://www.artsci.com/studentpoll/v6n2/index.aspx

Bateman, M., & Spruill, D. (1996). Student decision making: Insights from the college choice process. *College Student Journal, 30*, 182-186.

Bergerson, A. (2010). *College choice and access to college: Moving policy, research and practice to the 21st Century.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Bers, T. H., & Galowich, P. M. (2002). Using survey and focus group research to learn about parents' roles in the community college choice process. *Community College Review, 29*(4), 67-83.

Betts, J. R., & McFarland, L. L. (1995). Safe port in a storm: The impact of labor market conditions on community college enrollments. *Journal of Human Resources, 30*(4), 10-25.

Braunstein, A., McGrath, M., & Pescatrice, D. (1999). Measuring the impact of income and financial aid offers on college enrollment decisions. *Research in Higher Education, 40*(3), 247-259.

Cabrera, A. F., Burkham, K. R., & La Nasa, S. M. (2000). Understanding the college choice of disadvantaged students. *New Directions for Institutional Research, 107* (pp. 5-22). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Canale, J. R., Dunlap, L., Britt, M., & Donahue, T. (1996). The relative importance of various college characteristics to students in influencing their choice of a college. *College Student Journal, 30*, 214-216.

Callahan, W. L. (2003). *Effects of factors and people of influence on college choice comparing general population and top academic students* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI 3097856)

Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. (1986). How do students choose a college? *Change, 18*(1), 29-32.

Ceja, M. (2006). Understanding the role of parents and siblings as information sources in the college selection process of Chicana students. *Journal of College Student Development, 47*(1), 87-104.

Chapman, D. (1981). A model of student college choice. S.L. Thomas (ED). Journal of Higher Education (pp.490-505). Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press.

Chapman, D. W., & Gill, S. J. (1981). College advising: Current perceptions, future directions. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, *22*(4), 348-354.

Chapman, D. W., DeMasi, M. E., & O 'Brien, D. W. (1987). The effectiveness of the public school counselor in college advising. *The Journal of College Admissions, 15*, 11-18.

Clark, C. R., & Hossler, D. (1990). Marketing in nonprofit organizations. In D. Hossler,J. Bean, & Associates (Eds.). *The strategic management of college enrollments.*San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Cohen, A. M., & Brawer, F. B. (1996). *The American community college* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

College Board. (2009). *Trends in College Pricing 2009*. New York, NY: College Board.

College Board (2013). In *Admitted Student Questionnaire: How to interpret and use your ASQ reports and data* (pp. 1-65). Reston, VA: College Board.

Conklin, M. E., & Dailey, A. R. (1981). Does consistency of parental educational encouragement matter for secondary school students? *Sociology of Education, 54*, 254-262.

Cooper, M.A. (2006). *Exploring the relationship between early and later postsecondary educational aspirations among racial/ethnic groups* (Doctoral dissertation).Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI 3212619)

Cote, J. E., & Levine, C. (1997). Student motivations, learning environments, and human capital acquisition: Toward an integrated paradigm of students' development. *Journal of College Student Development, 38*(3), 229-243.

Dale, A. (2010). *The college-choice process of high achieving freshmen: A comparative case study* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI 3410693)

Dillman, D. A. (2007). *Mail and internet surveys: The tailored design method 2007 update with new internet, visual, and mixed-mode guide (2nd ed.).* New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.

Effective Counseling in Schools Increases College Access. (2006). Retrieved from http://www.nacacnet.org/research/research-data/Research%20Member%20Only/McDonough.pdf

Erdmann, D. G. (1983). An examination of variables influencing student choice in the college selection process. *Journal of College Admissions*, *76*, 3-6.

Espinoza, S., Bradshaw, G., & Hausman, C. (2002). The importance of college choice factors from the perspective of high school counselors. *College and University, 77*, 19-23.

Fang, M. (2013). Nearly 80 percent of Students Work while In School. Retrieved from http://thinkprogress.org/economy/2013/08/07/2428351/nearly-80-of-students-are-working-while-in-school/

Fatherree, B. H. (2010). *The community and junior college system in Mississippi: A brief history of its origin and development*. Retrieved from http://mshistorynow.mdah.state.ms.us/articles/333/the-community-and-junior-college-system-in-mississippi

Financial Aid Terms. (2014). San Diego, CA. Retrieved from https://students.ucsd.edu/finances/financial-aid/forms/terms.html

Flint, T. A. (1992). Parental and planning influences on the formation of student college choice sets. *Research in Higher Education, 33*(6), 689-708.

