Marketing and Non-Marketing Materials Sent by American Colleges and Universities

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Dominant traditional educational values have promoted higher learning as a privilege granted to deserving students—not a commodity for sale in the market place. Until the last few years educators have opposed the use of marketing techniques to increase college enrolments. They have closely associated marketing with "selling," and the idea of "selling an education" has not been acceptable within the traditional framework of academic thought (Campbell, 1978; Silber, 1980).

But attitudes are changing; public service as a primary purpose of marketing has been emphasized in several current articles directed toward educational and other non-profit organizations (Larkin, 1979; Johnson, 1979; Portugal, 1979). These scholarly efforts have enabled educators to see the close coordination between their own goal of serving the community and the goal of marketing. Admissions offices can claim to be showing a concern to serve the public through the use of marketing procedures (Halstead, 1979; Patton, 1980).

Justification for the use of sophisticated efforts to draw students has come at a crucial time for organizations providing higher education. The number of traditional college students has decreased. In 1974 Gorman noted that faculties and administrators were beginning to tolerate the use of marketing as a means to avoid economic hardship. During the seventies marketing techniques were rapidly adopted by admissions

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offices at colleges and universities throughout the country. Some educators see this change as having a positive influence upon American education. Others fear that the concern for drawing the most highly qualified students will degenerate into a concern for simply increasing enrollments (West, 1974; Finch and Tanthem, 1975; Fiske, 1980; Van Luchene, 1980; West, 1980).

The admissions office usually has the first contact with prospective students. It is responsible for establishing an applicant pool from which quality students may be drawn. Kotler, (1975; 1978), notes that because its key function is to provide potential students with information regarding what a college has to offer, the admissions office is best suited (and even obligated) to practice effective marketing procedures as a service to the community which supports the college (Coppock, 1979; Druesne, 1980).

GOALS OF THIS REPORT

Educational marketing practices are usually local applications of generally accepted procedures. Standardized methods of marketing are adapted to local conditions with the goals of improving public service and increasing enrollments. Johnson (1978) and others have shared local findings and built awareness regarding what works and what does not (Lucas, 1979; Blackland, 1980; Nelson, 1980). However, studies do not indicate the extent to which colleges and universities in general are using marketing procedures. Within limits, that is what this project has done.

This paper has three objectives: (1) to distinguish between marketing and non-marketing descriptive materials and divide them into distinct types; (2) show the extent to which American colleges and universities distribute marketing and non-marketing materials; and (3) indicate why four-year colleges and those offering higher degrees are much more likely than two-year colleges to send marketing materials to prospective students.

Conclusions and specific information will be useful to administrators of admissions oflices and marketing specialists. Administrators may be aided in decision-making regarding the use of marketing materials through an awareness of techniques of other colleges and universities. They will be able to compare their own descriptive materials with those being sent by others. Marketing specialists will gain a perspective on the types of descriptive materials currently being used by various types

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of colleges and universities. Marketing specialists will discover why they should focus their attention upon some types of institutions and materials rather than others. Persons performing services in the employ of admissions offices will be better able to determine the effectiveness of specific classifications of marketing materials through a knowledge of usage by other colleges. This report will provide enhanced awareness of why schools offering higher than two-year degrees are most likely to use marketing materials in their responses to prospective students.

DATA COLLECTION

Eight hundred and fifty-eight accredited public and private colleges and universities were randomly chosen from the 1978-79 Education Directory. The sample was divided into: (1) schools offering only two years of higher education; and (2) schools offering higher degrees. Associate degrees and various certificates were generally offered by two-year colleges. They included regional and branch colleges of major universities, community and junior colleges, and technical schools. Four-year colleges, whether or not they had a graduate program, comprised those institutions offering higher degrees. Schools offering only graduate programs were excluded.

Each college and university was sent a letter written by a prospective student requesting information about the school. The letter stated that the student would soon be living in the area and attending a local college or university. The information would help him choose the appropriate school.

Responses were gathered over a six-month period. Eighty-eight percent of the two-year colleges answered. Ninety-one percent of the others replied. Eighty-eight percent of all replies were received within two months. Practically all of the remaining 12% were second, third, or fourth mailings from schools which had responded during the first two months. One institution completed seventeen mailings and a phone call. Only nine admissions officers made telephone calls.

