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A MODEL FOR UNDERSTANDING CHOICE OF UNIVERSITY BY  
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: A TWO-CASE STUDY

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy  
International Family and Community Studies

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by  
Shuiping Jiang  
August 2020

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Accepted by:  
Dr. Mark Small, Committee Chair  
Dr. Susan P. Limber  
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Dr. Sharon Nagy

## ABSTRACT

Students from all over the world who study in the United States contribute to the economy, participate in scientific and technical research, foster a diverse campus environment, enrich the learning environment with cultural perspectives, and help prepare domestic students for global careers, which often lead to long-term business relationships. However, in the United States, higher education institutions are facing ever-increasing challenges in enrolling international students. In the past three years, many universities faced difficulties in increasing or maintaining international student enrollment, forcing colleges and universities to search for the most effective ways to attract international students with limited resources. This is particularly true for those Master's colleges and universities with limited marketing funding for international student enrollment. By conducting surveys and interviews at two universities, the study examined university administrators' perceptions of university-related strategies of international student enrollment, the most influential factors in international student college choice based on student perceptions, and the degree to which student and administrator perceptions converge and diverge in relation to enrollment strategies and student college choice. This study is expected to provide a tool and knowledge for university policy makers and administrators to adjust appropriate recruiting strategies under limited budget in order to optimize resource outputs.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all my family members. To my father, who passed away during my Ph.D. study and has been protecting me in heaven ever since. Dad, your encouragement and support made me believe that there is nothing I cannot achieve. To my mother, who was barely schooled, but has been devoting her whole life to my education. Mom, thank you for your unconditional love and support for all my major decisions. To my brilliant and lovely sister, I could not make this far without you taking care of our parents and all family issues in China. To my husband, who gave me a perfect family life and provided support with anything that I need. Especially, thank you for proofreading and help with the English language.

Finally, to my daughter, Hao You. I would like to show you that women can achieve their dreams no matter where they are from and how old they are. I was born and grow up in a rural village in China. Many people thought I was crazy when I decided to pursue a Ph.D. degree in the United States, because I was a married woman having a 7-year old daughter and had a so called “perfect” job for a woman in a public university. But, here I am. Never let stereotypes, bias, or difficulties stop your steps towards your dream.

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I also would like to acknowledge the entire Institute on Family and Neighborhood Life (IFNL) family, including all faculty, staff, and students. I have always believed that the International Family and Community Studies program is one of the best PhD programs in the United States. I met the kindest professors and a cohort from all over the world. I gained a lot of knowledge and perspectives from all of you.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background**

International students coming to the United States for higher education have been positively contributing to the economy. According to the report generated from the NAFSA's (Association of International Educators) International Student Economic Value tool, over one million international students studying at the United States during the 2017-2018 academic year have contributed approximately \$39 billion to the US economy and supported more than 455,000 jobs. About 65% of all international students studying in the U.S. receive their primary funding from sources outside the United States.

However, the economic impact is not the only benefit from having international students according to the Power of International Education (IIE) 2018 open doors report. Students from all over the world who study in the United States also contribute to American innovation in scientific and technical research, foster diverse campus environments, enrich learning environments with cultural perspectives, help prepare domestic students for global careers, and often result in longer-term business relationships (Foster, 2012; IIE 2018; NAFSA, 2019).

Therefore, international students have been recognized as a source of great value to universities' profiles and reputations, revenue, research and knowledge production, increased campus diversity, and student preparedness to the global community (Eder, Smith, & Pitts, 2010; Ergron-Polak, & Hudson, 2011; Ross, Grace, & Shao, 2013).

According to a recent Duke University study of alumni from several universities,

interacting with international students has not only helped domestic students to learn about foreign cultures and languages, but also enhanced their own self-confidence, leadership, and quantitative skills (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013). The study also found that Americans who engaged with international students while on campus were more likely to appreciate art and literature, solve problems in historical perspective, and reexamine their political and religious viewpoints and beliefs about races or ethnicities. Hence, most universities consider attracting international students as an imperative strategy in the pursuit of institutional development, growth and sustainability (Curtis, Abratt, & Minor 2009; Ross et al., 2013; Simoes & Soares 2010).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Because of the benefits of having international students, competition for recruiting international students has become more intense among U.S. colleges (Agrey & Lampadan, 2014; Phang, 2013; Tan, 2015). In the United States, higher education institutions are facing ever-increasing difficulties in enrolling international students and maintaining their international student enrollment. According to the IIE Open Doors 2018 Report, the total number of new international students enrolled in the United States decreased by 3.3% from 300,743 in 2016 to 290,836 in 2017 and further decreased by 6.6% from 2017 to 271,738 in 2018. From 2017 to 2018, the enrollment of new undergraduate international students decreased by 6.3% from 115,841 to 108,539, graduate international students decreased by 5.5% from 124,888 to 117,960, and non-degree seeking students decreased by 9.7%. With the exception of doctoral universities with the highest research activity, most other universities have experienced decreasing

new international student enrollment. Notably, Master's colleges and universities have experienced an average 5.0% decrease from 2017 to 2018. The Open Doors reports follow the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education which defines doctoral universities as those institutions that awarded at least 20 doctoral degrees and those institutions with fewer than 20 research doctoral degrees that awarded at least 30 professional practice doctoral degrees in at least 2 programs. Master's colleges and universities refer to those institutions that awarded at least 50 Master's degrees and fewer than 20 doctoral degrees excluding special focus institutions and tribal colleges. This study focuses on Master's college and universities, which will be referred as universities hereafter.

Because of the dramatic decrease in the past three years, universities have to find the most effective ways to enroll international students. The concept of market orientation has been widely applied to higher education institutions to pursue the most effective ways to improve international student enrollment. Nevertheless, there is limited funding for marketing to recruit international students in most higher education institutions (Himanen, Auranen, Puuska, & Nieminen, 2009; Literati, 2017; Roy & Lu, 2016). Universities must allocate their budgets wisely and maximize each resource to get the “biggest bang for their buck” (Darrup-Boychuck, 2007; Literati, 2017; Ross et al., 2013; Roy & Lu, 2016).

A wide range of studies suggest the importance of understanding student decision-making process of college choice by learning influential factors to effectively attract international students (Agrey & Lampadan, 2014; Chen, 2007; Eder et al., 2010;

Tan, 2015). Thus, universities can tailor institutional recruitment strategies and marketing investment to increase the chance of being selected by international students (Agrey & Lampadan, 2014). Many studies have revealed determinant factors that affect student choice when selecting an institution as a study abroad destination (Baharun et al., 2011, James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017, Lam et al., 2011). However, little research has targeted universities of medium or small size in the United States. In addition, few studies discovered whether university decision makers utilize those factors or how well those help universities in practice.

This study conducted a case study in two universities located in Midwestern United States. The study administered surveys and interviews to university executives who oversee international student enrollment and enrolled international students. Through conducting interviews with executives, the study examined administrator perceptions of university outreach approaches and conversion strategies. Through conducting the student survey and follow-up interviews, the study discovered influential factors of international student college choice. The study then revealed convergences and divergences between administrator perceptions and student perceptions. Finally the findings and implications will be discussed.

### **Purpose of Study**

The goals of this study are threefold: (a) to discover university administrator perceptions of the goals and effectiveness of international student enrollment strategies; (b) to explore international student perceptions of influential factors affecting their college choice; and (c) to identify how students' and administrators' perspectives

converge and diverge in relation to recruitment strategies and student college choice. The findings of this study are expected to reveal how resources were allocated by universities for international student enrollment, how factors influenced international student college choice, how university strategies compare to student choice, and how universities can tailor their recruiting strategies. It is anticipated that the findings of the study will help policy makers in universities with similar profiles to tailor appropriate recruiting strategies and maximize outputs of resources investment.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Existing Frameworks**

Researchers have tried to build models that can be used to understand the process of student study abroad decision-making. However, not all models focus on international student college choice. Among these models from the review of literature, the push-pull theory is widely adopted. Push-pull theory is believed to facilitate an understanding or to describe the decision-making process for international students (Agarwal & Winkler, 1985, p. 5).

Most studies reported in the literature recognize or use the push-pull framework to discover the determinant factors of international student college choice (Agrey & Lampadan, 2014; Bodycott, 2009; Chen, 2016; Eder et al., 2010; González et al., 2011; James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017; Lam, Ariffin, & Ahmad, 2011; Lee, 2014; Li & Bray, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Phang, 2013; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011). This framework explains that students make decisions of selecting a college by both push factors and pull factors. Push factors are those factors pushing students to leave their



home country, such as lack of higher educational recourses, lack of job opportunities after graduation, or political or social pressure, etcetera. (McMahon, 1992). Pull factors on the other hand, are those factors attracting students to the host country or institution, such as high quality of education, availability of programs, employment opportunities, immigration possibility, and cultural or language learning environments (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

The push-pull model was originally used in the theory of migration (Lee, 1966, Lee & Tan, 1984) to explain the factors that influenced the movement of people. Hence, many studies used this model for international student mobility (Altbach, 1998; Lee & Tan, 1984; McMahon, 1992) and student choice of a study abroad destination (Chen, 2007; Eder et al., 2010; Lee, 2014; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Phang, 2013; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011). Two empirical studies that used the push-pull framework were widely cited in the reviewed literature. McMahon (1992) used the push-pull framework to understand international student flows under higher education through a study of the flow of students from 18 developing countries to the United States during 1960s and 1970s. His study suggested push factors are highly related to the level of economy and educational opportunities in the home country. Pull factors, his study suggested, were economic links between the home and the host country, political and cultural environment in the home country, as well as host nation support via financial aid.

Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) also used the push-pull model in their study which was conducted with over 2000 students from four different Asian countries studying abroad in Australia. Their study proposed three distinct stages of student's decision-

making to study abroad: (a) the student makes a decision to study abroad; (b) the student selects a country; and (c) the student selects the institution. Along with the three stages, various push factors and six clusters of pull factors were identified (see Chapter Two). Push factors were set in the first stage, while pull factors were set in the last two stages.

James-MacEachern and Yun (2017) proposed three stages of the international student decision making process in selecting an institution. The first stage is the “Awareness Stage,” in which international students determine they wish to pursue education abroad. The second stage is the “Information Stage,” in which students collect information of higher education institutions to start to select one or a few. The final stage is the “Decision Stage,” whereby international students weigh factors, narrow their choices, and make a decision about the institution.

Some researchers argue that it is difficult to conceptualize students’ decision-making processes because choice is not a rational process, but rather an interactive, complex concept (Maringe, 2006; Petruzzellis & Romanazzi, 2010). A number of scholars adopted migration theories to explain student choice of study abroad. Traditional migration theories emphasize income and employment rate differences between home and host countries. For example, economic models emphasize the value of cost and benefits to students’ education (Fuller, Manski, & Wise, 1982; Kotler & Fox, 1995; Manski & Wise, 1983). New migration theories take a social choice approach and consider that migration is a collective strategy as a family or household (González, Mesanza, & Mariel, 2011; Wolf et al., 1997). The sociological models of student choice address issues related to family influences, personal motivation and ability, and other

influences (Ivy, 2010). The information processing models of student choice combine both economic and sociological models covering both aspects in decision making process (El Nemar & Vrontis, 2016). A few scholars employ structural models to explain student choice in the context of the institutional, economic and cultural constraints (Gambetta, 1996; Roberts, 1984; Ryrie, 1981).

### **Model Adapted from Existing Studies**

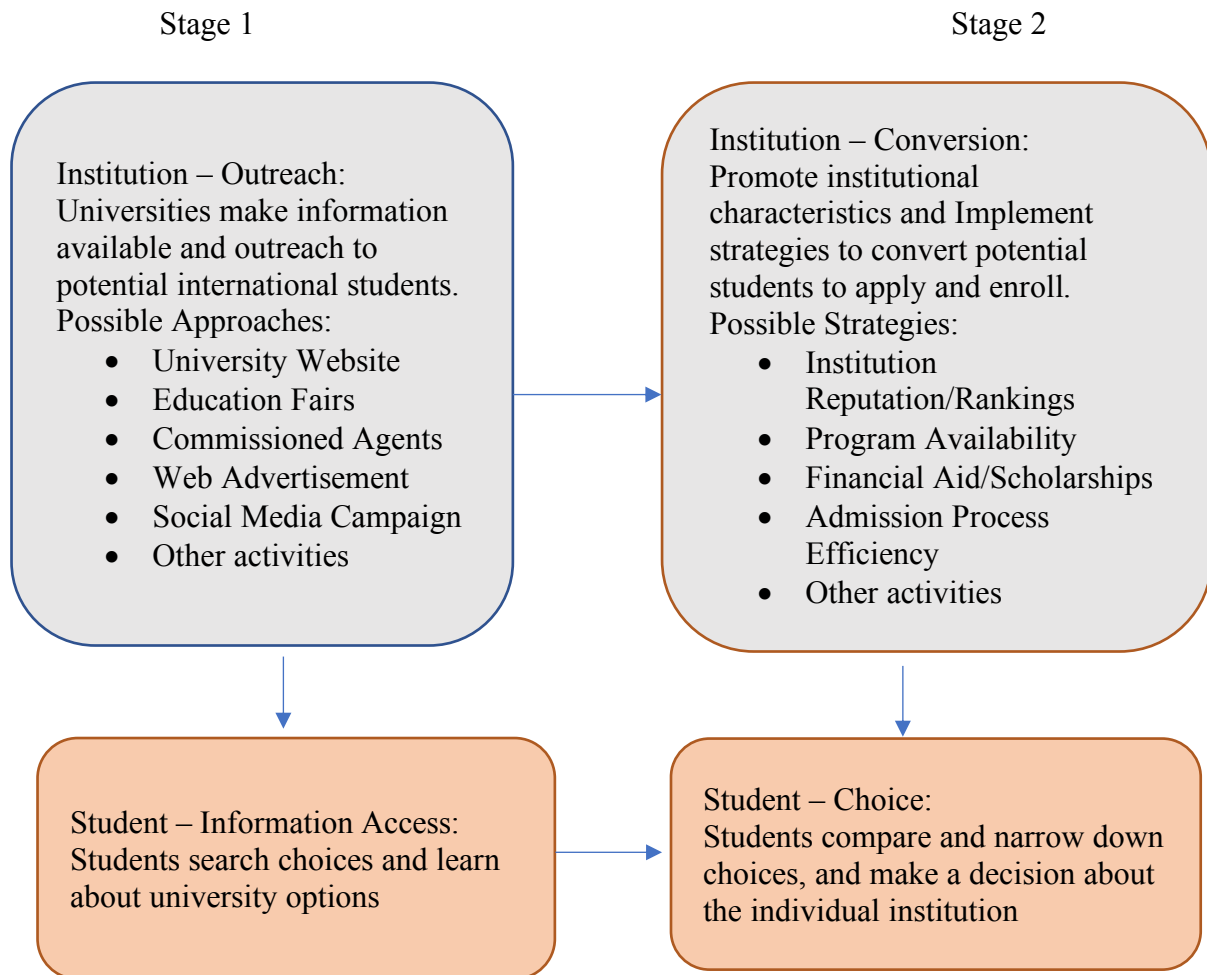
Numerous factors could affect students' choice when selecting a study abroad institution. For example, there are push factors, such as individual student family influence, personal preference, or external factors (e.g. political or economic issues); there are also pull factors that attract students from host countries and institutions such as economics, political systems, culture or language, environment, and location. Because the purpose of this study is to discover how international student choice mirrors university strategies, this study adapted a Two-Stage Model that combined components that were extracted from Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) push-pull model and James-MacEachern and Yun's (2017) three stage model.