Fraenkel, J. R., & Wallen, N. E. (2011). *How to design and evaluate research in education: 8th Ed.* New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach.* Boston, MA: Pitman.

Furukawa, D. T. (2011). *College choice influences among high-achieving students: An exploratory case study of college freshman* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, NV). Retrieved from digtitalscholarship.unlv.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2092&context=thesesdissertations

Galotti, K. M., & Mark, M. C. (1994). How do high school students structure an important life decision? A short-term longitudinal study of the college decision-making process. *Research in Higher Education, 35*, 589-607.

Garcia, J.V., Terrell, C., Dillion, T., Flink, J., Givens, Jr., F., Khayat, R.C., …(2001). *Access denied: Restoring the nation's commitment to equal educational opportunity*. Washington, DC. Retrieved from Advisory Committee of Student Financial Assistance: https://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/acsfa/access_denied.pdf

Goble, L. J., Rosenbaum, J., & Stephan, J. (2008). Do institutional attributes predict individuals' degree success at two-year colleges? *New Directions for CommunityColleges, 144*, 63-72.

Hanson, K., & Litten, L. (1982). Mapping the road to academia: A review of research on women, men, and the college selection process. In P. Perun (Ed.), *The undergraduate woman: Issues in education*. Lexington, MA: Lexington.

Harris, T. A. (2010). *Enrollment management professionals in community colleges: An exploratory study on their influence on student recruitment and retention* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI 3397208)

Hearn, J. (1984). The relative roles of academic ascribed and socioeconomic characteristics in college destinations. *Sociology of Education, 57*, 22-30.

Heller, D.E. (1996). *Tuition prices, financial aid, and access to public higher education: A state level analysis.* Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, New York, NY.

Heller, D. E. (2001). *The effects of tuition prices and financial aid on enrollment in higher education: california and the nation.* Ann Arbor, MI: Ed Fund, Inc.

Herren, C. D., Carmell II, D. D., & Robertson, J. T. (2011). *Perceptions of influence of college choice by students enrolled in a college of agricultural sciences and natural resources.* Retrieved from www.nactateachers.org/attachments/article/1259/Article9_Nacta_Sept2011.pdf

Hopkins, K. (2007). *Why did they enroll: The factors that influencing college choice.* (2007 National Research Report). Retrieved from Noel-Levitz Inside Enrollment Management website: http://oirap.rutgers.edu/reports/MSA2008/Self-Study-Reports/WhyDidTheyEnroll-2007.pdf

Hossler, D., & Gallagher, K. (1987). Studying college choice: A three-phrase model and the implication for policy makers. *College and University, 2*, 207-21.

Hossler, D., Schmit, J., & Vesper, N., (1999). *Going to college: How social, economic, and educational factors influence the decisions students make.* Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Hossler, D., & Stage, F. K. (1992). Family and high school experience influences on the postsecondary educational plans of ninth-grade students. *American Educational Research Journal, 29*(2), 425-451.

Hoyt, J. E., & Brown, A. B. (2003). *Identifying college choice factors to successfully market your institution*. C&U Journal, 3-10.

Jackson, G. (1978). Financial aid and student enrollment. *Journal of Higher Education*, *49*, 548-574.

Jackson, G. (1982). Public efficiency and private choice in higher education.*Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 4*, 237-247.

Kane, T. J. (1995). *Rising public college tuition and college entry: How well do Public subsides promote access to college?* NBER Working Paper no. 5164.Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

Katsinas, S.G., Davis, J.E., Koh, J.P., & Grant. P. D. (2012). *Pell grant's vital role in lifting up Mississippi.* Tuscaloosa, AL: Education Policy Center, College of Education.

Kern, C. W. (2000). College choice influences: Urban high school students respond. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 24*, 487-494.

Kezar, A. (2013). Recognizing and serving low-income students in higher education: An examination of institutional policies, practices, and culture. *Higher Education, 84*(5), 742-744.

Kiley, K. (2013). *It's the economy, stupid*. Washington, DC: Inside Higher Ed: Retrieved from www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/01/21/state-appropriations-higher-education-31-states-report-says

Kim, D. (2004). The effect of financial aid on students' college choice: Differences by racial groups. *Research in Higher Education, 45*(1), 43-70.

Kinzie, J., Palmer, M., Hayek, J., Hossler, D., Jacob, S.A., & Cummings, H. (2004). Fifty years of college choice: Social, political, and institutional influences on the decision-making process. *Lumina Foundation for Education, 5*(3), 40-44.