ANALYSIS OF DESCRIPTIVE MATERIALS

Materials were distinguished as having marketing or non-marketing

characteristics. They were sub-categorized into types of descriptive

TABLE I

MARKETING AND NON-MARKETING MATERIALS
SENT BY AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

MARKETING	NON-MARKETING
Letter to Parents Paid Return Reply School Promotional Brochure Personal Lotter School Promotional Booklets Program Brochure Events Advertissemt General Information Brochure Asmorted Brochure Carter Development Brochure	Application Form General Greeting Letter Financial Aid Information ACT Packet BEO Grant Data Catalogue Schedule of Classes

Marketing activities can be distinguished from non-marketing activities by the extent to which they support the four "P's" of marketing: Product...Price...Place...Promotion. The distinctions between marketing and non-marketing descriptive materials will be delineated through the use of these four concepts (Cf. Krachenberg, 1974; Fram, 1973; Wolf, 1973; Buchanan and Barksdale, 1974; Hugstead, 1975; Kotler, 1975, 1978).

Product

Programs and courses are dealt with as products. The marketing materials received from institutions presented capsulized descriptions emphasizing the best features of available programs. Program brochures described programs and courses in concise, attractive detail. They boldly outlined programs and emphasized the economic, social and personal advantages for the prospective students.

Non-marketing materials were typified by class schedules and catalogues which hid information and forced the prospective student to hunt for the most general information about programs and courses. When the student found what he was looking for, he then had to decipher a lengthy explanation written in regimented academic language.

Price

This concept refers to descriptions of college costs and financial assistance. Non-marketing materials merely gave a detailed factual presentation of college costs and financial aid possibilities. Marketing materials

presented costs as investments in the future. Colleges reflected a marketing orientation when the discussion of costs was tied to the economic return the student could expect from his investment of time and money at college. Career development and program brochures often had statistics to prove the employment success of graduates. Sometimes the brochure would show a student how to balance a budget while he received an education. Marketing materials often indicated that college personnel would be willing to assist students in receiving financial aid.

Traditional materials on financial aids only detailed the kinds of assistance available. BEOG Grant packets may be placed in this category. Such complex factual presentations were classified as non-marketing materials. Chapman (1979) notes that the "price" of an education was the most important factor influencing the college selection process.

Place

Through the use of promotional brochures and booklets colleges glorified the student environment. Whether large or small, the college town was portrayed as an ideal setting for student life. Such writings emphasized the prestige and quality of the school. They were classified as marketing materials.

In contrast, class schedules often gave no more than an address to indicate place. However, they are frequently the only descriptive material sent to the prospective student by community colleges.

Promotion

Biases were easily detected in promotional materials. For example, advertisements of events would underscore the success of the college football team and fail to mention how they were doing in other sports. School promotional booklets contained color pictures showing the obviously best aspects of the college. Promotional activities were reflected by the high degree of personalization in correspondence with the prospective student. Personal letters were sent and/or contact was made with parents of the prospective student. Both salutation and signature were on a first name basis.

Colleges which sent little other than the materials necessary for a student to proceed through the matriculation process were not using marketing principles. Descriptive materials such as application forms, catalogues, and verbose financial aids advertisements were poor promo-

Marketing encourages a highly selective display of a school's characteristics with a tendency to emphasize the best. Marketing materials present a warm personal image of the school. They do not usually tell much about rigorous academic programs to be completed or high attrition rates. Non-marketing materials give information. But it is clothed in drab sheets with few pictures. Black, blue, and white are dominant colors among non-marketing materials.

Types of Descriptive Materials

Table I reflects the results of classifying several thousand pieces of descriptive material sent to the prospective student. After a systematic inspection of the materials received, distinctions were drawn between types of material by noting basic characteristics held in common. For example, General Greeting Letters differ from Personal Letters by virtue of the greeting of "Dear Friend" rather than use of a specific name. Further, a second level evaluation was performed to distinguish marketing types from non-marketing types of material. These lines were drawn according to the extent the entire classification of materials sent fostered the four "P's" of marketing. The following discussion describes the seventeen types of materials — ten marketing and seven non-marketing.

