

Georgia Southern University

Digital Commons@Georgia Southern

Association of Marketing Theory and Practice
Proceedings 2013

Association of Marketing Theory and Practice
Proceedings

2013

How a Small Rural University Can Effectively Approach High School Students?

Jianfeng Wang

Liza Jussiaume

Arnaud Jaquier

Yasmine Fofana

Chuck Compton

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/amtp-proceedings_2013



Part of the [Marketing Commons](#)

This conference proceeding is brought to you for free and open access by the Association of Marketing Theory and Practice Proceedings at Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Association of Marketing Theory and Practice Proceedings 2013 by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu.

Authors

Jianfeng Wang, Liza Jussiaume, Arnaud Jaquier, Yasmine Fofana, Chuck Compton, James Davis, and Stephanie Walker

How a Small Rural University Can Effectively Approach High School Students?

Jianfeng Wang

Mansfield University of Pennsylvania

Liza Jussiaume

Mansfield University of Pennsylvania

Arnaud Jaquier

Mansfield University of Pennsylvania

Yasmine Fofana

Mansfield University of Pennsylvania

Chuck Compton

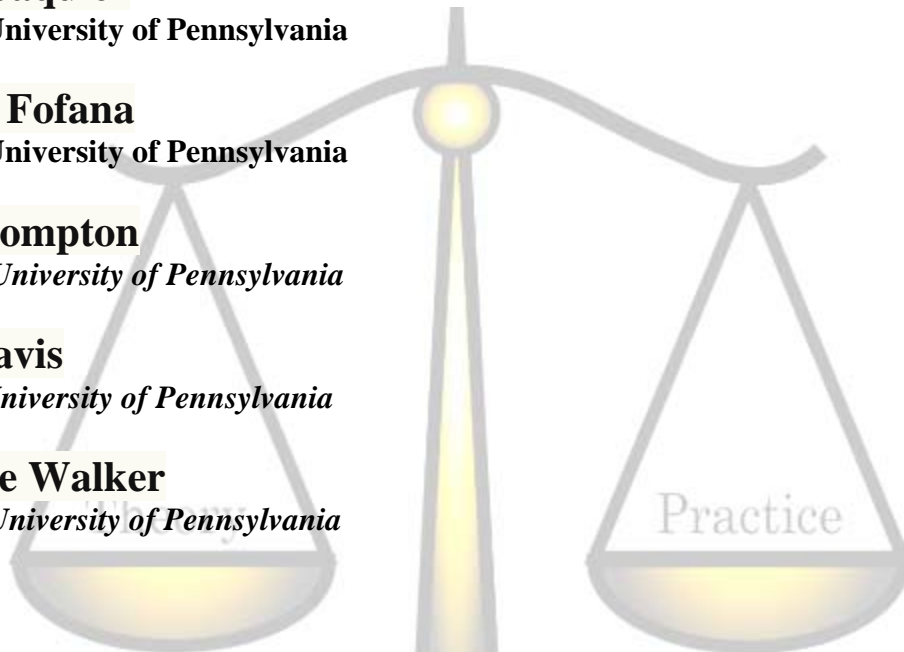
Mansfield University of Pennsylvania

James Davis

Mansfield University of Pennsylvania

Stephanie Walker

Mansfield University of Pennsylvania



Abstract

Nowadays many small rural universities or colleges are faced with the challenge of how to expand schools' student body. Given the limited budget, these schools need to make preliminary decisions on how to better reach high school students in order to achieve optimal enrollment goals. In this study, a survey was conducted to make an attempt at determining how a small rural university can effectively approach its anticipated target market. The objectives of this study are: 1. to determine how the target audiences hear about the university; 2. to determine who makes the final decisions regarding the target audience's future education; 3. to identify the most effective advertisement approach to the target audience; 4. to determine the target audience's media habits. Data are collected and analyzed. The results are presented.

INTRODUCTION

As a small rural liberal arts college, University A's (UA) student enrollment in fall of 2005 was 3,390, in fall of 2006 was 3,360, and in fall of 2007 was 3,380. Considering that the provided

figures had remained fairly consistent throughout these consecutive years, UA's Public Relations Division (PRD) was faced with the challenge of how to expand the university's student body. University's Director of PRD informed student marketing research team that the university originally had two target audiences – high school aged females and mothers of high school students. The PRD, therefore, was seeking information on how to expand their current target audience to all high school students.