The adapted Two-Stage Model (Figure 1.1, referred to as two stage model hereafter) guided the present study throughout, from the review of literature to the research questions, methodology design, findings, and discussions. For higher education institutions, Stage 1 is the outreach stage where institutions make related information available and outreach to potential international students. Possible approaches based on the existing studies include making the university website easy to navigate for students to obtain admission information, attending education fairs, working with commissioned

agents, conducting internet advertisement, conducting social media outreach campaigns, or other activities. Stage 2 is the conversion stage referring to the phase where institutions promote their characteristics and implement strategies to convert potential students to apply and enroll ultimately. Possible strategies based on existing studies include promoting university reputation and rankings, expanding program availability, providing financial aids/scholarships, using an effective application process, and employing effective communication between students and admission staff.

In contrast, for students, Stage 1 is the information access stage during which students search available information and learn about possible university options. Students can learn about a university through internet search, educational fairs, their previous institution partner programs, or individual reference such as family, friends, or educational agents. Stage 2 is the choice stage where students compare and narrow down options, then finally choose one institution as their study abroad destination. It is common that students apply for multiple institutions at the same time and make one of the colleges that have offered admissions as the destination for the best interest.

**Figure 1.1** Preliminary Two-Stage Model



## **Research Questions**

The overarching research goals are to understand university administrator perceptions of the goals and effectiveness of international student enrollment strategies, examine influential factors of international student college choice, and assess the degree to which administrators' and students' perceptions converge and diverge in university strategies. The study adopted the following research questions based on these goals and the Two-Stage Model:

RQ1: What are university administrator perceptions of the goals and effectiveness of their international student enrollment strategies?

RQ1a: What are university administrator perceptions of outreach approaches?

RQ1b: What are university administrator perceptions of conversion strategies?

RQ2: What factors influence college choice among international students?

RQ2a: How did students learn about the university?

RQ2b: What factors do students perceive as the most influential in their final college choice?

RQ2b-1: Do influential factors differ by gender?

RQ2b-2: Do influential factors differ by category of applicant (e.g., graduate student, undergraduate student, or language student)?

RQ2b-3: Do influential factors differ by country of origin?

RQ3: How do perspectives on recruitment strategies and student college choice compare between students and to administrators?

RQ3a: How do students' and administrators' perspectives converge and diverge in Stage 1: outreach approaches and information access?

RQ3b: How do students' and administrators' perspectives converge and diverge in Stage 2: conversion strategies and making final choice?

### **Significance of the Study**

The findings are expected to help peer university policy makers to recognize and utilize university market value, adjust resource allocation for international student enrollment, and maximize the outputs. The findings from comparison analysis are also expected to help university leadership to understand how influential factors differ by different population groups. With improved understanding, universities can tailor their strategies to increase as well as diversify the international student population.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A number of existing studies were related to student choice on selecting a study abroad destination, which is a complex decision-making process influenced by multiple push and pull factors (Eder et al., 2010; James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017; Lee, 2014). However, little research focused on university-related pull factors. Moreover, very little research considered the linkage between universities' resource allocations and determinant factors of student choice.

This study reviewed two domains of literature. First, outreach and conversion strategies that higher education institutions employed to understand the university efforts in international student enrollment. This domain is related to institutional behavior. Second, pull-push influential factors of student college choice with a focus on the population of enrolled international students, including both graduate students, undergraduate students, and English as a Second Language (ESL) program students. This domain is related to student's education choice behavior. Based on the purpose of the study, only factors, which are related to university characteristics or results of university strategies, were identified from the literature.

#### **Outreach and Conversion Strategies in Higher Education**

Globalization has made the world more interdependent and interconnected than ever. It brings changes in education, technology, economy, cultures, values, ideas, knowledge, and human mobility across borders (Brinson, 2012; Knight, 1997). Today, internationalization is a core issue for higher education regarding its social and curricular



relevance, institutional quality and brand, global and national competitiveness, and innovation potential (Rumbley, Altbach, & Reisberg, 2012). In the past three decades, international students have become the important (and for some institutions imperative) resources of revenue, research and teaching talents, diversity, as well as local community economic growth (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Bolsman & Miller, 2008; Galway, 2000; Ross et al., 2013; Tan, 2015). Universities have been competing for international students in this global-drive and inter-connected community (Gai, Xu, & Pelton, 2016; Hemsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2007; Maringe & Mourad, 2012). This has led to market orientation in higher education such that institutions employ customer service-based concept to make strategies for international student recruitment (Ross et al., 2013).

The competition for international students among universities in the global market has been increasing in the past two decades (Dennis, 2016; Onk & Joseph, 2017). This has led universities to find effective ways to differentiate themselves from the crowd and attract international students by using their unique strengths (Hemsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2007). However, most universities, especially public universities are under pressure because of limited marketing budgets due to decreasing public funding. This has increased the awareness and the need for effective marketing strategies used for international student enrollment in higher education (Hemsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011). Various researchers and practitioners have tried to utilize corporate marketing theories as frameworks of recruitment in higher education (Ross et al., 2013; Roy & Lu, 2016; Onk & Joseph, 2017; Ross, Heaney, & Cooper, 2007). However, the application has been found poorly

organized and coordinated, and usually lacked of strategic focus (Maringe, 2005; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011). Vrontis et al. (2007) suggested that higher education institutions adapt theories of student consumer behavior instead of simplifying the adaptation of marketing management. Although no marketing model of student enrollment in higher education has been found, both branding and marketing strategies have been identified from several studies (Gai, et al., 2016; Literati, 2017; Ross, et al., 2007; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011).

According to the American Marketing Association: “A brand is a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers.” Bennett and Ali-Choudhury (2009) argued that the university brand was a manifestation of an institution’s features that can differentiate from others through highlighting its capacity to satisfy students’ needs and facilitating potential students to attain a suitable “fit” in their college decisions. A strong brand will help a higher education institution stand out and differentiate itself from others, which is critical for universities involved in the competition of international student recruitment (Gai, et al., 2016). Studies showed that branding was especially important for new universities or those institutions whose names have not been widely recognized by international students (Bennett & Ali-Choudhury, 2009; Gai, et al., 2016). However, the dimensions of higher education branding have remained ambiguous that there is not a widely recognized agreement of the concept among researchers. Higher education branding is used to make the institution name and unique features known by potential international students. It is considered as outreach approaches in Stage 1 of the Two-Stage Model, which is also the

information access stage where an international student hears and learns about a higher education institution.

After outreaching to international students, parents, or agents, it is critical for the higher education institution to market well with conversion strategies during the Stage 2 of the Two-State Model. Researchers argue that universities have transformed from a segregated education focused only institution into market-oriented and relationship-based entities, which emphasize consumer centric approach (Bagheri & Beheshti, 2010; Dennis, 2016; Gai, et al., 2016; Hulme, Thomson, Hulme, & Doughty, 2014). Most recent studies focused on factors of migration or instrumental factors that influenced a student choice when selecting an overseas institution (Chen, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Tan, 2015; Phang, 2013). Those factors identified from the literature provided guidance for institutional decision makers to establish marketing strategies used for international student enrollment.

A few studies have focused on the popular recruitment strategies that higher education institutions are currently employing. According to Ozturgut (2013), universities in the United States mostly employed five marketing strategies for international student enrollment. They were: (a) attending educational fairs both on site or virtually; (b) providing academic support and use of campus resources (e.g. providing scholarships, tutoring); (c) utilizing international alumni; (d) using online web-based advertising or brochures, and (e) using staff recruiters. Roy and Lu (2016) found that the most popular recruitment initiatives employed by universities were in-person recruitment trips, education fairs, and social media marketing.

## **Push and Pull Factors Influencing Student College Choice**

This study has reviewed the literature which include university related pull factors that made an impact on student college choice. A number of studies conducted research on determinant factors affecting student college choice, however only a few of them covered research on pull factors focusing on students' choice of study abroad institutions. Very little research paid attention to small or medium size public universities such as the universities present in this study.

The review of literature identified pull factors which differ from one study to another possibly because the existing studies were conducted with different types of institutions, different student groups, or students from various countries of origin. The results indicate the complex nature of choosing an overseas institution that no decisions were made in isolation (Agrey & Lampadan, 2014; Li & Bray, 2007; Phang, 2013). For example, studies defined group factors and influential factors or independent variables in different ways; influential factors and important factors affecting international student college choice also varies from different decades. Common factors across studies have been identified in two sets based on two-time ranges: from studies published between 2010-2019 and studies published between 1997-2009. The following common influential factors were identified from all studies: institution image or reputation, cost issues, program availability, learning environment, university location, social links, scholarships, campus safety and crime, and influence from family, friends or other individual.

### **Common Factors Identified from the Literature (1997-2009)**

Table 2.1 lists 30 influential factors extracted from the review of literature published between 1997 and 2009. Thirteen out of the thirty factors were found to be statistically significant predictors of students' college choice (and are marked with asterisk in the table). These factors include English learning environment, on-campus housing, university ranking, effective communication with the institution, financial aid opportunities, academic reputation, quality of education, cost of education, program availability, social links (students have connections in the university before arrive), alumni base, number of current international students, and high-quality staff.

Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) conducted a study with 2485 students from Taiwan, India, China, and Indonesia respectively studying at Australian universities. They identified six important factors influencing students' choice of their host institutions. They were: (a) an institutions' reputation for quality, (b) links to other institution familiar to the student, (c) high-quality staff, (d) alumni base, (e) number of current enrolled international students, and (f) whether the institution was willing to recognize students' qualifications.

Chen's (2007) study focused on international students' choice of Canadian graduate schools. The study identified four key group factors related to university, which were academic pulling factors (e.g. reputation, quality of education, ranking, research, etcetera.); administrative pulling factors (e.g. financial aid, tuition, admissions, marketing, and information, etcetera.); environment and location (e.g. university location, racial

**Table 2.1***Common Influential Factors Identified from the Literature (1997-2009)*

<u>Name of Factors</u>	<u>Literature Source</u>
English learning environment* On-campus housing* Academic Support services Facilities	Bodycott, 2009
University ranking* Effective communication with the institution* Financial Aid* Degree values in my home country Location/physical geography Climate Safety and Crime Employment prospects Campus diversity Racial discrimination	Chen, 2007
Academic reputation* Quality of education* Institution image	Chen, 2007 María Cubillo, Sánchez, & Cerviño, 2006 Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002
Cost of education* Living cost, travel cost and social cost Other Personal recommendations	Chen, 2007 Mazarrol, Kemp, & Savery, 1997 Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002
Program availability* Effect of the city image	Chen, 2007 María Cubillo, et al., 2006
Social Links* Geographic proximity	Mazarrol, et al., 1997 Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002
Alumni base* Number of current international students* High-quality Staff* Size	Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002

*Note:* \* refers to most important pull factors identified from the studies.

discrimination environment, prospect employment, etcetera.); and significant other (individual influence). The findings showed that academic and administrative pull factors had the strongest influence on international students' choice of institutions.

Bodycott (2009) surveyed 251 mainland Chinese parents and 100 students who were considering to study abroad. This study did not have group factors, but tested 24 influential specific factors. The findings suggested that on-campus accommodations were the statistically significant pull factor, followed by program availability, English learning environment, academic support services, and facilities.

### **Common Factors Identified from the Literature (2010-2019)**

Table 2.2 lists 41 influential factors extracted from the review of literature published between 2010 and 2019. Fifteen out of the 41 factors which are marked with asterisk in the table were examined as statistically significant by the studies. Those significant factors are: cost of education, financial aid or scholarships, quality of education, academic reputation, institution image, program availability, location, learning environment, social links, employment prospects, student services and caring, ease of access and informative university website, effective communication with the institution, research facilities, and campus diversity.