Marketing Materials

Sophisticated procedures for mass production of personalized letters were usually employed in "letters to parents." They appealed to financial interests, concerns for a quality education, and desires for student safety on campus. For example, they often mentioned the high employment rates of recent graduates, the special expertise of faculty members, and the policy of monitoring school events.

"Return reply cards" and envelopes were closely associated with other marketing materials. For example, a school promotion brochure would invariably have one attached to it. Or, if a personal letter suggested a visit to campus, a paid return reply card would be enclosed so the student could indicate when he or she would prefer to visit the campus. Catalogues and other non-marketing materials were rarely accompanied by one. Return reply cards were generally designed to determine the degree of interest a student had in the school. With the

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reply card the student could request specific types of information, make an appointment for consultation, or arrange a telephone interview.

"School promotional booklets and brochures" devoted considerable space to full-color pictures of the beauty of the local area, highly attractive young men and women in enjoyable interaction or contemplation, and artistic/poetic symbols associated with the college. Crucial information, pointedly expressed in bold print, was carefully selected to present a specific image of the school — the "position" of the school. For example, a school which claimed to encourage student creativity included a poster sized brochure portraying a gull in flight and the school name written in free flowing form as a caption. One booklet designed to "light up the student's life" was printed in the form of a large matchbook. Inside, four-color pictures indicated why other schools could not "match" the quality education and glamorous student life.

"Personal letters" were first class mail items with a greeting which addressed the student by name. Sometimes they were written totally in longhand. With rare exception they expressed admiration for the student's wisdom in considering the college. Letters told of a strong student orientation by both faculty and administration. Low student-professor ratios were emphasized. The student was assured that he would receive very personal attention if he should be intelligent enough to select that campus.

Personal letters often invited the student to visit the school. Some schools hired students as "new student coordinators." Personal letters were often sent by persons in such a capacity. The new student coordinator would promise to show the prospective student around the campus and provide collegiate entertainment during the visit.

Advertisements regarding specific campus "events" were often enclosed with personal letters and materials inviting the prospective student to the campus. Sometimes these ads pointed to the coordination of special events on campus with dates of a "college day" or "college weekend" when the school would systematically show prospective students the assets of the school.

"Program brochures" described the basic programs that were offered by the college, A pamphlet which explained all of the basic characteristics of a nursing program, or another limited degree area, was classified as a program brochure. Some of these were lacking in style and aesthetic appeal. However, the vast majority were colorful and eyecatching, showing a unique design. A brochure advertising a nursing program was shaped like a nurse's cap. Another, for agriculture, featured the shape of a silo.

"General information" brochures included short summaries of essential information prospective students should know about tuition, housing, financial aid, programs, etc. At times these were printed in compact form on plain paper. Far more often they were colorful and featured an imaginative format. For example, some were thumbindexed so that a student could quickly locate data on financial assistance, programs, etc. These brochures were often sent instead of a catalogue. Sometimes this pamphlet indicated a catalogue could be ordered for a specific fee.

"Assorted" brochures included religious tracts, expressions of political positions, descriptions of local scenic attractions, and so forth. This category excludes brochures which provided information to enable the prospective student to distinguish between programs and courses. They usually reflected the philosophy of the institution. Sometimes they appeared to be purely propagands pamphlets.

"Career development" brochures were few in number. They contained information which indicated how the student could advance himself in a specific career area. They often pointed out the success of graduates in gaining employment in their area of specialization.

Non-marketing Materials

"General greeting letters" were highly stereotypical. The majority were obviously printed or mimeographed copies of a letter intended for a large number of prospective students. Over two-thirds of them began with the greeting "Dear Friend" or "Dear Student." Many attempted to present a personal appeal to students. That attempt was not very successful since the personal note was contradicted by the format of the letter. Many simply stated generalities regarding programs and campus conditions and ended with an invitation to visit the school.

"Application forms" varied from a simple one page form with no request for an application fee to a complex form several pages long requesting considerable personal information and charging a fee of \$35.

"ACT and BEO (Basic Educational Opportunity) Grant" data are standardized sets of information. ACT packets help a student complete a commonly used college admission test. The BEO grant packets contain information to explain conditions of eligibility for grants and application forms. They facilitate the student's admission to college, but they give no information about the specific school sending them. These heavy packets, when sent with each initial response, cause mailing costs to rise considerably.