The purpose of this project was to survey high school students and to make an attempt at determining how the university can effectively approach its anticipated target market. Ultimately, the results of this study will be used to help UA make preliminary decisions on how to better reach high school students in order to achieve optimal enrollment goals.

OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this research design is to make inquiries that will assist UA in the decision-making process of how to effectively approach high school students for the purpose of achieving optimal enrollment goals. The following research objectives are provided to facilitate PRD in achieving their ultimate goal:

- To determine how the target audiences hear about UA.
- To determine who makes the final decisions regarding the target audience's future education.
- To identify the most effective advertisement approach to the target audience.
- To determine the target audience's media habits.

METHODOLOGY

This study consisted of a survey of high school students in order to determine how UA can reach them effectively. A structured questionnaire design was used because it was a more convenient and inexpensive way to collect the data that was needed. The questionnaire contained 19 questions, one of which was split into six questions. The questions on the survey were first formulated by student groups working on marketing UA's project, and then those questions were revised by academic advisor and a director who was in charge of UA's PRD. High school students were asked questions about UA, general questions, and questions about themselves (age, gender, etc.).

The survey was distributed in person during the visitation day on campus. Respondents were instructed to completely fill out the questionnaire, to take their time in answering the questions, and then to place them in a specified box. The statistical methods used to analyze the data were obtained through the SPSS statistical analysis computer program. Through the use of SPSS program, we have been able to generate charts and cross tabulation reflecting the results of the survey.

RESULTS

183 questionnaires were distributed. 160 were returned. The response rate was 87.4%.

1. About UA

Question 1 - How did you hear about UA?

42.5% of students based on 160 responses heard about UA from someone within their high school. 31.9% of students selected that they heard about UA from friends and 16.3% selected advertising.

	High School	Parents	Friends	UA Recruiter	Ad	Other
Responses	68	32	51	22	26	29
Percentage	42.5%	20.0%	31.9%	13.8%	16.3%	18.1%

Question 2 – Have you ever seen an ad for UA on the following Media?

36.3% of 160 students have seen ads for UA on the Internet while 23.1% specified TV. 20.6% selected radio as an advertising medium, while zero students selected UA's Podcast.

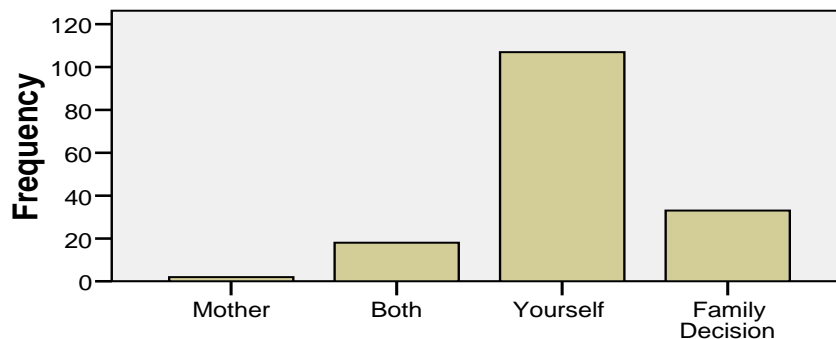
	Newspaper/ Magazine	Podcasts	Internet	Radio	Billboard	TV	Not at All
Responses	17	0	58	33	28	37	50
Percentage	10.6%	0%	36.3%	20.6%	17.5%	23.1%	31.3%

2. General

Question 3 - Who makes the final decisions regarding your future education?

66.9% of students felt that they make their final education decisions. Furthermore 20.6% of students' decisions were based on their families' decision.

Who makes educational decisions?



Question 4 – Where would you start to look for college information?