**Table 2.2***Common Influential Factors Identified from the Literature (2010-2019)*

<u>Name of Factors</u>	<u>Literature Source</u>
Cost of education*	Agrey & Lampadan, 2014
Living cost, travel cost and social cost	Baharun et al., 2011 Eder et al., 2010
Financial Aid/Scholarships*	James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017 Lam et al., 2011 Lee, 2014 Phang, 2013 Tan, 2015
Quality of education*	Agrey & Lampadan, 2014
Academic reputation*	Baharun, Awang, & Padlee, 2011
Institution image *	Eder et al., 2010 James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017 Lam et al., 2011 Lee, 2014 Phang, 2013;
Program availability*	Agrey & Lampadan, 2014 Baharun et al., 2011 Eder et al., 2010 James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017 Lam et al., 2011 Phang, 2013 Tan, 2015
Location/physical geography*	Agrey & Lampadan, 2014 Baharun et al., 2011 Eder et al., 2010 James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017 Lam et al., 2011 Phang, 2013
Learning environment*	Agrey & Lampadan, 2014 Baharun et al., 2011 Eder et al., 2010 Lam et al., 2011 Lee, 2014
Influence of peers	Agrey & Lampadan, 2014
Influence of family/relatives	Baharun et al., 2011 Eder et al., 2010 Lee, 2014 Tan, 2015

*Note:* \* refers to most important pull factors identified from the studies.



**Table 2.2**

*Common Influential Factors Identified from the Literature (2010-2019)-  
Continued*

<u>Name of Factors</u>	<u>Literature Source</u>
Facilities	Agrey & Lampadan, 2014 Baharun et al., 2011 James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017 Lam et al., 2011 Lee, 2014
Social Links*	Eder et al., 2010 Lee, 2014 Phang, 2013 Tan, 2015
Language learning	Eder et al., 2010 González, et al., 2011 James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017 Lee, 2014
Safety and Crime	James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017 Lam et al., 2011 Lee, 2014 Phang, 2013
Influence of agency Other personal influence	James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017 Lam et al., 2011 Lee, 2014 Tan, 2015
Employment prospects*	Agrey & Lampadan, 2014 James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017 Lam et al., 2011
Student services and caring* International student activities	Agrey & Lampadan, 2014 Baharun et al., 2011 Tan, 2015
Mass media	Agrey & Lampadan, 2014 Baharun et al., 2011 James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017
Climate	Eder et al., 2010 González, et al., 2011 Lee, 2014
Ease of access/ Informative university website*	James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017 Lee, 2014 Phang, 2013

*Note:* \* refers to most important pull factors identified from the studies.

**Table 2.2**

*Common Influential Factors Identified from the Literature (2010-2019)-  
Continued*

<u>Name of Factors</u>	<u>Literature Source</u>
Easier application process	James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017 Lam et al., 2011 Tan, 2015
Geographic proximity	Eder et al., 2010 Lam et al., 2011
Alumni influence	James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017
University ranking	Phang, 2013
Number of current international students	
Effective communication with the institution*	
Research facilities*	
Recruitment materials	James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017 Tan, 2015
Campus diversity*	Lam et al., 2011 Tan, 2015
Western culture	Eder et al., 2010
Housing	
Transportation	
Degree values in my home country	James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017
Potential employment in my home country	
Effect of the city image	María Cubillo, et al., 2006
High-quality Staff	Phang, 2013
Current international students' qualifications	
Partner school student program	Tan, 2015

*Note:* \* refers to most important pull factors identified from the studies.

Phang (2013) conducted research of eight international graduate students and eight university staff in Sweden. The findings of the study indicated three group factors with a number of influential factors affecting students' choice of a study abroad destination: quality of communication, attractiveness of the university location, and social network. The quality of communication factor covers various communication channels, such as online communication through multiple platforms as well as offline channels referring to educational fairs or exhibitions on site. The research grouped a number of influential factors into the location factor: institutional image, a desired program, language, international environment and even costs. Social network includes influences from family, friends, and university faculty. Those influential factors are identified from the interviews. However, the relationships between influential factors and their group factor in the study do not quite match. Phang (2013) did not explain the rationale of how the author grouped those influential factors.

Agrey and Lampadan (2014) interviewed 261 students from central Thailand about the factors influencing students' university choice including international institutions. Based on the findings of this study, five group factors were identified: support systems (Factor 1), including both physical (e.g. bookstore, guidance or counseling office) and non-physical factors (scholarships, credit transferability, spiritual programming); learning environment and job prospects (Factor 2), such as modern learning environment and facilities, reputation, beautiful campus, library and computer labs, and high rate of graduates being employed; sporting facilities (Factor 3); student life and activities (Factor 4), such as health care services, residential accommodation, and

wide range of extracurricular activities; and finally safe and friendly Environment (Factor 5), such as safe campus as well as supporting faculty. The findings showed that learning environment and job prospects were the strongest factors, followed by student life and activities, support systems, safe and friendly environment, and sporting facilities.

Although Agrey and Lampadan's (2014) findings are valuable for the research in this fields, although the relations between group factors and between each group factor and its variables are confusing. For example, the variable spiritual programming under Factor 1 overlaps with a wide range of extracurricular activities under Factor 4. Learning environment and job prospects (Factor 2) could be split into two factors respectively as they are two independent aspects of student life both having major impact on students' choice.

James-MacEachern and Yun (2017) conducted research on 313 undergraduate international students at a small-sized Canadian college examining the deterrent factors of affecting students' choice of a study abroad institution. James-MacEachern and Yun (2017) employed three main constructs of pull factors: sources of information; pull and structural motivation; and reference group influence. The sources of information domain examined how students learned about the institution with variables such as websites, social media platforms, mass media, educational fairs, and family, friends, or alumni. Pull and structural motivation examined university-related factors that helped students' decision making. This domain included seven factors:

- Factor 1-reputation and academic programs (e.g. the university's reputation, the university's ranking, program availability);

- Factor 2- expenses and grants (e.g., tuition, costs, and financial aids);
- Factor 3- opportunities after the study (e.g., opportunity to stay in Canada after completion of study, potential employment in a foreign country);
- Factor 4- ease of process (e.g., easy process to apply, admission requirements);
- Factor 5- environmental cues and educational facilities (e.g., English-speaking environment, clean and safe environment, educational facilities.);
- Factor 6- values in home country (e.g., potential employment in my home country, degree valued in my home country);
- Factor 7- physical environment and recreational facilities (e.g., location, size, and recreational facilities of the university).

Reference group influence domain consisted of three factors, which were:

- Factor 1-people (e.g., teachers or school officials in home country, professors, alumni or current student in host country);
- Factor 2-the institution (e.g., positive interaction with university personnel, Information supplied by the university);
- Factor 3- family and recruitment agency.

James-MacEachern and Yun (2017) found that the university's website was the most used information source for international students; direct communication from the institution and environmental cues and educational facilities were the most important pull motivational factors influencing students' choice.

The structure of three relationships among the domains, factors and influential factors was valuable for the present study, although some influential factors of the

reference group factor could be university-related pull factors too, such as agent or alumni recommendations.

Lee (2014) conducted a case study by examining determinant factors of study abroad destination. The study interviewed 72 international students who chose Taiwan as the study abroad destination. Among six determinants of the decision-making process of studying abroad, four of them were university-related pull factors, which were: (a) physical and learning environment, including comfortable climate, exciting place to live, and friendly and supportive learning environment; (b) cost issues, including tuition and fees, cost of living, opportunity of working during study, time length to obtain a degree safe environment and low crime rate, and racial discrimination; (c) social links and geographic proximity, including friends, relatives study or live in the host country, and home-host country distance; and (d) institution image, including reputation of education quality, reputation of staff, links to other institutions known to students, a strong alumni, program availability, large campus, and excellent facilities. The factor categorizing in Lee's (2014) study were not convincing because some factors under one category were not even related. For example, safe environment and low crime rate was under cost issue category. However, the individual influential factors provide value to the present study. The findings from Lee's (2014) study indicated that a friendly and supportive learning environment was the most important factor affecting student college choice, followed by quality of education, cost of studying, and finally recommendations from others as least important factor.

Other studies did not examine influential factors by groups, but examined each individual factor. For example, Lam, Ariffin, and Ahmad (2011) examined international students' choice of study abroad institution with 24 influential factors which have been included in Table 2.2. Findings of Lam, Ariffin, and Ahmad (2011) suggested that institution image and job prospect were the most significant pull factors targeting 130 international students who have chosen a university in Malaysia. Tan (2015) discovered that strong student support services, diverse environment, easy application process, and program availability were the top four most important pull factors influencing international students' college choice. Eder et al. (2010) found that program availability and quality of education were the most important pull factors through a qualitative study conducted with 21 international students from a midsize southern university in the United States.

## **Review of the Literature Summary**

### **University Strategies**

The first part of literature review identified the most popular recruitment strategies for international student enrollment in higher education settings in outreach and conversion stages respectively. Several studies revealed the most effective recruiting strategies included factors such as attending on-site or virtual educational fairs, providing academic support and campus resources (e.g. providing scholarships, tutoring), recruiting through international alumni; online web-based advertising or brochures, in-house staff recruiters, and social media marketing, etcetera. The findings of those strategies

combined with the researcher's professional experience provided guidance for the study to design interview questions for executives.

However, there is no clear boundary between outreach approaches and conversion strategies discovered through the literature. Most studies mixed outreach approaches (branding) with conversation strategies (marketing). Further, no unified strategies have been identified that can work for all higher education institutions due to the distinctive characteristics of each institution, such as available budget, location, program availability, tuition rate, city image, and living cost, so on and so forth. In addition, no evidence has been found about how or even whether university policy makers use the research findings. It is unknown what guided higher education policy makers to establish or modify enrollment strategies. To fill these gaps, this study will conduct interviews with university executives who oversee international enrollment to discover how universities outreached to international students and how they convert potential students to apply and enroll ultimately based on the Two-Stage Model.

### **Student College Choice**

The second part of the literature review identified influential factors for international student college choice. Over 40 common influential factors (See Table 2.1 and Table 2.2) were identified from existing literature. Twenty two of them were examined as statistically significant factors. Among the most common were cost of education, financial aid or scholarships, quality of education, academic reputation, institution image, program availability, and location. However, no consensus emerged regarding the categorization of individual influential factors.



Therefore, this study categorized multiple influential factors that are related into one category (refer to as an influential category, hereafter). If an influential factor does not relate to another factor, it was set as an influential category as well as an influential factor. As a result, 12 influential categories were developed based on the literature review and the researcher's professional experience. Table 2.3 lists 12 influential categories with according influential factors. For examples, university ranking, academic reputation, institution image, quality of education, learning environment, research facilities were categorized within the reputation and academic profile influential category; language learning was categorized under program availability influential category; scholarships and cost of education were categorized as cost category; factors of individual influences were categorized within reference group influential category, etcetera.

The existing studies were conducted in various regions as well as different types of higher educational institutions. Therefore, the significant influential factors vary from one study to another under various contexts. Moreover, no study so far has been identified to discover university-related pull factors that have affected international students' college choice in medium-sized universities specifically. To fill the gap, this study will conduct a student survey to discover how international students heard about their current universities and discover what factors have affected international student college choice based on the Two-Stage Model.

**Table 2.3***Adapted Category and Influential Factors*

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<u>Influential Category</u>	<u>Influential Factors/Variables</u>
Reputation and Academic Profile	University ranking; Academic reputation; Institution image; Quality of education; Learning environment; Research facilities; Size
Physical Geography	Location/physical geography; Geographic proximity; Effect of the city image
Program Availability	Program availability; Language learning
Cost	Financial Aid; Scholarships; Cost of education; Tuition/living cost; Travel cost and social cost;
Administrative Effectiveness	High-quality Staff; Easier application process; Direct communication from the institution;
International Student Support	Student services and caring; International student activities; US culture; Housing; Transportation
Campus Climate	Campus Safety and Crime rate; Campus diversity; Racial discrimination; Campus Facilities

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**Table 2.3**

*Adapted Category and Influential Factors -Continued*

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<u>Category</u>	<u>Influential Factors/Variables</u>
Reference group	Parental Preference; Influence of family or relatives; Influence of peers; Personal recommendations; Alumni Base/influence; Influence of agency;
Information access	Ease of access; Mass media; Recruitment materials; Informative university website
Employment Prospects	High rates of graduate being employed; Immigration prospects after graduation
Social Links	Having friends at the university; Having students from home country at the university
Institutional Partnerships	Partner school student program

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## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

The research goals of the study are three-fold: (a) to discover university administrator perceptions of university strategies regarding international student enrollment; (b) to gain a better understanding of factors influencing international student college choice; and (c) to explore how factors converge or diverge in relation to institution recruitment strategies. A mixed-methods design was chosen to allow the researcher to address the research goals more fully. This section discusses the research design, case selection, sampling, measures, data collection, and methods of data analysis. As previously noted, the primary research questions (RQ) were:

RQ1: What are university administrator perceptions of the goals and effectiveness of their international student enrollment strategies?

RQ1a: What are university administrator perceptions of outreach approaches?

RQ1b: What are university administrator perceptions of conversion strategies?

RQ2: What factors influence college choice among international students?

RQ2a: How did students learn about the university?

RQ2b: What factors do student perceive as the most influential in their final college choice?

RQ2b-1: Do influential factors differ by gender?

RQ2b-2: Do influential factors differ by category of applicant (e.g., graduate student, undergraduate student, or language student)?

RQ2b-3: Do influential factors differ by country of origin?

RQ3: How do perspectives on recruitment strategies and student college choice compare between students and to administrators?

RQ3a: How do students' and administrators' perspectives converge and diverge in Stage 1: outreach approaches and information access?