"Financial Aid Brochures" are the most difficult to categorize accurately as marketing or non-marketing. The vast majority are austere information booklets detailing the stipulations for receiving assistance. A very high percentage of two-year colleges simply sent mimeographed information sheets. In contrast, Financial Aid brochures fromschools offering higher degrees. For example, some were printed to look like currency. Covers informed prospective students that the route to getting through college with financial ease could be found inside. However, these clearly marketing financial aid brochures were few compared to the substantial number of non-marketing ones (cf. Huddleston, 1978).

"Catalogues" tended to be equally nondescript, whether sent by twoyear, or other colleges. Essentially they consisted of intricate descriptions of various courses and degree programs. However, those few with specially tailored formats were exclusively produced by colleges offering four-year and graduate degrees. For example, two were printed in the form of a paperback novel. One had a cover which simulated Levi ieans.

Most "class schedules" were compactions of information regarding specific times classes were held. They were usually mimeographed or printed in microscopic black and white text in newspaper form. Little other information was included. Print quality was poor. Some were almost illegible. The few with interesting formats were usually from four-year private colleges. A few class schedules were part of a copy of the school paper. Then, in addition to the schedule, admissions offices were sending personalized information concerning the school. The vast majority of class schedules, however, were unattractive.

Summary

This section has defined specific types of descriptive materials sent by admissions offices of American colleges and universities. Further, it has distinguished marketing from non-marketing materials. The result of that analytic process is shown by Table I. Cognizance of distinctions between descriptive materials will facilitate understanding the findings discussed in the next section of this report.

FINDINGS

Table II indicates that colleges offering higher degrees were more likely to send marketing materials than those offering two-year programs. Only 31% of all the descriptive materials sent by two-year colleges reflected marketing orienttions. However, 44% of the materials sent by schools offering higher degrees supported marketing principles.

TABLE II
PERCENTAGES OF MARKETING AND NON-MARKETING
MATERIALS SENT BY TWO-YEAR COLLEGES AND
THOSE OFFERING HIGHER DEGREES

	Marketing	Non-Marketing
TWO YEAR	31	69
HIGHER	44	56

The percentages in Table III reflect the number of items of a specific type a student may expect to receive when hearing from 100 schools. For example, in material from 100 two-year schools a student might expect to find 53 catalogues and 29 class schedules. However, he would find only 8 paid return reply cards and 5 school promotional brochures. Two-year colleges send large quantities of non-marketing materials and small quantities of marketing materials. The above figures may be compared with schools offering higher degrees: a prospective student could expect to receive only 43 catalogues and 12 schedules of classes when hearing from 100 schools offering higher degrees. But, he could expect to receive 30 paid reply cards and 15 school promotional brochures. Distinctions drawn in Table III between specific classes of material show clearly that schools offering higher degrees are most likely to send marketing materials.

TABLE III
PERCENTAGE OF SPECIFIC TYPES OF DESCRIPTIVE MATERIALS
INCLUDED WITH RESPONSE TO PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS

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		2 year	Higher	•	2 year	Higher	
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lat	Paid Return Reply	7.8	29.6	General Greeting	2 8	17.3	~
Sc.	School Promotional	6.4	15.3	Letter	;	:	
^	Brochure			Financial Aid Infor-	30.7	7 17	_
Per	Personal Letter	18.6	48.7	mation	;	•	
Sch	School Promotional	16.9	31.7	ACT Packet	2.6	3.2	-
_	Booklet			BEO Grant Data	2.6		_
Pro	Program Brochure	5.5	10.8	Catalogue	2 63	9 67	_
Eve	Events Advertisement	3.6	8.2	Schedule of Classes	28.7	11.0	
Gen Gen	General Info. Brochure	17.9	27.5			777	_
ASS	Assorted Brochure	5.2	6.3				
Car	Career Development	1.6	8.0				
MEAN	-	8.2	18.5	MEAN	26.8	27.3	
					,	2.7	_

The means of the percentages at the bottom of Table III show further how two-year colleges are similar to and different from others. Note that on the average both send about the same percentage of non-marketing materials—26.8 vs 27.3. These are traditional items like applications and catalogues. The difference between the admissions office activities of each type of school is reflected in the rauch more frequent use of marketing materials by schools offering higher degrees—8.2% vs. 18.5%. Two-year colleges sent one piece of marketing material for each 2.2 sent by schools offering higher degrees.