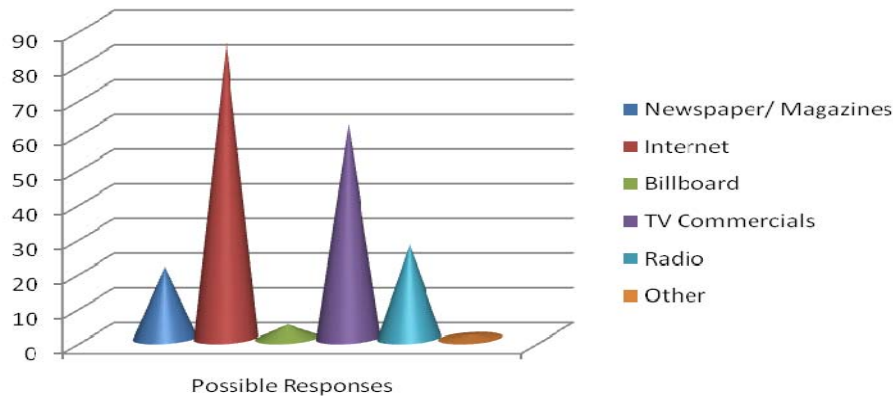
Out of 160 responses 75% of students would use the Internet to search for college information. 31.9% of students would speak with their guidance counselor, and 21.3% would start by visiting colleges.

	Visiting	Parents	Friends	Internet	school guidance counselor
Responses	34	32	51	120	51
Percentage	21.3%	20.0%	31.9%	75.0%	31.9%

Responses	34	6	3	120	51
Percentage	21.3%	3.8%	1.9%	75%	31.9%

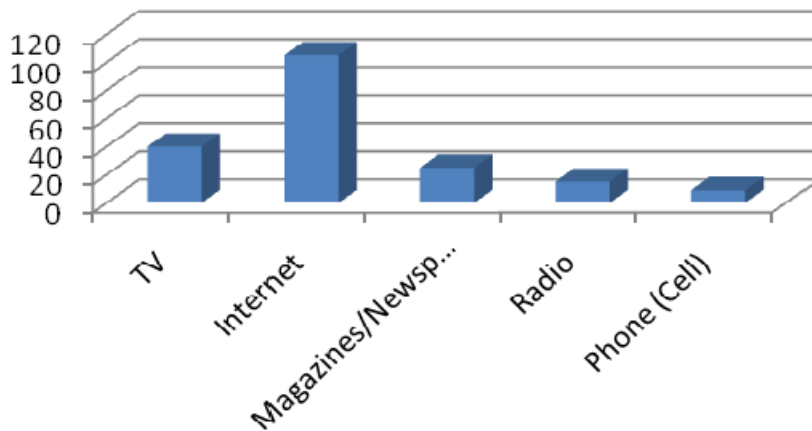
Question 5 – Which type of advertising has the most affect on you?

Based on 160 responses 53.1% of students felt that advertising on the Internet had the most impact on them, while 38.8% chose television. 16.9% and 13.1% chose radio and newspapers/magazines respectively.



Question 6 – What is your favorite way to keep in touch with the world?

Based on 160 responses, 65.6% of students used the Internet to keep in touch with the world, while 25% selected television. 15.6% of students kept in touch by magazines or the newspaper.



Question 7 – How much TV do you watch per day?

53.8% of students watched between 1 and 3 hours of television a day while 40.6% watched less than 1 hour. Also, 3.8% watched more than three and 1.3% watches no television at all.

How often do you watch TV?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	More than 3 hours each day	6	3.8	3.8	3.8
	1-3 hours a day	86	53.8	54.1	57.9
	Less than one hour a day	65	40.6	40.9	98.7
	Not at all	2	1.3	1.3	100.0
	Total	159	99.4	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.6		
Total		160	100.0		

Question 8 – What service provides your television programming?

Of 160 responses 33.8% students had local cable service, 28.8% had digital cable and 28.1% used a satellite television provider.

What TV service do you use the most?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Local Cable	54	33.8	37.2	37.2
	Digital Cable	46	28.8	31.7	69.0
	Satellite	45	28.1	31.0	100.0
	Total	145	90.6	100.0	
Missing	System	15	9.4		
Total		160	100.0		

Question 9 – Which TV channel do you watch most frequently?

Based on 160 responses 26.3% of students watched MTV most frequently followed by ABC at 23.8% and ESPN at 13.8%. The majority chose “other” channels at a rate of 30%.

	MTV	TBS	ABC	NBC	ESPN
Responses	42	13	38	11	22
Percentage	26.3%	8.1%	23.8%	6.9%	13.8%

Question 10 - What are some of your favorite shows?

When asked what specific shows students watched, the followings are the majority:

- Grey’s Anatomy -25
- CSI - 24
- House - 18
- The Hills - 14

- Scrubs – 13

Question 11 – What site do you frequently surf in your spare time?

When asked to choose the site the respondents visit in their free time, 46.9% of the 160 responses selected MySpace. 33.1% selected Facebook and 15% selected YouTube. Also, .09% selected others.