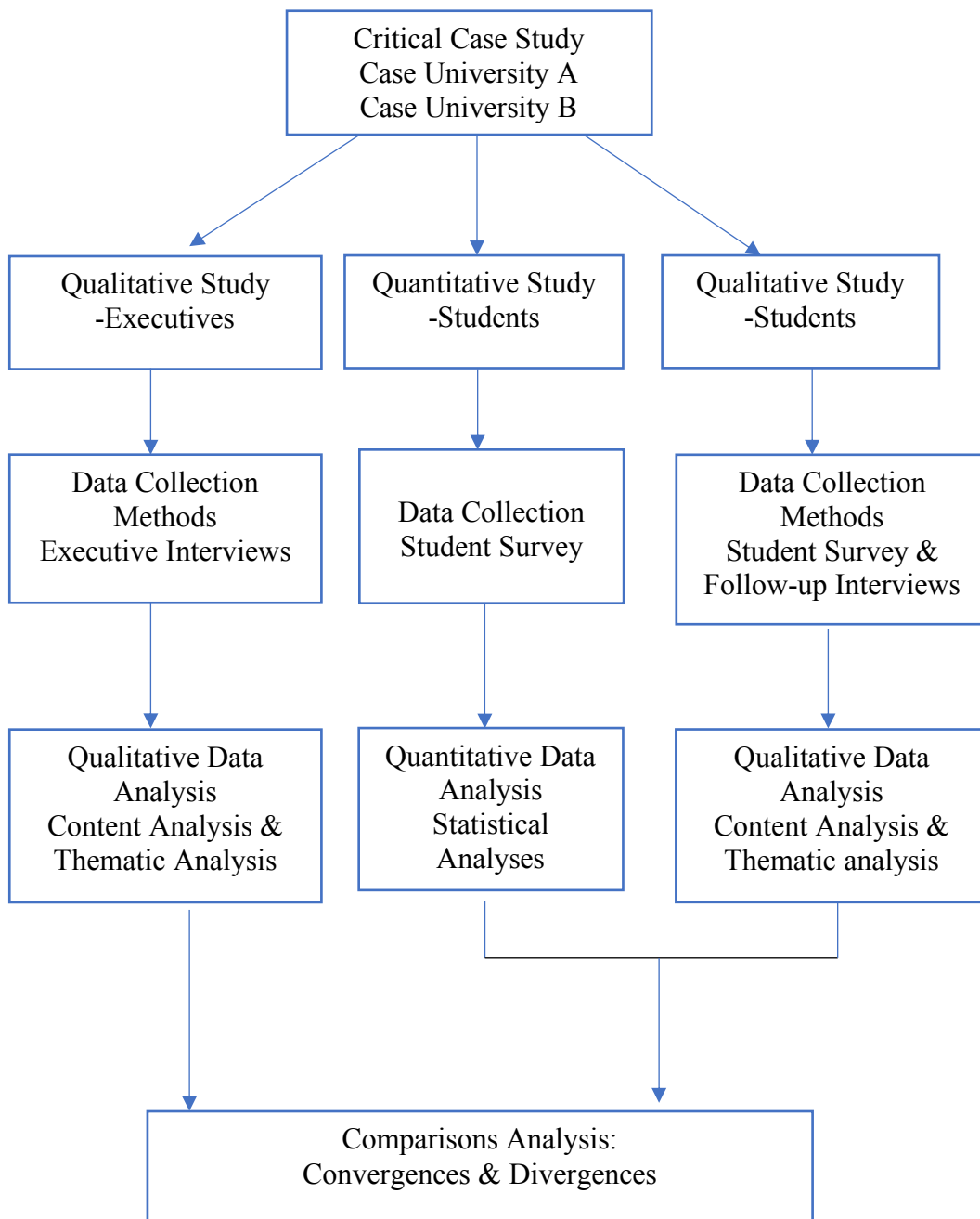
RQ3b: How do students' and administrators' perspectives converge and diverge in Stage 2: conversion strategies and making final choice?

### **Research Design**

This research adopted elements of a critical case study with data collected via surveys and interviews from two types of participants: (a) international enrollment executives and (b) international students. Case study organizes the data through specific cases for in-depth study and comparison (Patton, 2014, p.534). The study employed mixed methods integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Figure 3.1 illustrates the mixed methods design of this study.

The research was conducted to two cases: University A and University B. The study employed a mixed methods design, which included: (a) a qualitative study conducted through semi-structured interviews with executives; (b) a quantitative study conducted through survey of students; (c) a qualitative study conducted through student survey and student follow-up interviews. Qualitative data analyses were performed through content analysis and thematic analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed by

**Figure 3.1:** Mixed Methods Design



statistical analyses, including basic descriptive analysis, Friedman Tests, T-tests, and One-way ANOVA analysis of variance (ANOVA). Finally, the study used pattern analysis to analyze the convergences and divergences between executive perceptions and student perceptions.

### **Case Selection and Setting**

The study selected two universities coded as University A and University B. The selection was based on the consideration of common traits shared by the two institutions, such as:

- definition as Master Colleges and Universities by Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education;
- geographic location: Midwestern United States; in cities that are small college towns;
- size: with a total student body between 11,000 to 13,000 and international student body between 300-500.

Another consideration was convenience. The author selected the two institutions from her professional network. With help from familiar colleagues at both international offices, it was believed that the chance of getting sufficient student responses would be higher.

No physical setting was required for conducting interviews and the student survey. The executive interviews were conducted through an online conference tool; the student survey was also designed and conducted online; finally, the student follow-up interviews were conducted through phone calls and online questionnaires.

## Participants

The study employed a purposeful sampling strategy, referred to as matched comparisons. According to Patton (2014), matched comparison purposeful sampling usually begins with quantitative data and categorical measurements as the basic resources for matching; then it moves to in-depth case studies to understand the similarities and differences behind the numbers (Patton, 2014, p. 280). Participants in the study include two groups: (a) two executives as key informants, and (b) international students currently enrolled at each university.

The two executive key informants were selected because they oversee international student enrollment at their respective universities and have the most knowledge of related university strategies. The executive from University A was coded as Executive A; the executive from University B was coded as Executive B in the study. The study conducted semi-structured interviews with the two key informants. Executive A has been working in the field of international student enrollment for about 13 years and working in the current position for 4 years. Executive B has been working in the field as well as in the current position for about six years.

The study invited a total of 690 enrolled international students at both universities to participate in the student survey, with a composition of 420 students from University A and 270 students from University B. As a result, 147 students ( $n=690$ , 21.3%) participated the student survey and 131 of participants ( $n=147$ , 89.1%) completed the survey. The participation rate was beyond the initial expectation as the number of projected student participants was estimated between 69 (10%) and 103 (15%) of the



total invited population. According to the National Survey of Student Engagement (2017), the institutional response rates of student surveys in 2016 ranged from five percent to 77 percent with an average 29 percent. For an individual dissertation research, it was anticipated that the response rate would fall under the lower range from 10% to 15%.

After the student survey was conducted, 15 students from University A and 13 students from University B were invited to participate in follow-up interviews. The following criteria were applied to the selection of students for in-depth interviews: (a) students must have completed the student survey; (b) students must have checked “Yes” to the last question of the student survey: “Would you like to be invited to a follow-up phone interview?” and (c) students lived in diverse countries of origin (with a minimum of five countries represented in the study). As a result, the follow-up interviews were conducted with 14 students from University A representing 11 countries and 10 students from University B representing eight countries.

### **Qualitative Study – Executives**

The first study involved semi-structured interviews with key informants (executives) who oversee international enrollment at each university. This section describes the details of this qualitative study, including data collected methods and procedures and analytic approaches.

#### **Data Collection Methods: Executive Interview**

To address Research Question One, semi-structured interviews were conducted with executives from each university. This method was chosen to obtain in-depth

contextual information on perceptions of international enrollment goals and strategies at each university, allocation and prioritization of resources, and implementation of existing strategies. Specifically, the interview questions collected the following information: (a) demographic information, (b) perceptions of outreach approaches and (c) perceptions of conversion strategies. Each is described in detail below. Appendix A contains the full interview guide.

**Demographic Information.** The executive interviews collected demographic information from the executives to provide contextual data and gain understanding beyond numbers for the two cases. Their work title, years of professional experience, and years in current position were collected.

**Executive Perceptions of Outreach Approaches.** According to the Two-Stage Model Stage 1 (outreach), universities usually outreach to potential international students with branding information, which allows potential students to learn the characteristics of different universities before narrowing their choices. This phase does not play a determinant role in students' choice when selecting a university, however, it is an imperative first step for student to learn about a university before they apply (Agrey & Lampadan, 2014; Baharun et al., 2011; James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017; Lee, 2014; Phang, 2013; Tan, 2015).

To learn executive perceptions of university outreach approaches, the investigator asked administrators to talk about each of the ten approaches employed and rate its priority and effectiveness (see Table 3.1 for a listing of the ten approaches and definitions). Administrators were asked to rate each approach from 1 (*not a priority* or

*not available*) to 7 (*essential priority*). These approaches corresponded with student ways of information access approaches and developed from the review of literature combined with the author’s professional experience. Executives were also asked to rank the top five most prioritized approaches to validate the ratings in case multiple approaches were rated

**Table 3.1**

*University Outreach Approaches*

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<u>Outreach Approach</u>	<u>Definition</u>
Informative university website	Universities establish website providing sufficient information for prospective students to learn about university characteristics and admission requirements
Online Search Engine Advertisement (i.e. Google AdWords)	Search engine advertisement such as Google AdWords can help show university banner or links in the search results
Facebook Campaign	One of the social media advertisements focused on posts
YouTube Campaign	One of the social media advertisements focused on videos
Attending virtual international student recruitment fairs	Recruiting fairs held through online software
Traveling to international student recruitment fairs on site	In-person attendance to on-site recruiting fairs overseas
Working with commissioned agencies	Universities recruit students through student recruitment agencies and pay commission in return
Investing on third-party online platform	Universities pay third party web-based platforms to recruit students
Partner university program	Universities recruit students through partner school programs
Other	Other outreach approaches that are not listed above

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with highest scores. Data collected from this aspect were coded as descriptive information relevant to RQ1a.

**Executive Perceptions of Conversion Strategies.** According to the Two-Stage Model Stage 2 (conversion), universities made efforts as pull factors to affect international students' decision making when selecting their colleges. Pull factors here refer to the factors that significantly affected students to choose their current university as a study abroad destination (Agrey & Lampadan, 2014). The interviews collected administrator perceptions about what conversion strategies have been prioritized by the university in the past four years and how effective each strategy was.

The study developed thirteen strategic categories based on the influential categories of student choice in order to conduct comparison analysis between executive and student perceptions (RQ3). In line with the same categorizing rationale as the of the influential categories, if a conversation strategy does not fall under any strategic categories, it was coded as a strategic category with a single strategy included. For example, international partnerships was set as a strategic category with only one conversion strategy included: partner university programs. Table 3.2 shows thirteen strategic categories with definitions. To increase validity, executives were asked to score each strategy on a 7-point scale for priority and effectiveness respectively from 1 (*not a priority or not available*) to 7 (*essential priority*), and also rank the five most prioritized strategies in case multiple strategies were rated with highest scores. Data collected from this aspect were coded as descriptive information relevant to RQ1b.

**Table 3.2***University Conversion Strategies*


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<u>Strategic Category</u>	<u>Definition</u>
Reputation and Academic Profile	Overall university ranking, reputation, or image.
Cost	Expenses students spend on tuition, living expenses and other fees
Program Availability	Variety of programs students can choose.
Reference Group	Individual's influence on international students' choice
Social Links	Connections between prospective international students and current enrolled international students coming from the same country or cultural background
Administrative Effectiveness:	
i. Technology Support;	Application software, University website, or other technology infrastructure support
ii. Staff Qualifications;	Admission staffing support, including staff number, professional development opportunity, etcetera.
iii. Processing Efficiency	Inquiry responding time, Admission processing time, etcetera.
Campus Climate	Campus environment for international students including both hard and soft environment
Employment Prospects	Employment opportunities on and off campus for international students
International Student Support	Support system for international students at each university
Institutional Partnerships	Students select colleges through partner university programs
Other	Any other factors that have not been addressed in the Survey

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**Institutional Goal, Strengths, and Challenges.** The last part of the executive interviews was to collect information about: (a) if there is an institutional goal that has been set for international student enrollment and whether each university has achieved its goal; and (b) how executives perceive the university strengths and challenges to attract international students. The questions were designed as opened-ended questions.

### **Methodological Considerations**

The executive interviews were conducted through the Cisco WebEx online meeting tool after approval was received from Clemson University's Institutional Review Board (See Appendix D: Consent Form to Executives). Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes. The investigator recorded the interview videos for purposes of subsequent transcription. The interview videos were stored in a secured folder on a private computer. Follow-up communications with executives occurred for data clarification and verification purposes. Final transcripts of the interviews were sent to executives to confirm the accuracy. After each executive confirmed the accuracy, interview videos were deleted to protect interviewees' identities.

One executive from each institution also provided international student enrollment data in the past four years. The enrollment data included information about enrollment numbers based on spring semesters, as well as details about countries of origin, admission types, and academic level. Enrollment data will also serve as contextual information for each case.

### **Data Analysis**

The descriptive data served as contextual information in the study and were employed with attribute coding strategy. Attribute coding strategy are often used for descriptive data to facilitate a better understanding of individuals' or organizational situations (Patton, 2014). The study employed content analysis and thematic analysis for data collected from the executive interviews. Content analysis is a general term for identifying, organizing, and categorizing the content of narrative text (Grbich, 2012; Patton, 2014; Powers, Knapp, & Knapp, 2010). It is suitable for use of qualitative descriptive approaches such as descriptive phenomenology (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003). Thematic analysis assisted with data collected from semi-structured interviews to report patterns (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). This approach helped the researcher with defining, reviewing, and analyzing themes.

### **Quantitative Study – Students**

The study conducted a student survey to learn student perceptions of information access to the university and influential factors related to their college choice. This section describes the quantitative methodology of the study in details, including student survey design, variables, data collection process, and analytic approaches.

#### **Data Collection Methods: Student Survey**

A web-based student survey was designed to collect data from enrolled international students at the two universities. Survey, especially web-based survey research methods has been widely used over the past two decades, for its internet technology advances as well as its economic feature (Newcomer & Triplett, 2010). The

student survey used self-developed questionnaires to collect data. To assure the validity, questionnaires developed by the researcher were based on the review of literature.