Lee, S. J., & Chatfield, H. K. (2011). *The analysis of factors affecting choice of colleges: A Case Study of UNLV hotel College Students*. Las Vegas, NV: University of Nevada. Retrieved from: http://scholarworks.umass.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1288&context=gradconf_hospitality

Leedy, P. D., & Ormrod, J. E. (2001). *Practical research: Planning and design,* (7th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Leslie, L. L., & Brinkman, P. T. (1987). *The economic value of higher education.* Washington, DC: American Council on Education.

Levine, A., & Nidiffer, J. (1996). *Beating the odds: How the poor get to college.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Litten, L. H., & Brodigan, D.L. (1982). On being heard in a noisy world: Matching messages and media in college marketing. *College & University, 57*(3), 242-263.

Manski, C. F., & Wise, D. A. (1983). *College choice in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Martinez, M., & Klopott, S. (2003). *Improving college access for minority, low-income, and first-generation students*. Retrieved from www.inpathways.net/improvingcollege.pdf

McCullough, A. K. (2010). *Factors that impact two-year college attendance and program enrollment among community college students* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI 3428382)

McPherson, M. S., & Schapiro, M. O. (1991). Does student aid affect college enrollment? New evidence on a persistent controversy. *The America Economic Review, 81*(1), 309-318.

Miles, M.B., & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *An expanded sourcebook: Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.). Thousands Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Mills, M. (2004). Do and should financial aid packages affect students' college choices? *Journal of College Admissions, 18*, 28-29.

Ming, J. S. (2010). Institutional factors influencing students' college choice decision in Malaysia: A conceptual framework. *International Journal of Business and Social Science, 1*(3) 135-178.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2011). United States Department of Education. *Digest of education statistics (2011). (NCES 2011-015).* Washington, DC: J. Deaton. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=77

Nesbary, D. (1999). *Survey research and the world wide web.* Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Niu, S. X., & Tienda, M. (2008). Choosing college: Identifying and modeling choice sets. *Social Science Research, 37*, 416-433.

Noel-Levitz. (2012). 2012 e-recruiting practices and trends at four-year and two-year institutions. Coralville, IA: Author. Retrieved from: www.noellevitz.com/BenchmarkReport

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1991). *How college affects students*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Patel, R., & Rudd, T. (2012). Can scholarships alone help students succeed? *MDRC Policy Brief*, 1-6.

Paulsen, M. B. (1990). *College choice: Understanding student enrollment behavior* Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education.

Rea, L.M., & Parker, R.A. (1992). *Designing and conducting survey research: A comprehensive guide.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Report: Current Term Enrollment Report-Fall 2013. (2013). National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. Retrieved from www.nscresearchcenter.org/currenttermenrollmentestimate-fall2013/

Rouse, C. E. (1994). What to do after high school: The two-year versus four-year college enrollment decision. In R. G. Ehrenberg (Ed.). *Choices and Consequences: Contemporary Policy Issues in Education.* Ithaca, NY: ILR Press.

Rowe, K. B. (2007). *The college choice process of high school seniors: An investigation of significant influences* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Digital Dissertations and Thesis database. (UMI 3159664)

Scrivener, S., & Coghlan, E. (2011). Opening the door to student success. *MDRC Policy Brief*, 1-12.

Schneider, B., & Stevenson, D. (1999). *The ambitious generation: America's teenagers, motivated but directionless.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Schoenherr, H. (2009). *Beyond academic reputation: Factors that influence the college of first choice for high achieving students* (Doctoral dissertation) University of South Florida. Tampa, FL. Retrieved from www.scholarshipcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewpoint.cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=etd

Sheehan, G.R. (1996) *Assessment of the quality of institutes of higher education: Correlational analysis of U.S. News and World Report's university and college rankings and institution size, age, selectivity, graduation rate, faculty salaries, wealth, and private/public status* (Doctoral dissertation) Available from ProQuest Digital Dissertations and Thesis database. (UMI 9720293)

Smith, K. & Bers, T. H. (1989). Parents and the college choice decisions of community college students. *College and University, 64,* 335-348.

Somers, P., Haines, K., & Keene, B. (2006). Toward a theory of choice for community college students. *College Journal of Research and Practice, 20*, 53-67.

Spanard, J. M. (1990). Beyond intent: re-entering college to complete the degree. *Review of Educational Research*, *60*, 309-344.

State Board for Community/Junior Colleges. (2014). *SBCJC history*. Jackson, MS: D. West. Retrieved from http://www.sbcjc.cc.ms.us/ResearchPlan/rpDefault.aspx

St. John, E. P. (1990). Price response in enrollment decisions: An analysis of the high school and beyond senior cohort. *Research in Higher Education,* 3(2), 161-176.