Question 12 and 13 – Do you listen to the radio, if so, what format?

Of 144 students that listened to the radio, 89.6% listened to their local stations, while the remaining listened to XM or Sirius.

Question 14 – Do you pay attention to the commercials?

Of 144 students 56.9% answered that they did not listen to the commercials, and 43.1% of students did listen to the commercials.

3. Important Qualities

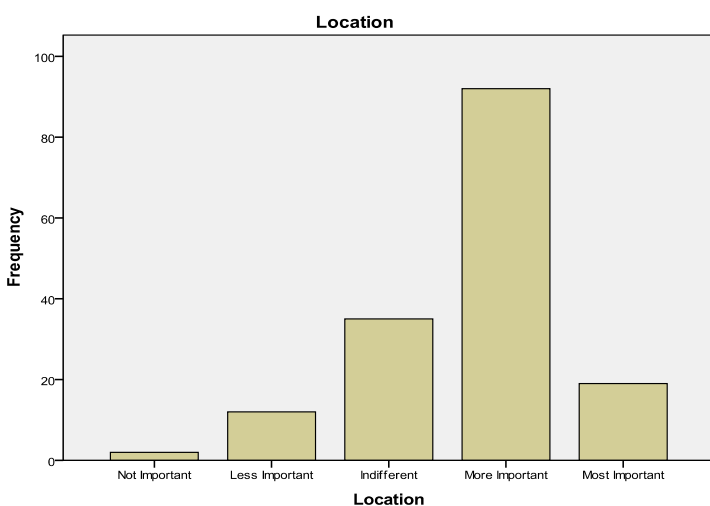
Question 15A - How important is a school’s EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM when considering a college?

When asked about the importance of colleges Educational Program when considering a college, 58.1% rated it as Most Important, 38.1% as More Important, and 3.8% as indifferent.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Indifferent	6	3.8	3.8	3.8
More Important	61	38.1	38.1	41.9
Most Important	93	58.1	58.1	100.0
Total	160	100.0	100.0	

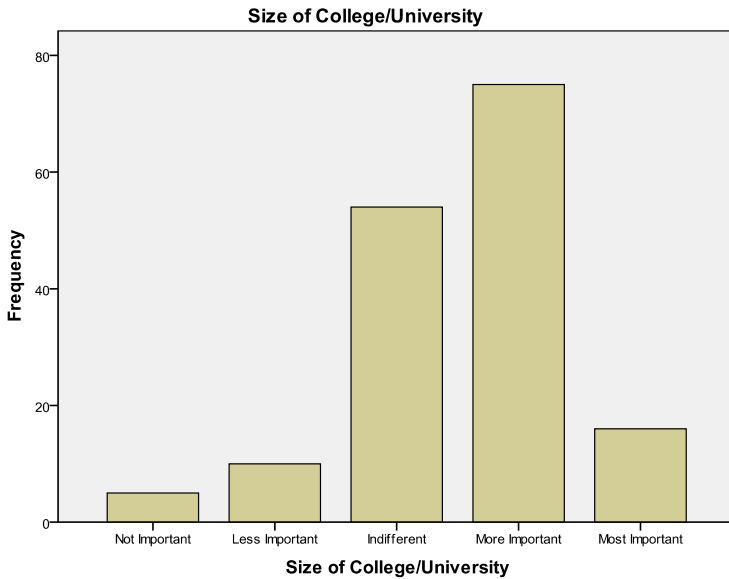
Question 15B - How important is a school’s LOCATION when considering a college?

When asked about the importance of colleges geographic location when considering a college, 11.9% selected Most Important, 57.5% selected More Important, 21.9% were indifferent, 7.5% selected Less Important and 1.3% selected Not Important.