The student survey (see Appendix B) was designed to reveal factors that influenced international student college choice. This survey consisted of four parts. Part One included demographic information from currently enrolled international students. Part Two assessed how students heard about the university. Part Three asked students to rate the importance of each factor affecting their college decision. Part Four asked students to rate the degree of satisfaction of their college choice and provide comments about their university's strengths and if there were any hesitations (correspondent to university weaknesses) before deciding to enroll in the university, finally recommendations to attract more international students. The last question of the survey (Question 17) asked whether students agreed to participate in the follow-up interviews and collected E-mail addresses from those who agree to participate.

### **Quantitative Measures**

Quantitative data of the study mostly came from the student survey relevant to RQ2. Based on the Two-Stage Model, the following quantitative data were collected: (a) How students heard about their current universities; (b) how factors differentially influenced student college choice, and (c) how students were satisfied with their college choice. The quantitative measurements in the study were adapted from the review of literature. Dependent variables and independent variables are addressed below. Definition of independent variables as well as measures are explained.



**Demographic Variables.** Demographic data from the student survey provided categorical information for comparison analyses. The student survey included six demographic questions: institution, years of college, gender, entry student type, area of study, and finance resource. For examples, “Year of college” is an ordinal variable coded as “1, 2, 3, 4, 4+;” “gender” is a dichotomous variable coded as “1” female, “2” male; “admit type” is a nominal variable coded as “1” undergraduate freshman; “2” undergraduate transfer student; “3” graduate student; and “4” ESL Student. These demographic variables are categorical and provided the base for comparison analyses of influential factors by different student groups.

**Information Access.** Question 7 on the student survey assessed information access, which accessed the most frequent ways that participants learned about their university for the first time. Possible response options included family, relatives, or friends; university alumni; agent; website advertisement; online search engine; university website; Facebook; YouTube advertisement; online/virtual educational fair; educational fair (on site); and participants’ previous school/college.

**Influential Factors of College Choice.** Influential factors were examined quantitatively by data collected from Question 10 and 11 on the student survey. Students responded to 36 possible factors (which represented 12 possible categories) by indicating the degree to which each was considered important in their decision making. Students responded using a 7-point Likert-type scale where 1 = *not important at all*, 2 = *not important*, 3 = *slightly important*, 4 = *neutral*, 5 = *moderately important*, 6 = *important*, and 7 = *very important*. The only exception to the 7-point scale was Question 10.12,

**Table 3.3***Independent Variables of Influential Factors of College Choice*

<u>Category and Definition</u>	<u>Influential Factor</u>	<u>Proposed Measures</u>
Reputation and Academic Profile: Overall university ranking, reputation, or image	a. Overall ranking b. Student qualifications c. reputation in student home country d. Research facilities e. Learning environment f. Professors' reputation	Categorical, 7 Likert Scale
Cost: Expenses students spend on tuition, living expenses and other fees	a. Tuition rate b. Application fee c. Scholarships d. On-campus employment opportunities e. Cost of living in the city	Categorical, 7 Likert Scale
Program Availability: Variety of programs students can choose	a. Choices of academic programs b. Available ESL program	Categorical, 7 Likert Scale
Reference Group: Individual's influence on international students' choice	a. from family or relatives b. from friends c. from university alumni d. Recommendation from my study abroad agent	Categorical, 7 Likert Scale
Social Links: Connections between prospective international students and current enrolled international students coming from the same country or cultural background	a. Students from home country b. Friends at the university	Categorical, 7 Likert Scale

**Table 3.3***Independent Variables of Influential Factors of College Choice-Continued*

<u>Category and Definition</u>	<u>Influential Factor</u>	<u>Proposed Measures</u>
Administrative Effectiveness: Effectiveness of international admission process	a. University website guidance b. Online application system guidance c. Admission staff guidance  d. Application process	Categorical, 7 Likert Scale
Campus Climate: Campus environment for international students including both hard and soft environment	a. Campus safety b. Campus environment c. Number of international students d. Staff attitude e. University facilities	Categorical, 7 Likert Scale
Employment Prospects: Employment opportunities on and off campus for international students	Employment opportunities after graduation	Categorical, 7 Likert Scale
International Student Support: Support system for international students at each university	a. Student support services b. Student activities	Categorical, 7 Likert Scale
Physical Geography: Location of the university	a. Location of the university b. Reputation of the city	Categorical, 7 Likert Scale
Institutional Partnerships: Students select colleges through partner university programs	Partner school program	Categorical, 7 Likert Scale
Only Choice: Students' current university was the only one offering admission	Only choice	Categorical, Dichotomous

which asked students to indicate whether the current college was the only choice for admission. This variable was coded as “yes” or “no.” Table 3.3 lists the category and definition, influential factors, and proposed measurements.

**Satisfaction with Decision Making.** Question 13 on the student survey examined the degree to which students were satisfied with their college choice, with response options ranging from “*strongly disagree*” (1) to “*strongly agree*” (7). Question 14 asked how likely students would recommend their current university to family and friends. It was examined by a categorical question with three options: “*Yes, definitely;*” “*Maybe, it depends;*” and “*Not likely.*”

### **Data Collection Process**

The student survey was created in Qualtrics Online Survey Tool. Two weeks after the Spring 2020 semester started, the officials from International Office at each university sent out the survey invitation to all currently enrolled international students through E-mail. Overall, 690 international students were invited, including 420 from University A and 270 from University B.

Sending E-mail invitations through International Office at each university likely increased response rates, as students were likely trusted university authorities and were unlikely to flag the E-mails as junk mail. To further improve the response rate, the study also established incentives. Student participants who completed the online survey and followed-up interviews received a \$25 Amazon digital gift card. The online survey was closed after four weeks. Staff members at the International Office from each university

have sent three E-mail reminders to help increase the response rate. The online survey was closed after four weeks.

## **Data Analysis**

**Data Coding and Cleaning.** The investigator exported the student survey dataset from Qualtrics as an SPSS (version 26.0) file. Data cleaning and coding were operated through SPSS software directly. Data were screened, cleaned, and transformed as needed. The study only used 100% completed responses and removed 17 incomplete responses from the dataset, resulting in 131 student participants (83 from University A and 48 from University B). All text choice fields were removed from the SPSS dataset. Variable names and labels were modified for convenience of analysis. The investigator selected the top five countries of origins from participants and regrouped them into a new variable: Countygroup.

**Approach to Analysis.** A combination of descriptive and inferential statistics was used to perform quantitative data analysis. First, frequency analysis was used to examine the distribution of students' responses to RQ2a on information access to the university (see Table 3.1). Frequency analysis was also applied to “number of universities applied” variable, “number of offers received” variable, and “only choice” variable.

To examine what student characteristics might be associated with student college choice, a series of comparison analyses were conducted for factors influencing student college choice differences. For examples, the study used Friedman Test analysis for influential category ranks; used Chi-Square to compare influential factor ratings between gender; used T-test analysis to compare student influential factor difference between

institutions and two countries of origin; and used One-way ANOVA between groups to analyze student influential factor difference among student entry types as well as countries of origin.

### **Qualitative Study - Students**

The last part of the overarching methodology is the qualitative study of student data. This section describes the qualitative methods for qualitative data collected from the student survey open-ended questions and student follow-up interviews. Data collection process and analytic approaches are described as well.

#### **Data Collection Methods**

**Textual Data from the Student Survey.** Descriptive data were collected from open-ended questions from the student survey relevant to RQ2. The qualitative data students provided helped the study to catch missing factors that have not been listed on the survey. The data served as the base for the investigator to select participants for the follow up in-depth interviews. The descriptive data improved the validity of the study related to important factors that have influenced student college choice.

Open-ended questions provided supplemental information for the study to catch any missing factors that have not been addressed in the survey. This has improved the validity of the study. Question 12 (Are there any hesitations about this university discouraged you from making your decision of selecting it?) allowed the study to learn possible weakness of each university from students' perspectives. Those factors may not have stopped the participating students to enroll at their current university, however, may

be the reasons that other students who did not enroll at the sampled universities. Data collected from open-ended questions on the student survey are descriptive.

**Student Interviews.** One-on-one follow-up interviews were designed to understand factors affecting student college choice in depth after collecting data from the student survey. Appendix C lists semi-structured interview questions for student follow-up interviews. Those questions were designed to learn details about how students heard about their college for the first time and why they ultimately decided to enroll at their current college. Through mixed methods of data analysis, the study was able to better understand student perceptions of university recruiting strategies. Data collected from in-depth interviews were coded as descriptive data. The data helped the investigator understand influential factors that affected student college choice in depth. It provided detailed information for comparisons between groups, such as gender, study entry types, or countries of origins.

### **Methodological Considerations**

Overall, 82 students agreed to participate in follow-up phone interviews and provided E-mail address for further contact. The investigator screened 82 responses based on the selection criteria for follow-up interviews and invited 28 students through E-mail. Ultimately, 24 students responded and completed follow-up interviews including 14 respondents from University A and ten respondents from University B.

It is worth mentioning that technical and language issues appeared during the follow-up interview data collection, especially in the case of University B. The initial response rate for follow-up interview invitation was under 50%. The possible reason was

that the invitation E-mails were sent from the investigator's academic E-mail address. Considering this factor, the investigator contacted international office staff members and asked their help in reaching out to those students who have not responded to investigator's original invitation E-mail. Another issue was with arranging phone conversations. One invited student from University A and eight invited students from University B responded were concerned that they would not be able to use phone communication for the interview. Therefore, the investigator provided an alternative way of communication by providing a follow-up questionnaire to those students to fill out details and return through E-mail. All nine students stated that they preferred the alternative way than phone interviews. As a result, 15 students completed the interviews by phone calls and nine students completed by typing the answers on questionnaires.

All follow-up interviews were finished within one week after the student survey was closed. Follow-up interview participants received digital gift cards three weeks after all interviews were completed.

### **Data Analysis**

The text choice fields collected from open-ended questions were created as a separate dataset from the quantitative dataset. Data collected from student follow-up interviews were also created as a separate dataset. Descriptive analysis was applied to all variables to identify missing cases and outlier data. Student interview participants were coded as a combination of letters and numbers (e.g. M-01, TY-14, etcetera.) to protect student privacy.



The study employed content analysis and thematic analysis to data collected from open-ended questions on the student survey and student follow-up interviews. Specifically, similar answers of each question were coded into one theme. Then the study used the frequency analysis to determine the most popular themes. These methods aided in helped gaining a better understanding of what students have gone through before making their final choice.

### **Comparison Analysis**

Finally, after analyzing data from both executives and students, the study conducted comparison analysis between student perceptions and executive perceptions based on Stage 1 and Stage 2 respectively of the Two-Stage Model. This step provided answers to RQ3. Because the executives provided perceptions of two-stage strategies in both priority and effectiveness layers, the comparisons of convergence and divergence from student perceptions are profound rather than simple value comparison.

Because the content of student questionnaire paralleled the content of the executive interviews, the views of students and executives could be compared in a consistent manner. Table 3.4 shows the accordance of Stage 1 approaches between students and executives. Table 3.5 shows the accordance of Stage 2 strategies and influential factors between students and executives. Thematic analysis was the primary analytical procedure involved in this step, combined with content analysis.

**Table 3.4***Accordance of Stage 1 Approaches between Students and Executives*

<u>Outreach Approach-Executive</u>	<u>Information Access Approach-Student</u>
Informative university website with detailed admission information	University Website
Online search engine (web-links, Google AdWords)	Website Advertisement; Online search engine (web-links)
Facebook Campaign	Facebook Advertisement
YouTube Campaign	YouTube Advertisement
Attend virtual international student recruitment fairs	Online/virtual Educational Fair
Travel to international student recruitment fairs on site	Educational Fair (on site)
Work with commissioned agencies	Agent
N/A	Family, relatives, or friends
N/A	University Alumni
Partner university program	Your previous school/college
Other	Other

**Table 3.5***Accordance of Stage 2 between Students and Executives*

<u>Strategic Category-Executive</u>	<u>Influential Category-Student</u>
Reputation and Academic Profile	Reputation and Academic Profile
Cost	Cost
Program Availability	Program Availability
Reference Group	Reference Group
Social Links	Social Links
Administrative Effectiveness: i. Technology Support; Administrative Effectiveness: ii. Staff Qualifications Administrative Effectiveness: iii. Processing Efficiency	Administrative Effectiveness
Campus Climate	Campus Climate
Employment Prospects	Employment Prospects
International Student Support	International Student Support
N/A	Physical Geography
Institutional Partnerships	Institutional Partnerships
N/A	Only Choice
Other	Other

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

This chapter describes data analyses and results based on the Two-Stage Model framework incorporating the three research questions. Data were collected from two executives, 131 student survey participants, and 24 follow-up interview student participants from two universities. The chapter starts with a background section providing basic facts about both universities as well as international student enrollment profiles. Next, executive perceptions, student perceptions, and convergences and divergences of perceptions between the two groups are discussed. Qualitative analysis was applied to executive interview data and a mixed methods analyses was applied to student data collected from surveys and in-depth interviews. A basic descriptive analysis was applied to comparisons of perceptions between executives and students.

#### **Background**

##### **Case University A**

University A serves over 12,000 total enrolled students including about 470 international students. It is a regional public university located in the Midwest of the United States. The university has secured a positive reputation along local counties; however, it is not much known nationally and internationally. The city where University A is located is ranked as one of the most low-cost cities nationwide, however, it does not have a good reputation for safety due to its crime rate.

The international student population was not highlighted on campus until 2016 (four years prior to this study), when a new leadership and team was put in place. In the

first three years, University A doubled the enrollment of international students, increasing the total number by 87%, from 310 in Spring 2016, to 580 in Spring 2019. However, the growth slowed down in the fourth year, when the total number of enrolled international students decreased by 12% to 510. In January 2020, the top five countries of origin for international students were Saudi Arabia (23.2%), Nepal (17%), Kuwait (8.0%), Vietnam (6.0%), and Ghana (4.2%). In the University A's Mission Statement (2020) published on the university website, the term "global perspectives" was addressed which is the only term that could relate to international students. However, international student enrollment does not appear in the strategic plan.