St. John, E. P. (1991). The impact of student financial aid: A review of recent research, *Journal of Student Financial Aid, 21*, 18-32.

St. John, E. P., Paulsen, M. B., & Carter, D. F. (2005). Diversity, college costs, and postsecondary opportunity: An examination of the financial nexus between college choice and persistence for African Americans and whites. *The Journal of Higher Education, 76*(5), 545-569.

St. John, E. P. & Starkey, J. B. (1995). An alternative to net price: Assessing the influence of prices and subsidies on within-year persistence: *Journal of Higher Education, 335*(29). 143-168.

Stokes, T., & Somers, P. (2009). Who enrolls in two-year colleges? A national study. *Journal of Student Financial Aid. (39)*1. Retrieved from http://publications.nasfaa.org/jsfa/vol39/iss1/1/

Study finds Pell Grants increased enrollment at rural community colleges. (2012). Retrieved from http://blog.cappex.com/blog/admissions-advice/study-finds-pell-grants-increased-enrollment-at-rural-community-colleges/

Streitfeld, R. (2009). Unemployed workers heading back to school. BLUE BELL, Pennsylvania, (CNN). Retrieved from http://www.cnn.com/2009/LIVING/02/14/unemployment.education/index.html?eref=ib_us

Svenson O., & Salo, I. (2007). Mental representations of important real-life decisions. *European Journal of Operational Research*, 177(3), 1353-1362.

The White House, Support for Higher Education. (2013). *Building American Skills through Community Colleges.* Retrieved from www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/higher-education/building-american-skills-through-community-colleges

Tinto, V. (1997). Classrooms as communities: Exploring the educational character of student persistence. *Journal of Higher Education, 68*(6), 599-623.

Turabian, K. L. (2013). *A Manual for writers of research papers, theses, and dissertations* (8th ed.). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Vaughn, G. B. (2000). *The Community College Story.* Washington, DC: Community College Press.

Undergraduate Ranking Criteria and Weights. (2014). *U.S. News & World Report: America's best colleges 2013.* Retrieved from http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/2013/09/09/best-colleges-ranking-criteria-and-weights

United States Department of Education. (2014). *How Aid is Calculated*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://studentaid.ed.gov/fafsa/next-steps/how-calculated

United States Department of Education, National Center of Education Statistics. (2012) *Digest of Education Statistics, 2011* (NCES 2012-001).

van der Klaauw, W. (2001). Estimating the effect of financial aid offers of college enrollment: A regression-discontinuity approach. *International Economic Review 43*(4), 1249-1287.

Wallen, N. E., & Fraenkel, J. R. (2000). *Educational research: A guide to the process 2nd edition*. Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Young, J. B., & Ewing, J. M. (1978). *The Mississippi public junior college story: The first fifty years 1922/1972*. Jackson, MS: The University Press of Mississippi.

APPENDIX A

LETTER TO HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Date:

Dear [Principal],

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Leadership and Foundations at Mississippi State University. I plan to conduct a research study entitled *An Examination of the Factors That Influence Students' Choice of College.* This study will examine the factors that influence students' choice of college.

I am asking for your help in identifying prospective students who would be willing to participate in my research study. Specifically, I am interested in distributing questionnaires to members of your senior class who are at least 18 years old. I am available to distribute the surveys during a homeroom or other class if you would allow me to do so. Each student will be asked to complete a short questionnaire that should only take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

The information I collect will remain confidential and there will not be any personal or professional risk to the student. If the results of this study are published or presented at a professional conference, the name and identity will not be revealed and the student's record will remain confidential.

The student's contribution to the study may benefit many people. The data gathered through this research will give future students an opportunity to examine the effectiveness of certain techniques for choosing a college. If a student initially decides to participate in this study and then changes his or her mind, he or she will not incur any type of penalty.

Please email me at awalton@eccc.edu to let me know if you are willing to assist me in my research study. I would like to distribute the questionnaires before the end of the spring 2014 semester if possible. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to call me at 601-635- 6214.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Amanda Walton

Doctoral Candidate, Mississippi State University

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Title of Research Study: A Study examining factors that influence a high school student's college choice

Study Site: Mississippi area high schools

Researchers: Amanda L. Walton (Mississippi State University)
Dr. Stephanie King (Mississippi State University)

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to conduct research to determine the factors that influence high school seniors to attend college and what college they choose to attend.