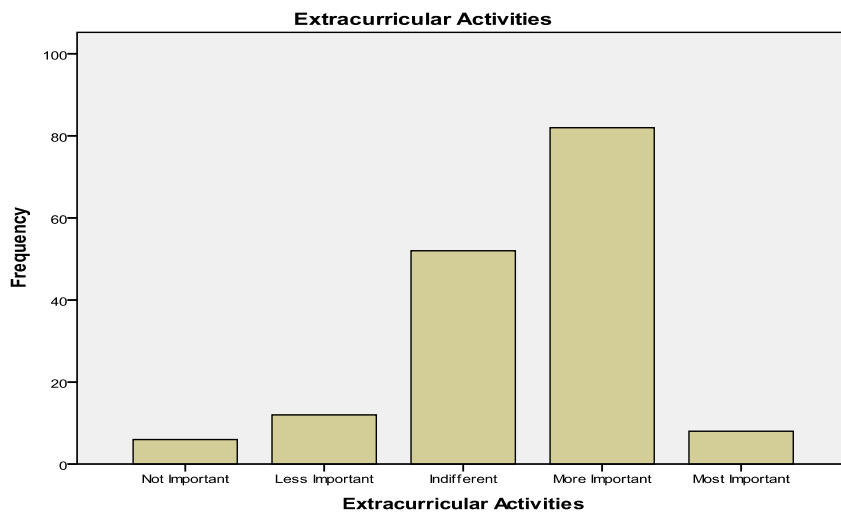
Question 15C - How important is a school's PHYSICAL SIZE when considering a college?

When asked about the importance of the physical size of a College/University when considering a college, 46.9% felt it was more important and 33.8% were indifferent. Only 10% selected Most Important and 6.3% less Important. 3.1% selected that it was Not Important.



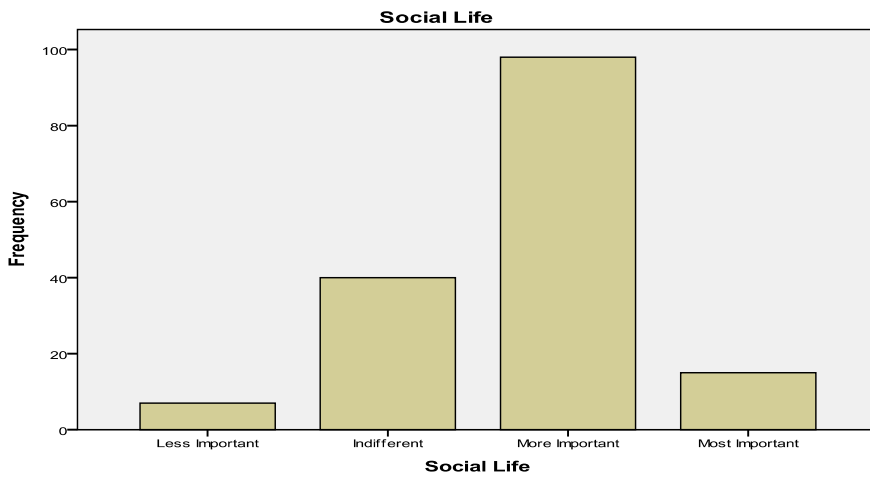
Question 15D - How important is a school's EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES when considering a college?

When asked how important a campus' extracurricular activities are when considering a college, 51.3% selected More Important, 32.5% Indifferent, 7.5% Less Important, 5.0% Most Important and 3.8% Not important.



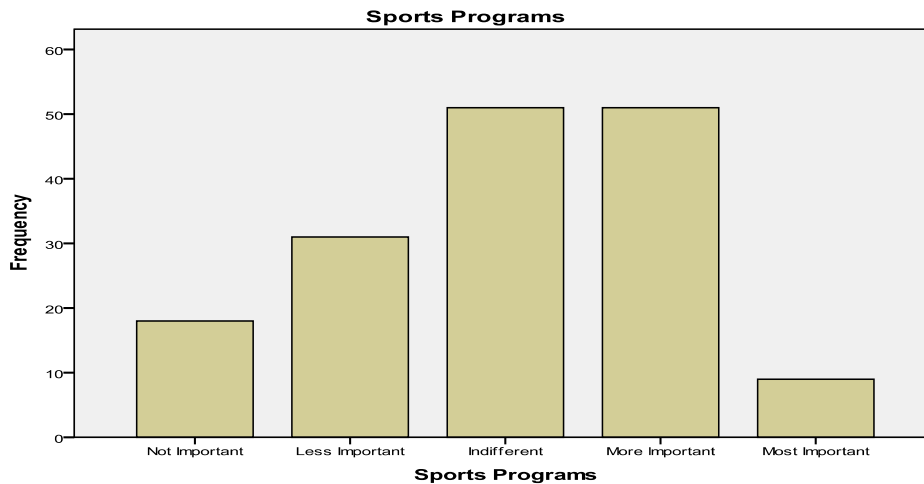
Question 15E - How important is a school's Social Life when considering a college?