### **Case University B**

University B serves over 9,000 total enrolled students including approximately 270 international students. It is also a regional public university located in the Midwest of the United States. The university has secured a good ranking in the region; however, it is not much known nationally or internationally. The town where University B is located is relatively small and known for being friendly and safe.

Regarding international student enrollment, University B reached its peak with over 900 international students enrolled in 2013 when the total student enrollment was approximately 12,000. International and domestic student enrollment has been dropping in the past five years. The number of total enrolled international students has decreased by 68% from 860 in Spring 2015 to 270 in Spring 2019. In January 2020, the top five countries of origin for international students were Saudi Arabia (19.2%), China (16.7%), South Korea (15.8%), Belize (13.3), and India (11.3%). In the University B's Mission

Statement (2018) published on the university website, the term “global awareness” was addressed which was the only term that could relate to international students. Similar to University A, international student enrollment does not appear in the strategic plan.

### **Results of Research Question 1 -- Administrator Perceptions**

Research Question 1 sought to reveal executive perceptions of institutional goals, outreach approaches (Stage 1) and conversion strategies (Stage 2) for international student enrollment. This section analyzed executive interview data through a thematic approach. The results of this data analysis provided context for both university cases.

#### **International Student Enrollment Goal**

Information about institutional goals for international student enrollment was collected to answer RQ1. As a common practice, some universities set up an institutional goal for international student enrollment. According to Executive A, University A currently does not have a goal for international student enrollment. However, in the past the university had a policy related to international recruitment. Executive A stated:

For the first two years, we met those targets. Then due to an unanticipated change in scholarships, we were not able to meet the goal last year. Anyway, no enrollment goal right now. To have a goal, you have to have a strategy at the activity level. Right now, I don't know if we have a strategy.

Similarly, Executive B stated that University B used to have a goal for international enrollment, however, currently there is no goal in place. Executive B explained:

Many years ago, my university had a goal for international student enrollment, it was about 5% of the total student enrollment. But in the past four years, there was no set goal. I think the goal now is to do whatever we can to increase the number.

### **Stage 1 -- Outreach Approaches**

To answer RQ1a, executives were asked what approaches their institutions used to reach out to potential international students and how their institutions prioritized each approach. Both executives confirmed the use of nine approaches and rated each on a 7-point Likert-type scale. In addition, Executive A added two other approaches and Executive B added one more approach. Table 4.1 lists the institutional priority of each approach rated by executives.

As Table 4.1 shows, Executive A rated three approaches as *essential priorities*: informative university website, traveling to international student recruitment fairs on site, and partner university program. Executive B rated four approaches as *essential priorities*: traveling to international student recruitment fairs on site, working with commissioned agencies, partner university program, and WhatsApp campaign. To further understand the resource priorities, executives were asked to rank the top five outreach approaches in order from *most prioritized* to *least prioritized* (Table 4.2). Although ranking order varies, four common outreach approaches were identified as top priorities: university website, attending overseas educational fairs, partner university program, and commissioned agents.

**Table 4.1***Priority of Outreach Approaches*

<u>Approaches</u>	<u>University A</u>	<u>University B</u>
Informative university website with detailed admission information	Essential priority	High priority
Google AdWords Advertisement	Moderate priority	Low priority
Facebook Campaign	Low priority	High priority
YouTube Campaign	Neutral	Moderate priority
Attending virtual international student recruitment fairs	Moderate priority	Neutral
Traveling to international student recruitment fairs on site	Essential priority	Essential priority
Working with commissioned agencies	High priority	Essential priority
Investing third-party online Ad platforms	Low priority	Not a priority
Partner university program	Essential priority	Essential priority
Printing Materials	High Priority	N/A
Alumni	Somewhat priority	N/A
Other Social Media Campaign (e.g. WhatsApp)	N/A	Essential priority

Note: 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (Not a priority at all) to 7 (essential priority)



**Table 4.2**

*Top Five Prioritized Outreach Approaches*

<u>Rank</u>	<u>University A</u>	<u>University B</u>
1 <sup>st</sup>	Informative university website with detailed admission information	Working with commissioned agencies
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Traveling to international student recruitment fairs on site	Traveling to international student recruitment fairs on site
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Partner university program	Partner university program
4 <sup>th</sup>	Working with commissioned agencies	WhatsApp Campaign
5 <sup>th</sup>	Printing Materials	Informative university website with detailed admission information

**Stage 2 -- Conversion Strategies**

This section provided the data to answer RQ1b with regard to conversion of student interest to enrollment. From a preset list of twelve conversion strategic categories, the executives were asked to rank the five most important strategies in their efforts to convert student interest into enrollment. The five ranked in Table 4.3 were all rated as *essential priorities* by both executives. Notably, the two executives chose the same top five strategies though ranked them in different order. To further understand how executives perceive the utility of these strategies, semi-structured interviews were conducted.

**Table 4.3**

*Top Five Prioritized Conversion Strategies*

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<u>Rank</u>	<u>University A</u>	<u>University B</u>
1 <sup>st</sup>	Cost factor	Institutional partnerships
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Individual Influence- Commissioned agents	Cost factor
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Administrative effectiveness- processing efficiency	Individual Influence- Commissioned agents
4 <sup>th</sup>	Institutional partnerships	Administrative effectiveness- technology input
5 <sup>th</sup>	Administrative effectiveness- technology input	Administrative effectiveness- processing efficiency

---

**Strategic Category: Cost.** Executive A ranked cost as the top prioritized strategic category while Executive B ranked it second. In general, universities can reduce the total cost for students in three major ways: reduce tuition and fees, provide scholarships or assistantships, or create on-campus employment opportunities.

Executive A stated that University A tries to lower international student total cost by providing scholarships as well as creating on-campus employment opportunities. The outcomes of the two strategies were perceived as effective. Notably, the tuition reduction strategy was not perceived as a priority. Executive A explained the importance of scholarships and on-campus employment at University A:

Providing scholarships is a high priority for international student enrollment. We went from \$0 to the current GPA-based international student scholarships. The top scholarships are \$7,000. Increasing on-campus employment opportunities are

an essential priority from the President level down. He gives a million dollars to hire on-campus international students.

In contrast, Executive B perceived that reducing tuition and fees was currently the most important strategy to reduce international student costs and increase enrollment.

However, it was not a priority before this year at University B. Executive B explained:

In the past four years, this has not been a priority at all because the tuition has been increased each year. But the university has decided to reduce tuition for international students which will take place in Fall 2020 intake. So, starting this year, this strategy has been prioritized. It is a major policy change.

On the other hand, a scholarship strategy was a high priority in the past four years, though not currently because of a tuition reduction. Executive B explained:

We actually had a merit-based scholarship that considers ACT and TOEFL scores. There were a bunch of new scholarships and there was a grade. It was high priority before the tuition reduction. The assistantships were not emphasized because our graduate program tuition had gone down. Now because the undergraduate tuition will decrease dramatically in Fall 2020, most of the scholarships are going to go away. The argument is that because our tuition will be much lower, I think students will look at the overall cost but not be so concerned with scholarships. Because by the end of the day, students will want to know how much they have to pay. It is hard to say now because the tuition drop has not been implemented yet. We will know more information after next fall.

When asked how effective the scholarship strategy was in the past four years, Executive B perceived it as ineffective. The major reason was that not many international students were qualified for the top scholarships which made the total cost high. Executive B explained:

Even our scholarships were merit-based, but many of our applicants did not qualify for the highest tier. Even if they did, they usually got better offers elsewhere. The scholarships may sound very good on paper. The majority of our students didn't qualify for the top tier scholarships. The tiers they did qualify while the tuition is already high, so it did not matter they were getting the scholarships or not.

Executive B perceived the on-campus employment opportunities strategy as a low priority. Opportunities are available, however, not specifically for international students. Therefore, Executive B stated that University B does not push this as a recruiting strategy.

**Strategic Category: Individual Influence.** This strategic category includes the use of commissioned agents, university faculty and student references, and alumni references strategies. Executive A ranked the use of commissioned agents strategy as the second most prioritized conversion strategy while Executive B ranked it third. Commissioned agents refer to international student recruitment agents who usually represent multiple universities and get paid with either a percentage of student tuition or a flat commission fee from their represented universities after their referred students are successfully enrolled.

Executive A only claimed using commissioned agents as an employed strategy under this strategic category which he perceived to be moderately effective. The applicants referred by University A commissioned agents represent about 20 percent of all international applicants; while the enrolled international students referred by agents represent less than 14 percent of all enrolled international students. Executive A further explained:

Our tuition is low, and our commission is low. We are not attractive to commissioned agents. And we are even a threat to agents because they want to get high commission. They don't really care whether students can afford the high tuition. Maybe only in some special circumstances when parents can barely make it, then agents probably would introduce students to us. Otherwise, they would hide students from us because they will not make much money working with us.

At University B, about 50 percent of the total international student applicants were referred by commissioned agents in the past four years. This strategy was perceived as moderately effective by Executive B. He stated:

Even though we got a lot of students referred by commissioned agents applying, not a lot of students enrolled. The conversion rate is low. Also, even though our commission rate has been increasing over the years, however I don't believe it is competitive compared to other schools which pay a higher rate.

**Strategic category: Administrative Effectiveness (Processing Efficiency).**

Administrative effectiveness (processing efficiency) refers to such factors as the university admission team inquiry response time and admission processing time, etcetera.

Executive A ranked application processing efficiency third, and Executive B ranked it fifth in importance for converting student interest to enrollment.

Executive A stated that the university currently has one full-time staff member for international graduate admissions who is responsible for addressing admission inquiries and GPA evaluation. However, there is currently no full-time admission staff member for international undergraduate admission work, which is currently handled by a single part-time staff member. According to Executive A, the average response time for admission inquiries is one to two business days; the admission processing time is approximately one to five business days for international undergraduate admission decisions, and 4 to 8 weeks for international graduate admission decisions.

There was a major change that affected the admission effectiveness in the past few years. Before Summer 2018, the admission team was ineffective, however a reform brought positive changes. Executive A explained:

We switched the admission process from paper to digital process in August 2018. Before we did that, it was very hard to check an application status and no convenient database could be used. So, I would rate 2 (*ineffective*) before August 2018. After that point, we started the digital process and established a shared database to check application status in real-time, although it is still a manual CRM process, however it has been 5 (*moderately effective*).

University B on the other hand has two full-time international admission staff members. According to Executive B, the average response time for admission inquiries is one to three business days; the admission processing is approximately two business days

for international undergraduate admission decisions and two to four weeks for international graduate admissions. Executive B rated his admission team's work as 7 (*very effective*).

**Strategic category: Administrative Effectiveness (Technology Input).**

Administrative effectiveness (technology support) in the present study refers to the software infrastructure input used to support and improve the efficiency of the admission process, including inputs in the application software systems, university website, and other supporting platforms. Executive A perceived this strategy as the fifth most prioritized and Executive B ranked it fourth.

According to Executive A, University A is currently using a combination of application systems for different students. The university adopted a non-interactive online platform for international undergraduate applications, an interactive online system for international graduate applications, and a combination of a non-interactive online application webforms and PDF application form for undergraduate visiting students. Executive A stated that the institutional support for these systems is a moderate priority. Executive A perceived the effectiveness of the graduate application system to be effective and the undergraduate application system to be moderately effective (on account of the manual customer relationship management (CRM) process).

University B is using an interactive system for both international undergraduate and graduate applications. A PDF form is used for partner university exchange students only because of a waived application fee. Executive B claimed that the application system support is currently effective, though it was not at the beginning. He said:

When the Ellucian Recruiter was just installed, nobody on campus tried to consult with the international office. So, the whole system was built based on domestic first year freshman framework. Because international admission requirements are very different from domestic ones, we had so many problems at the beginning. It turned lots of people away from Recruiter (the application system). Now, I think they have a good support system. There is a troubleshooting team for Recruiter, if my staff has trouble, they would go to a specific tech support member for solutions. So, now it works well and it's effective.

**Institutional Partnerships Strategy.** Institutional Partnerships strategy refers to a mean of establishing student programs with international partner universities, by which universities can recruit students from partner universities directly. Executive A ranked this strategy as the fourth most prioritized, Executive B as the top strategy for converting interest into enrollment.

To attract more students from partner universities, University A provides special benefits for exchange or visiting students. University A provides full tuition waiver for some partner university exchange students and special scholarships for most partner university students from around \$3,000 for a semester or \$6,000 for a year. Executive A explained:

We also provide ESL scholarships for partner university students who need language training before entering academic studies. With partner scholarships, students will pay tuition equivalent to in-state tuition. It is worth mentioning that we also host a summer camp program for partner university students at a very low



cost. The summer camp program allows partner university students to come experience American culture for a short-term about 3 weeks. We have already had a few summer camp students return for a degree-seeking study.

Executive A perceived the strategy to be moderately effective. Although many partner universities have students who are eligible for benefits, not many students applied.

Executive B perceived that University B has been dedicating the most resources (e.g., budget for establishing or maintaining partnerships, scholarships for partner university students) on partner university programs for international student recruitment. However, the scholarships provided to partner university students will likely drop due to an adjustment of the tuition cut. Executive B explained:

In the past couple of years, we had a partner university scholarship, providing \$5,000 scholarships for international partner university students on top of another \$5,000 scholarships for international students. So, in total \$10,000 for a partner university student. Now we are going to reduce the tuition dramatically, the scholarships will reduce too. It will be around \$2,000.

About the outcomes, Executive B perceived this strategy as effective because a large portion of international students are from partner universities though the coming year would be uncertain due to the tuition and scholarship changes.

**Other Conversion Strategies.** Both executives shared their perceptions of additional strategies used to convert interest into enrollment out of the preset influential

categories. Some strategies have been more prioritized than others, a couple of influential categories have not been considered in the past four years (see Table 4.4).