Procedures

A questionnaire will be administered in this study. You may respond to the questions by selecting the appropriate answer. You may withdraw your participation at any time if you choose to do so. The questionnaire contains 11 Likert questions, three open-ended questions, and 10 demographic questions. Completion of the questionnaire should not take more than 10 minutes. All participants must be 18 years of age or older.

Benefits

Information from this study may be used by community/junior recruiting personnel in identifying the factors that influence if a student attends college and where they choose to attend. Institutions may also use this study to create more effective recruiting strategies within the community college system.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality of records will be maintained. The data gathered will be stored on a password- protected computer. Research information may be shared with the MSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP).

Questions

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact Amanda Walton at 601-635-6214 or Dr. Stephanie King at 662-325-7066.
For questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or to discuss problems, express concerns or complaints, request information, or offer input, please feel free to contact the MSU Research Compliance Office by phone at 662-325-3994, by e-mail at irb@research.msstate.edu, or on the web at http://orc.msstate.edu/humansubjects/participant/.

Voluntary Participation

Please understand that your participation is voluntary. You may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.
Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.
If you decide to participate, your completion of the research procedures indicates your consent. Please keep this form for your records.

APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD CONSENT

May 28, 2014

Amanda Walton
Community College Leadership

RE: HRPP Study #14-170: An Examination of the Factors That Influence Students' Choice of College

Dear Ms. Walton:

This email serves as official documentation that the above referenced project was reviewed and approved via administrative review on 5/28/2014 in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2). Continuing review is not necessary for this project. However, in accordance with SOP 01-03 Administrative Review of Applications, a new application must be submitted if the study is ongoing after 5 years from the date of approval. Additionally, any modification to the project must be reviewed and approved by the HRPP prior to implementation. Any failure to adhere to the approved protocol could result in suspension or termination of your project. The HRPP reserves the right, at anytime during the project period, to observe you and the additional researchers on this project.

Pl! ease note that the MSU HRPP accreditation for our human subjects protection program requires an approval stamp for consent forms. The approval stamp will assist in ensuring the HRPP approved version of the consent form is used in the actual conduct of research. Your stamped consent form will be attached in a separate email. **You must use the stamped consent form for obtaining consent from participants.**

Please refer to your HRPP number (#14-170) when contacting our office regarding this application.

Thank you for your cooperation and good luck to you in conducting this research project. If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at nmorse@orc.msstate.edu or call 662-325-5220.

Finally, we would greatly appreciate your feedback on the HRPP approval process. Please take a few minutes to complete our survey at http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YZC7QQD.

Sincerely,

Nicole Morse, CIP
IRB Compliance Administration

cc: Stephanie King (advisor)

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire

1. Check the box that best describes how important each factor is to you as you are selecting a college.

VI = Very important
I = Important
N = Neither important or unimportant
U = Unimportant
VU= Very unimportant

Recruitment factors:	Importance Levels: VI	I	N	U	VU
a. Cost of college					
b. Financial aid					
c. Scholarships					
d. Interested in particular major or degree program					
e. Location of the college					
f. Course selection					
g. Influence of high school counselor					
h. Influence of siblings					
i. Influence of friends					
j. Parental influence					
k. Family income					

Respond to these open-ended questions according to your perceptions regarding the college selection process.

2. What are the three most important factors that influenced your choice of college?

_____

_____

_____

Why?

_____

_____

3. What do you think institutions could do to market themselves better to potential students?

_____

_____

_____

4. Demographic questions:

a. Age _____18 years or older

b. Gender _____Male_Female

c. Race

_____ White
_____ African American, Black
_____ American Indian
_____ Hispanic/Mexican
_____ Asian
_____ Multiracial
_____ Other

d. Current High School Grade Point Average

_____ Less than 1.0
_____ 1.0-2.0
_____ 2.1-3.0
_____ 3.1-4.0
_____ Higher than 4.0

e. ACT or SAT score

_____ Less than 1.0
_____ 1.0-2.0
_____ 2.1-3.0
_____ 3.1-4.0
_____ Higher than 4.0

f. Is the high school you attend public or private?

_____Public
_____Private

g. Current family household combined income:

_____. Less than $25,000
_____ $25,001-$50,000
_____ $50,001-$75,000
_____ $75,001-$100,000
_____ Greater than $100,000

h. Education of parent or guardian with highest level of education

_____ Less than High School
_____ High School Graduate
_____ Some College
_____ Associates Degree
_____ Bachelor's Degree
_____ Graduate Degree

i. Colleges or universities applied to and accepted

_____

_____

j. Is the college or university you plan to attend your first choice? Yes No