When asked about the importance of a campus' social life when considering a college, 61.3% selected More Important, 25% were indifferent, 9.4% selected Most Important and 4.45% as less Important. No students selected Not Important.



Question 15F - How important is a school's SPORTS PROGRAMS when considering a college?

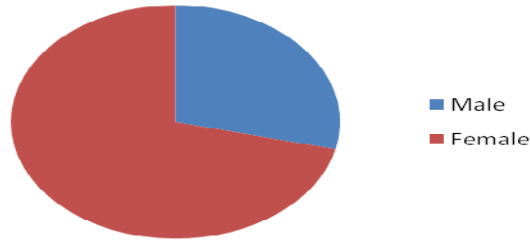
When asked how important a colleges' sports program is when considering a college, 31.9% selected More Important and 31.9% selected Indifferent. 19.4% selected Less Important, 11.3% selected Not Important and 5.6% selected Most Important.



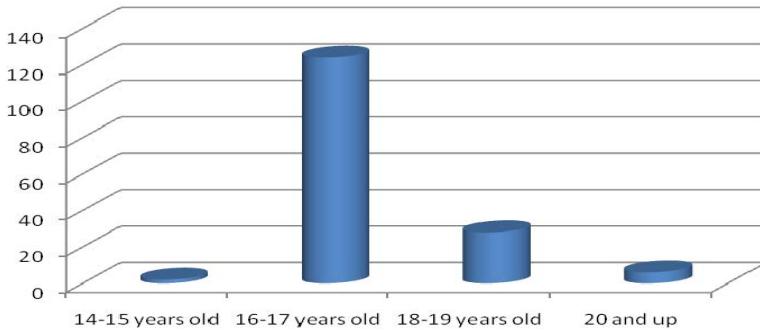
4. Demographics

Question 16 – What is your gender?

71.2% of students surveyed were female while 28.8% were male.



Question 17 – What is your age?



Question 18 – What is your ethnic Background?

150 of 160 students were Caucasian, while 3 students were Native American, 1 student was Asian, 1 student was Hispanic and 3 selected “other”.

Question 19 – Which city/state are you from?

76.2% of students were from Pennsylvania, 20% were from New York, and only 3 students were from New Jersey.

DISCUSSION

Limitations

Due to time constraints, this study has several limitations. First of all, the selection of the survey’s respondents was done by convenience sampling. Although our respondents were high school students, they were students coming to the UA on a visitation day. Due to this method of sampling, our surveyors were limited to the number of prospective students coming on that specific date. Moreover, our samples were students already interested in applying to UA or who had at least already heard about UA. If it was not for the time constraints, the team’s intended plan was to visit local high schools as well as other high schools; this would have allowed more variation and diversification in our samples.

Another limiting factor our team faced was the assumption that our survey respondents consisted mainly of junior and senior high school students attending the visitation day, without taking into consideration that there could have been transfer students as well as non -traditional students.

There were also *nonrespondents* to the surveys. Out of 183 surveys handed out, 160 were returned therefore, 23 surveys were non-responses.

In addition, this study could possibly be subject to *response bias*. In fact some parents filled out the questionnaires instead of the students, which indicated that some surveys might have been invalid due to *systematic error*. Due to this systematic error, our teams’ surveyors realized that

they should have clearly expressed the importance of only having the students fill out the surveys.

After the examination of the surveys, our team also realized that some questions should have been formulated differently, which would have facilitated our analysis.

For example, question # 10 in the questionnaire —“*What are some of your favorite shows?*”— should have also included the specific channels on which selected shows were watched.

Considering that some shows appear on multiple channels throughout the day, this minor detail would have saved our research valuable time.

Our team also found a similar issue with the question regarding where the respondents were from. We recognized that this detail would have been helpful for our team and for research purposes to have zip codes instead of cities on the survey because, some cities existed in more than one state.