***Other Prioritized Strategies.*** Executive A provided an additional conversion strategy: short-term student programs. Such programs offer students opportunities to experience academic classes on campus as well as American cultural locally for a few weeks. Usually those programs are non-credit bearing, which makes such programs more affordable and easier to operate compared to long-term programs. He said: “We have run

**Table 4.4**

*Executive Perceptions of Other Conversion Strategies*

<u>Strategic category</u>	<u>University A Priority</u>	<u>University B Priority</u>
Reputation and Academic Profile	Somewhat priority	Not a priority
Program availability		
--Academic Programs	Not a priority	Low priority
--ESL or pathway programs	High priority	Low priority
Social Links	Not a priority	Not a priority
Campus Climate	Moderate priority	High priority
Employment Prospects	High priority	Low priority
International Student Support	High priority	Low priority
Other -Summer Camp Program	High Priority	N/A

the featured short-term program for three years and have already seen students return to University A for academic studies.” Executive A rated this strategy as high priority.

Executive A noted that the high priorities of employment prospects, ESL and pathway program availability, and international student support strategies are more for

international student retention purposes than recruiting. When asked about the priority of university reputation and academic profile strategic category, Executive A stated that some efforts have been made to raise the language proficiency requirement scores and reform the English as a Second Language (ESL) program in order to better prepare students.

Other than the top five most prioritized conversion strategies, Executive B only rated campus safety strategy as a high priority. All other strategic category or strategies were perceived as low priority or not a priority. Executive B stated that University B uses campus safety as recruiting tool when meeting with parents and agents. He also explained the situation of other strategies under campus climate strategic category. To improve faculty and staff attitude towards international students, Executive B mentioned that there was a faculty and staff visiting abroad program four years ago that helped improve the multi-cultural awareness greatly. However, the program was cut by the previous President after he took the job. After that, professional staff members are not allowed to participate in study abroad programs; faculty members only. Executive B stated: “I think lots of people who need training for cross-cultural awareness are professional staff, but they were not given the opportunity.

***Non-prioritized Strategies.*** According to executive perceptions, the two universities share commonalities in least prioritized strategies. Social links strategic category was perceived as not a priority at both universities. Both executives believe that bridging current international students with applicants from their home countries should be an important recruiting tool, however nothing has been done yet. Besides social links

strategy, academic program availability strategy was not perceived as a priority at University A as well. Executive A explained: “Actually, the university has cut a couple of academic programs in the past two years due to the decreased overall enrollment.”

Executive B perceived reputation and academic profile as not a priority. Executive B said: “I really don’t think we prioritize any resources to increase our academic profile. I think it is the opposite, it is going backwards because of the extreme pressure to increase enrollment.”

### **University Strengths and Challenges**

This section provides in-depth information for RQ1 regarding the university characteristics and enrollment strategies. Executive A believed low cost is University A’s top strength to attract international students. He perceived university location is a strength too because he heard from some students that university location is convenient as it is close to big cities. Regarding challenges, Executive A believed that the most challenging thing to maintain the growth of international student numbers is communication with people across campus to realize the university marketing value of affordability. He stated:

I think that our brand is low cost institution. We are an unranked public regional university. There is a market value for a public regional university. And that market value is very price sensitive. I think what I need to do is a better job to communicate with people campus that there is a bubble. The bubble is the surrounding counties around this university. If you talk to people inside of the bubble, people have great things to say about the university and about this city. But if you talk to people outside of the bubble, people would say: “Why would I

go to that university? There is nothing good about the city and the university.” So, you really have to work to sell this place. That starts to create liabilities. Our greatest strengths are our costs and our greatest liability is our location. People have negative feelings about this city. The greatest challenge I think is that the top administration does not have a clear sense of market value of this university. The educational consumers that you deal with from all other countries have a keen sense of market value of regional public university in the United States and in the world. However, the local people who just target their hometown college do not. Executive B perceived international student support services, campus safety and the upcoming tuition reduction as strengths to attract international students. When asked about challenges he and his colleagues are facing with, he stated:

“I think the major challenge is that international section is not a priority to the university. The biggest challenge is for the leadership to consider international students as regular university students. The leadership needs to see international students from a source of revenue to an overall picture by considering diversity, quality of education. I think the university need to prioritize international students.”

### **Results of Research Question 2 -- Student Perceptions**

Research Question 2 seeks to reveal student perceptions of how they learned about their university and what factors have influenced their college choice. Overall, the study received 131 completed responses from the student survey, including 83 from University A and 48 from University B. Twenty-four student participants completed the

follow-up one-on-one interviews. This section describes the results of data analyses that combined both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The following results are described: student demographics data, results of information access approaches, results of influential factors for college choice, and results of influential factor differences by gender, entry student types, and countries of origins.

### **Student Participant Demographics**

Overall, 147 responses were recorded by Qualtrics Survey Tool, 131 of them were completed including 83 (20%) from University A and 48 (18%) from University B. Twenty-four student participants participated in follow-up interviews from in-depth interviews. Detailed student participant demographics are shown in Table 4.5.

**Gender.** Among the final poll of the 131 participants who completed the student survey, 51.9% were male and 48.1% were female. The gender distribution was almost even among participants at University A (49.4% male, 50.6% female); while slightly more males (56.3%) than females (43.7%) took part in the study at University B.

**Entry Student Type.** Overall, more than half (56.5%) of the participants entered their universities as undergraduate freshman. Approximately 12% of participants entered their universities as undergraduate transfers. Twenty-six percent (26%) of the participants entered as graduate students, and the remaining 5.3% entered as ESL students. There were marked differences in students at the two universities, however. Nearly three quarters (72.3%) of participants from University A were undergraduate freshman, in contrast to less than 30% from University B. About 7.2% of the participants from University A entered as undergraduate transfer students, in contrast to 20.8% from

University B. Fifteen percent (14.5%) of the participants from University A were entered as graduate students, in contrast to almost half (45.8%) of the participants from University B. Student participants whose entry type was ESL remain the smallest percentage (6.0% from University A, 4.1% from University B) from both universities.

**Year of College.** Overall, 21.4% of the participants were in the first of year of college; nearly 33% were in the second year of college; about 22% were in the third year of college; nearly 14% were in the fourth year of college; the remaining 10% of has been in college more than 4 years.

The largest percentage of respondents from University A were in their second year (37.3%), followed by the third year (28.9%), the first year (18.1%), the fourth year (9.6%), and finally more than 4 years (6.0%). Over a quarter of University B respondents were in the first year of college, followed by the second year (25%), the fourth year (20.8%), over four years (16.7%), and lastly the third year (10.4%) in college.

**Area of Study.** Over half of the overall participants (50.4%) were from the field of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), followed by Business and Economics (18.3%), Health Sciences (12.2%), Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (6.9%), Fine Arts (6.1%), and Education (5.3%). This order is consistent with University A participants' fields: STEM (61.4%), Business and Economics (14.5%), Health Sciences (10.8%), Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (6.0%), Fine Arts (6.0%), and Education (1.2%). The most common academic fields among University B participants was STEM (31.3%), followed by Business and Economics (25%) and Health Sciences (14.6%),

**Table 4.5***Student Participant Demographics (n=131)*

<u>Variables</u>	<u>Total</u> n=131 (%)	<u>University A</u> n=83 (63.4%)	<u>University B</u> n=48 (36.6%)
<b>Gender</b>			
Female	63 (48.1%)	42 (50.6%)	21 (43.7%)
Male	68 (51.9%)	41 (49.4%)	27 (56.3%)
<b>Entry Student Type</b>			
UG Freshman	74 (56.5%)	60 (72.3%)	14 (29.3%)
UG Transfer	16 (12.2%)	6 (7.2%)	10 (20.8%)
Graduate	34 (26.0%)	12 (14.5%)	22 (45.8%)
ESL	7 (5.3%)	5 (6.0%)	2 (4.1%)
<b>Years of College</b>			
1	28 (21.4%)	15 (18.1%)	13 (27.1%)
2	43 (32.8%)	31 (37.3%)	12 (25%)
3	29 (22.1%)	24 (28.9%)	5 (10.4%)
4	18 (13.7%)	8 (9.6%)	10 (20.8%)
4+	13 (9.9%)	5 (6.0%)	8 (16.7%)
<b>Area of Study</b>			
Business/Economics	24 (18.3%)	12 (14.5%)	12 (25%)
Liberal Arts & Social Sciences	9 (6.9%)	5 (6.0%)	4 (8.3%)
STEM	66 (50.4%)	51 (61.4%)	15 (31.3%)
Fine Arts	8 (6.1%)	5 (6.0%)	3 (6.3%)
Health Sciences	16 (12.2%)	9 (10.8%)	7 (14.6%)
Education	7 (5.3%)	1 (1.2%)	6 (12.5%)
Other	1 (0.8%)	0	1(2.1%)

Education (12.5%), Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (8.3%), Fine Arts (6.3%), and lastly other fields (2.1%).

**Countries of Origin.** A total of 35 countries of origin were reported from 130 survey participants (See Table 4.6) including 82 respondents from University A (See



Table 4.7) and 48 respondents from University B (See Table 4.8). A total of 24 student participants were interviewed after filling out the survey, including 14 interviewees from University A coming from 11 countries of origin and ten interviewees from University B coming from six countries of origin (See Table 4.9).

**Table 4.6**

*Countries of Origin Distribution-All Participants*

<u>Country of Origin</u>	<u>Total Responses</u>	<u>%</u>
Nepal	29	22.1
Saudi Arabia	14	10.7
India	13	9.9
China	8	6.1
Germany	7	5.3
Belize	5	3.8
Pakistan	5	3.8
Vietnam	5	3.8
Bahamas	4	3.1
Ghana	4	3.1
South Korea	4	3.1
Kuwait	3	2.3
Nigeria	3	2.3
Sierra Leone	3	2.3
Myanmar	2	1.5
Republic of Korea	2	1.5
Other countries*	19	14.5
Total responses	<i>n</i> =130	

*Note:* \* All countries that include cases with only one respondent

Table 4.7 shows the countries of origin distribution among 82 University A survey respondents. A total of 26 countries of origin were reported. The top five countries origins were Nepal (31.3%), Saudi Arabia (9.6%), India (8.4), China (6.0), and Vietnam

(6.0). Countries that only one respondent reported were coded as “Other countries.”

Notably, country representativeness of the survey participants diverged from the proposition of overall international student population at each university. For example, Nepalese students represent the second largest student body (17%) among overall international students at University A, but represent the largest student body (31.3%) among survey respondents; students from India were not in the top five countries of origin among overall international student population, however, represented the third largest student group among survey respondents. In contrast, students from Kuwait, and Ghana represented top five largest student body among overall international student population, but do not appear among the top five student groups among survey respondents. Only 9.6% Saudi Arabian students were among survey respondents compared to 23.2% represent overall international population. The divergence of country representativeness is inevitable due to possible factors. One possible reason is motivation. Most students from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are usually sponsored by their governments when studying abroad. Compared to self-funded students from other countries, they may not be interested in participating in surveys or activities to win a \$25 gift card.

Table 4.8 shows the countries of origin distribution among 48 University B survey respondents. A total of 17 countries of origins were reported. The top five countries origins were Germany (14.6%), India (12.5%), Saudi Arabia (12.5%), Belize (10.4%), and Pakistan (10.4%). Countries that only one respondent reported were coded as “Other countries.” Similarly, country representativeness diverged from survey respondents compared to the overall international student population at University B. For

**Table 4.7***Countries of Origin Distribution-University A Participants*

<u>Country of Origin</u>	<u>Responses</u>	<u>%</u>
Nepal	26	31
Saudi Arabia	8	10
India	7	8
China	5	6
Vietnam	5	6
Bahamas	3	4
Nigeria	3	4
Sierra Leone	3	4
South Korea	3	4
Ghana	2	2
Myanmar	2	2
Other countries*	15	18
Total responses	<i>n</i> =82	

Note: \* All countries that include cases with only one respondent

**Table 4.8***Countries of Origin Distribution-University B Participants*

<u>Country of Origin</u>	<u>Responses</u>	<u>%</u>
Germany	7	15
India	6	13
Saudi Arabia	6	13
Belize	5	10
Pakistan	5	10
China	3	6
Nepal	3	6
Ghana	2	4
Kuwait	2	4
Republic of Korea	2	4
Other countries*	7	15
Total	<i>n</i> =48	

Note: \* All countries that include cases with only one respondent

examples, students from Germany and Pakistan appeared on the top five represented countries of origin among survey respondents however, do not represent among top five countries of origin among the overall international student population at University B. In contrast, students from China and South Korea were represented in the top five countries of origins among the overall international population at the university but did not appear in the top five represented countries among survey respondents. The possible reasons of the divergence in the case of University B may be related to motivation as well as language proficiency. For example, students from China and South Korea usually are sponsored by parents with sufficient funding. At the same time, they are known to be shy to engage in student activities including surveys with a concern of English barrier compared to students from other countries.

Table 4.9 shows the distribution of countries of origins in each university case from follow-up interview student participants. University A student interviewees were composed of two students from Bahamas, two students from India, two students from Nepal, and one student each from the following countries: Brazil, China, Honduras, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, United Kingdom, and Vietnam. University B student interviewees consisted of two students from China, two students from Germany, two students from India, two students from Nepal, one student from Saudi Arabia, and one student from South Korea.

**Table 4.9**

*Countries of Origin Distribution-Interview Participants (n=24)*

<u>University A (n=14)</u>	<u>University B (n=10)</u>
Bahamas (n=2)	China (n=2)
India (n=2)	Germany (n=2)
Nepal (n=2)	India (n=2)
Brazil (n=1)	Nepal (n=2)
China (n=1)	Saudi Arabia (n=1)
Honduras (n=1)	South Korea (n=1)
Nigeria (n=1)	
Sierra Leone (n=1)	
United Kingdom (n=1)	
Vietnam (n=1)	

**Choice of Colleges.** Overall, 25.2% of the participants reported they did not apply to any other colleges other than their current enrolled college; 68.5% reported that they applied to up to four other colleges; 22% reported that they applied to five up to nine other colleges; and 16% reported that they applied to more than 10 other colleges.