More intricate differences between types of materials are shown by Table IV.

Descriptive materials are arranged to reflect differences in marketing tendencies between two and four-year colleges. Table IV shows a range of items from top to bottom which reflects a continuum from those descriptive materials most likely to be sent by colleges offering higher degrees to those most likely sent by two-year colleges. The five items listed first are among the most important advancements in educational marketing. Most of the other descriptive materials have been sent traditionally.

Table IV indicates that two-year colleges are much more likely than other schools to send non-marketing materials such as schedules of classes. The X2 indicator points out that there is little difference in the likelihood that either type of school will send the descriptive materials listed in the midsection of the table. As one ascends the list of X2 indicators, a generally direct relationship is found between the probability that marketing materials will be sent and schools offering higher degrees. Colleges offering higher degrees responded with a larger amount of mail in general than did two-year colleges, Four-year colleges are most likely to send most types of materials. In addition, the tendency for a school offering higher degrees to send more descriptive materials than those offering two-year degrees increases as the materials have more marketing characteristics. At the bottom of Table IV, where mainly non-marketing materials are located, one finds the type that two-year colleges are rauch more likely to send.

Fiske (1980) has noted that many marketing techniques have an unsophisticated quality which might be associated with a "hard sell." An example from my data supports this conclusion: In response to a phone call from one four-year college, the student said, "I have discussed the matter with my parents and have chosen to attend another college." The admissions officer replied, "You aren't going to let your parents tell you where to go, are you?" However, such crude over-sell was uncommon.

CHI-SQUARE INDICATION OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN QUANTITIES OF TYPES OF DESCRIPTIVE MATERIALS SENT BY TWO-YEAR COLLEGES AND THOSE OFFERING HIGHER DEGREES TABLE IV

DESCRIPTUE : MATERIALS CLASSIFICATION Tron-Y letter to Parents* Marketing C.0.0 Paid Return Reply Marketing C.0.0 Personal letter Marketing C.0.0 Personal letter Marketing C.0.0 Personal letter Marketing C.0.0 Personal letter Marketing C.0.0 Program Brochure Marketing C.0.0 Program Brochure Marketing C.0.0 Marketing	١					
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nation Non-Marketing Non-Marketing Marketing Marketing Non-Marketing Non-Marketing Non-Marketing Non-Marketing		eneral Information Brochure	Marketing	17.9	27.5	7170
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Non-Marketing 5		EO Grant Data	Non-Marketing	2.6	-	099
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		ciedate of classes	Non-Marketing	28.7	11.9	.000

^{*}Inadequate data base for reliable chi-square test.

With time one may expect a careful refinement of marketing procedures. (Bender, 1975; Turner, 1978; Vaccaro, 1979).

Materials from most colleges and universities revealed a concern to explain honestly to students the value of an education at a particular school and sought an awareness of the student's needs. This reflects the most basic value of educational marketing. That is, marketing in education is built on the value of determining student needs and satisfying them, rather than simply seeking to increase enrollments through persuading students to attend. As this value becomes more a part of educational marketing procedures, colleges which use them will possess highly accurate information concerning the needs of students within their drawing area and continually become more able to offer programs designed to meet those needs. Stear (1977) and others have shown the effectiveness of educational marketing, (Johnson, 1978; Durand, 1979; Blackburn, 1980a; 1980b; Peters, 1980). As some colleges become more adept, they will draw students away from others (Litten, 1980).

DISCUSSION

Historical and social conditions are responsible for creating the differences in the use of marketing materials by two-year and other colleges. A review of those conditions is prerequisite to consideration of the use of the findings of this report.

Declining Enrollments Lead Four-Year Colleges to Market

During recent decades, the creation of colleges offering two-year degrees has increased rapidly (Education Directory, 1978-79). The growth of two-year community colleges has drawn large numbers of economically conscious young people who, in the past, would have gone to schools offering higher than two-year degrees. Gorman (1974) points out that marketing procedures are first adopted by educational institutions most pressed by economic difficulties.