Recommendations

The intention of this project is to provide the PRD along with the Admissions Department a foundation that will enhance their ability to better Market UA to high school students. Here are some recommendations:

a. For the survey

If surveys of this kind are to be conducted in the future, they should be given out on more than one visitation day in order to increase the sample size. Moreover, UA recruiters could also hand the questionnaires out while visiting different high schools so that the sample size is not only limited to prospective students interested in UA.

b. For the PRD

✓ *How did the target audience hear about UA?*

According to the results, a great majority of students have heard about UA from someone such as a guidance counselor within their high school. If UA has a “partnership” with certain high schools, it’s definitely in their best interest to emphasize the importance of their inside connections and continue to put forth strong advertising efforts. Another great source of information that the results revealed useful was the high percentage of respondents who heard about UA through friends. Indeed, teenagers can be very influential among themselves. Therefore, we recommend that current UA students be included in the advertising and recruitment process.

✓ *Who makes the final decision regarding the student’s college education?*

According to the survey results, it seems that high schools students are becoming their own decision makers when it comes to their future education, although it still remains a family decision. One of the original target audiences, as the director of PRD stated, were mothers of high school students. However, according to the results, mothers are not a prominent decision maker. We feel that UA could be putting too much time and efforts into a target that would not be significantly beneficial to the university’s needs.

✓ *What is the most effective advertisement approach to reach students?*

Responses showed that the Internet was the most effective advertising tool among high school students. In fact, a good portion of respondents expressed that they would use the Internet to search for college information, stay connected with the world, and that the Internet had the most impact on them in terms of advertising. Out of 160 responses, none of the respondents acknowledged a selection of UA Podcast as a method of advertising. Although, according to the Director PRD, there are approximately 2000 downloads a week in 26 different countries. Our recommendation would, therefore, be to effectively advertise Podcast to high school students so that they are not only aware of it, but also that it can become an influential factor in their decision making of whether or not attend UA. The Podcast could be introduced to prospective students on future visitation days or even promoted by UA recruiters when visiting high schools. Social networking is the younger generation's most current trend. Among our respondents, the social website with the highest percentage was MySpace with 46.9% closely followed by Facebook with 33.1%. Due to the high volume of visits to these websites, we recommend that UA should advertise more on these social networks. On a smaller scale, student representatives of UA such as student ambassadors of the Admissions Office for example, can create professional yet friendly profiles in order to connect with prospective students and answer any questions they may have concerning their own experience at UA.

✓ ***What are the target audience's media habits?***

The constant evolving society in which we are living today is focused around the Internet and its advanced technologies. In addition, a small percentage of students are magazines or newspapers oriented. Therefore our research team recommends that advertising efforts be focused on the Internet. The results confirmed that the majority (36.3%) of the respondents saw a UA's advertisement on the Internet. The radio can also be considered as a useful tool considering that 20.6% of the respondents declared having heard an advertisement from UA. However, the effectiveness of the radio is debatable because the percentages of respondents that paid attention to the radio commercials were very close to the amount of respondents that did not pay attention to commercials.

Our team incorporated TV channels and TV shows watched by the respondents in the survey to see if more television advertisement can be projected to prospective students. Although only 25% of our respondents selected Television as their connection with the outside world, TV channels such as MTV, ABC and ESPN are still widely watched and should be considered as effective tools of advertising for the University.

✓ ***What characteristics does the target audience value the most in a College/University?***

Respondents found the following attributes more important when selecting their college or university: educational program, location, physical size, extracurricular activities, and social life. We recommend that the university incorporate these leading characteristics into their advertising.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to make inquiries that will assist UA in the decision-making process of how to effectively approach high school students for the purpose of achieving optimal enrollment goals. Being college students ourselves, we understand that choosing a college or university is not an easy process. However, characteristics such as the educational program, location, size, extracurricular activities and social life of a university can significantly impact a

students' final decision if advertised to the right target audience in the right way. According to our survey results, the most effective way for UA to successfully advertise to their anticipated target audience is through the Internet. Social networking websites should also be considered in the advertising process. If the budget permits, Television channels such as MTV, ABC or ESPN should also be targeted for UA advertising.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Jianfeng Wang is an Associate Professor of Marketing at Mansfield University of Pennsylvania. He received Ph.D. degree from The University of Toledo. His research appeared in *Computers & Education*, *Journal of Organizational and End User Computing*, *Behaviour & Information Technology*, *Journal of Internet Commerce*, *conference proceedings of Decision Sciences Institution*, and *Academy of Marketing Science*.

Liza Jussiaume, Arnaud Jaquier, Yasmine Fofana, Chuck Compton, James Davis, and Stephanie Walker were undergraduate students from Mansfield University of Pennsylvania.