Students today are more apt to view higher education as an investment in their future (Egler, 1974; Leister, 1976). It is economically sensible to attend the least expensive college when there is no clear sacrifice in the quality of the education. Tuition rates at two-year degree colleges are lower than at other colleges. Credits earned at a two-year college are just as valuable as lower division credits earned at institutions which

cost more to attend.

Students see the two-year degree as more valuable than merely two years of credit hours (Hazard and Bradford, 1978). But, most institutions offering advanced degrees do not offer two-year terminal degrees. Consequently, the expansion of two-year colleges has presented lower division students with a tempting alternative to four-year degree schools. There is a degree to be gained with nothing to lose by beginning an academic career at a two-year college.

These factors have made the two-year college more appealing for many students than the four-year school. So, one might expect academic institutions offering higher degrees to be experiencing difficulties drawing lower division students and more readily adopting mark-ting procedures than two-year colleges. In addition, institutions offering advanced degrees tend to be larger than two-year colleges. They are better financed per student and more strongly supported by a staff throroughly trained in marketing procedures. The availability of these resources increases the probability that such schools will bring them into play when dealing with the problem of insufficient enrollments.

Use of Findings

All academic institutions are under a similar constraint because of the decline in the number of traditional students. Several studies point out that colleges and universities must worry about the effect of the decline of high school graduates upon their enrollments (Englehart, 1973; Finch and Tantham, 1975; Parker, 1977). Heeding such warnings, many colleges and universities have developed advertising campaigns built on marketing techniques. This report shows that adminstrators must become conscious that increasingly effective marketing techniques will intensify the struggle for all classifications of potential students. It will force colleges to see each other as competitors in the student market.

As a result of the continued marketing orientation by academic institutions offering four-year and higher degrees, two-year colleges may expect greater difficulty enrolling lower division students.

The philosophy of two-year "community" colleges leads them to appeal to local populations. This explains their emphasis on sending class schedules much more often than other schools. They assume that such materials are most essential to "local" students. However, the majority of these colleges also send catalogues which are expensive to produce and send. This indicates a lack of careful consideration for effi-

cient use of financial resources by two-year college admissions offices. That may be associated with admissions offices not being under pressure to streamline activities and aim efforts more toward inexpensive, yet effective recruitment techniques. A brochure would be considerably less expensive to produce and send than a catalogue. Its less formal approach would achieve the same goal as a catalogue: introducing a prospective student to awareness of programs and procedures.

The findings of this report enable four-year institutions to weigh their own admissions office procedures against those used by other colleges and universities. Such information will help them determine the kinds of marketing techniques used by others and adjust their own procedures perhaps to coordinate with what is most popular and/or effective among other schools in the classification. For example, if a college has been using a general greeting letter, consideration of the fact that almost half of the four-year institutions use personal letters may infer the advisability of this school's adopting a new format (Cf. Gorman, 1974).

Marketing specialists can use the findings of this report to direct their efforts. For example, most endeavors to foster development of marketing procedures have been aimed at large universities - especially those suffering from declining enrollments. This report suggests that two-year colleges may benefit through guidance by marketing principles. Perhaps two-year institutions should send fewer unattractive schedules of classes and bulky, expensive catalogues, and a greater number of less expensive, more attractive types of information (Alberger, 1980).

Information gathered in this study makes monitoring the progression of academic institutions toward the development of improved marketing techniques possible. If this study were repeated in two years, analysis would reveal growth and decline in the use of various descriptive materials sent by admissions offices. Showing such trends would indicate the direction of increases and decreases in the use of specific classifications of descriptive materials, and administrators could use this information to guide their own decisions regarding the use of marketing materials.

SUMMARY

This report explains why educational marketing has gained popularity. It notes that such practices are most likely to be used by colleges offering higher than two-year degrees. It has also proffered an explanation why two-year colleges used few marketing materials—and has

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shown how that may hurt them. This study provides administrators of admissions offices with a scale which will enable them to compare their own marketing procedures and use of descriptive materials with other schools. This will facilitate their own decision making regarding the use of marketing materials. Marketing specialists have been given insight regarding types of schools where marketing is needed.

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