About one fourth (21%) of participants reported that they did not receive any other admission offer other than from their current college where they are enrolled. Around 44% of participants reported that they received one or two offers from colleges. The remaining participants reported that they received more than three offers from other colleges at the time of making final college destination.

### **Stage 1 – Information Access Approach**

This section provides results for RQ2a: How did students learned about the university? All 131 participants from both universities responded to the question of how they learned about their current university for the first time. Table 4.10 shows the

frequencies of each approach from University A respondents; and Table 4.11 shows the frequencies of each approach from University B respondents. In addition, results of follow-up interviews were reported.

**University A.** According to University A participant survey responses (see Table 4.10), 48.2 % of students heard about the university through family, relative, or friends. This was followed by online search engines (27.7%), direct university website (25.3%), agent (20.5%), and website advertisement (15.7%), and education fair approach (13.3%). All other approaches received a low selection rate (under 10%). Notably, none of the respondents selected the YouTube Advertisement option. Two out of three participants who selected “Other” specified that they learned about the university through the university sport coaches during recruiting activities.

As Table 4.11 shows, the follow-up interview results revealed that six out of fourteen interview participants (43%) were introduced to University A by friends or relatives, followed by Agent (29%), previous schools (14%), and self-search through online search engine combined with university website (14%). Nine students (64%) reported that they learned further university information through university website. Five students (36%) reported that they learned further details from university faculty and international admission staff members. One of them claimed that: “I got all my answers from international admission staff members through E-mails. I did not check the university website at all.” Two students reported that they continued to learn about University A through their previous school advisors. Notably, two approaches that student reported

**Table 4.10***Information Access Responses-University A*

<u>Approach</u>	<u>Responses</u>	<u>%</u>
Family, relatives, or friends	40	48.2
Online search engine (web-links)	23	27.7
University Website	21	25.3
Agent	18	21.6
Website Advertisement	13	15.7
Educational Fair (on site)	11	13.3
Your previous school/college	6	7.2
University Alumni	6	7.2
Other	3	3.6
Online/virtual Educational Fair	3	3.6
Facebook	2	2.4
YouTube Advertisement	0	0
Total	<i>n=83</i>	

were not addressed by the student survey: EducationUSA Resources and University faculty or staff. According to United States Department of States official website, “EducationUSA is a U.S. Department of State network of over 430 international student advising centers in more than 170 countries and territories.”

Student interviewees also provided perceptions of the most popular ways of accessing information about to a U.S. university in their home countries among all students in their generation. Follow-up interviewees were from 11 countries: two from Bahamas, two from Nepal, and one student from each of the following countries: Brazil, Honduras, India, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Singapore, United Kingdom, and Vietnam. Students from Bahamas, Brazil, Honduras and Singapore perceived that school visits and personal connections were the most popular ways. Students from India, Nigeria, and Vietnam

perceived that paying a study abroad agency was the most prevalent way of accessing information to a U.S. university. Students from Nepal and Sierra Leone perceived EducationUSA as the most population resource. The student from Nigeria also perceived social media as a popular way of accessing this information.

**Table 4.11**

*Information Access from Follow-up Interviews (n=14)-  
University A*

<u>Approach</u>	<u>First Heard</u>	<u>Further Learned</u>
Family, relatives, or friends	5 (43%)	--
Agent	4 (29%)	1 (7%)
Previous school	2 (14%)	2 (14%)
Online search engine & University website	2 (14%)	9 (64%)
EducationUSA Resource*	--	1 (7%)
University faculty or staff*	--	5 (36%)

*Note:* \* Approach not addressed on the student survey

**University B.** According to University B participant survey responses (see Table 4.12), most students (43.8%) also heard about the university through family, relatives, or friends. This response was followed by students' previous schools (23%), direct university website (16.7%), agents (14.6%), and online search engines (12.5%). Five participants selected "Other" and four of them specified the reasons. Two claimed through university sport coaches. None of the respondents selected "Website Advertisement" or "YouTube Advertisement" as options.



**Table 4.12***Information Access Responses- University B*

<u>Approach</u>	<u>Responses</u>	<u>%</u>
Family, relatives, or friends	21	43.8
Your previous school/college	11	22.9
University Website	8	16.7
Agent	7	14.6
Online search engine (web-links)	6	12.5
Other	5	10.4
University Alumni	3	6.3
Educational Fair (on site)	2	4.2
Online/virtual Educational Fair	2	4.2
Facebook	1	2.1
Website Advertisement	0	0
YouTube Advertisement	0	0
Total	<i>n=48</i>	100

As Table 4.13 shows, results from the follow-up interview revealed that three out of ten interview participants (30%) were introduced to University B by friends or relatives; three were introduced by an agent (30%); three were introduced by previous schools (30%); and only one student reported receiving information through online self-search then found the university website listed (10%). Five students (50%) reported that they accessed more information from the university website. Three students (30%) reported that they learned further university details from their previous school advisors. Among these three students, two of them stated that they paid more attention to university partner programs because they and their parents believed university partner universities more trustworthy than other options . Two students (20%) reported that they learned further details from current university faculty and international admission staff

members; two students reported that they learned further details from friends who were studying at the university at the time; and one student reported that he learned further details from a study abroad agent. Notably, no student indicated that they learned further information from university faculty or staff, which was the only approach that was not addressed on the student survey.

Student interviewees also provided perceptions of most popular ways of information access to a U.S. university in their home countries. Students from China, Germany, and South Korea perceived partner university programs as the most common ways for students back home to learn about U.S. universities. Students from China, Nepal, Saudi Arabia perceived personal presence (e.g. school visits) as one of the most popular ways. Both students from India perceived agents as the most common way. The student from Saudi Arabia also perceived word of mouth as one of the most popular ways among students in his home country.

**Table 4.13**

*Information Access from Follow-up Interviews (n=10) -  
University B*

<u>Approach</u>	<u>First Heard</u>	<u>Further Learned</u>
Family, relatives, or friends	3 (30%)	2 (20%)
Agent	3 (30%)	1 (10%)
Previous school	3 (30%)	3 (30%)
Online search engine & University website	1 (10%)	5 (50%)
University faculty or staff*	--	2 (20%)

*Note:* \* Approach not addressed on the student survey

## Stage 2 – Influential Factors of Student Choice

This section provides results for RQ2b. It provides detailed findings of those factors that were influential in students' college choice. The results consisted of three parts: influential factor ratings from the survey by quantitative analyses, open-ended questions from the survey by qualitative analyses, and student follow-up interviews by qualitative analyses.

**Influential Factor Ratings.** A total of 131 student participants rated the individual 34 influential factors that might influence their college choice. Students rated each on a scale of 1 (*least important*) to 7 (*most important*) to their college choice. The study employed statistical mean test analysis for influential factor ratings. This section provides results of most important and least influential factors from each university. Please see Appendix F for results from overall participants.

**University A. Survey Ratings.** A total of 83 student participants from University A rated influential factor ratings. Table 4.14 shows the top ten most influential factors. Scholarships for international students, tuition rate, campus environment for international students, student support services, and cost of living in this city were the top five most influential factors rated. See Appendix F for all influential factor ratings. In contrast, as Table 4.15 shows, the least influential factor was available ESL program, followed by the university's reputation in my home country, recommendations from friends, recommendations from study abroad agent, and partner school program.

**Table 4.14***Top Ten Influential Factor Ratings at University A (n=83)*

<u>Influential Factor</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Min</u>	<u>Max</u>	<u>Ranks</u>
Scholarships for international students	6.42	1	7	1
Tuition rate	6.29	1	7	2
Campus environment for intl. students	6.18	1	7	3
Student support services	6.06	1	7	4
Cost of living in this city	6.05	1	7	5
Employment opportunities after graduation	6.02	1	7	6
Staff attitude	6.01	1	7	7
Learning environment	6.00	1	7	8
Choices of academic programs	5.99	1	7	9
Campus safety	5.95	1	7	10

**Table 4.15***Five Least Influential Factor Ratings at University A (n=83)*

<u>Influential Factor</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Min</u>	<u>Max</u>	<u>Ranks</u>
Available ESL program	3.69	1	7	34
Its reputation in my home country	4.17	1	7	33
Rec from friends	4.20	1	7	32
Rec from my study abroad agent	4.27	1	7	31
Partner school program	4.40	1	7	30

**University B. Survey Ratings.** A total of 48 student participants from University B rated influential factor ratings. Table 4.16 shows the top ten most influential factors. Campus safety was rated as the most influential factor, followed by campus environment for international students, cost of living in this city, staff attitudes, and choices of

**Table 4.16***Top Ten Influential Factor Ratings at University B (n=48)*

<u>Influential Factor</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Min</u>	<u>Max</u>	<u>Ranks</u>
Campus safety	5.77	1	7	1
Campus environment for international students	5.73	1	7	2
Cost of living in this city	5.71	1	7	3
Staff attitude	5.63	1	7	4
Choices of academic programs	5.56	1	7	5
Scholarships for international students	5.48	1	7	6
Tuition rate	5.48	1	7	7
Learning environment	5.44	1	7	8
Student support services	5.38	1	7	9
Professors' reputation	5.38	1	7	10

**Table 4.17***Five Least Influential Factor Ratings at University B (n=48)*

<u>Influential factor</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Min</u>	<u>Max</u>	<u>Ranks</u>
Available ESL program	3.29	1	7	34
Recommendation from my study abroad agent	3.63	1	7	33
Application fee	3.81	1	7	32
Friends at the university	3.81	1	7	31
Students from home country	3.85	1	7	30

academic programs. Among those five, three of them are under the campus climate influential category. See Appendix F for all influential factor ratings.

Table 4.17 shows the five least influential factors. They were available ESL program, recommendations from study abroad agent, application fee, friends at the university, and students from home country. Available ESL program was identified as the

least influential factor, which was consistent with the overall and University A Group result. Recommendations from study abroad agent was another one of five least influential factors, which also was consistent with overall and University A group result.

**Group Difference by Gender.** To provide answers to RQ2b-1, the study employed a series of T-tests to examine influential factor difference by gender. Significant differences were identified in four factor ratings in the individual case data analysis. Table 4.18 and Table 4.19 show results of these tests with statistically significant differences only.

**Table 4.18**

*Group Statistics: Influential Factor Ratings by Gender*

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Influential Factor</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>
University A	University website guidance	Male	41	5.22
		Female	42	5.83
University B	On-campus employment opportunities	Male	27	3.48
		Female	21	4.90
	Available ESL program	Male	27	3.85
		Female	21	2.57
	Employment opportunities after graduation	Male	27	4.44
		Female	21	5.86

In the case of University A, University website guidance ratings were higher among female participants ( $n=42$ ,  $m=5.83$ ) than male participants ( $n=41$ ,  $m=5.22$ ). This difference was statistically significant  $t(81) = -2.120$ ,  $p < .05$ .

In the case of University B, there were significant gender differences among three factors. Female participants ( $n=21$ ,  $M=4.90$ ) rated on-campus employment opportunities

higher than male participants ( $n=27$ ,  $M=3.48$ ). The difference was statistically significant  $t(46)=-2.176$ ,  $p<.05$ . Available ESL program was rated higher by male participants ( $n=27$ ,  $M= 3.85$ ) than female participants ( $n=21$ ,  $M=2.57$ ). The difference was statistically significant  $t(46)= 2.067$ ,  $p<.05$ . Employment opportunities after graduation was rated higher by female participants ( $n=21$ ,  $M= 5.86$ ) than male participants ( $n=27$ ,  $M=4.44$ ). The difference was statistically significant  $t(46)= -2.832$ ,  $p<.05$ .

**Table 4.19**

*Independent Samples Test Influential Factor Ratings by Gender*

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Influential Factor</u>	<u>t-test</u>		
		<u>t</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>Sig. (2-tailed)</u>
University A	University website guidance	-2.120	81	0.037
University B	On-campus employment opportunities	-2.176	46	0.035
	Available ESL program	2.067	46	0.044
	Employment opportunities after graduation	-2.832	46	0.007

**Group Difference by Student Type.** This section provides the answers to RQ2b-2. Influential factors were analyzed by one-way ANOVA between groups by student type categorical variable. Factor rates were analyzed for each university case respectively.

**For Cost Influential Category.** Significant differences were revealed in two influential factors in the case of University A and University B respectively (See Table 4.20). In the case of University A, there was a statistically significant difference in the on-campus employment opportunities influential factor between groups as determined by

one-way ANOVA [ $F(3, 79)=4.162, p=.009$ ]. A Games-Howell post-hoc test revealed that students who entered as undergraduate freshman ( $M=6.02, SD=1.67$ ) and students who entered as graduate students ( $M=5.92, SD=1.44$ ) rated on-campus employment opportunities significantly more influential than students who entered as undergraduate transfer ( $M=3.50, SD=2.17$ ).

**Table 4.20**

*ANOVA for Cost by Student Entry Type*

<u>Level</u>	<u>Influential Factor</u>	<u>Stu-type</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Sum of Squares</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
U-A	On-campus employment opportunities	UG Freshman	6.02	35.496	3	4.162	0.009
		UG Transfer	3.50				
		Graduate	5.92				
		ESL	5.40				
U-B	Scholarships for international students	UG Freshman	5.57	41.211	3	3.811	0.016
		UG Transfer	5.60				
		Graduate	5.68				
		ESL	1.00				

In the case of University B, there was a statistically significant difference in scholarships for international students influential factor between groups as determined by one-way ANOVA [ $F(3, 44)=3.811, p=.016$ ]. A Games-Howell post-hoc test revealed that students who entered as undergraduate freshmen ( $M=5.57, SD=2.21$ ), students who entered as undergraduate transfers ( $M=5.60, SD=1.43$ ), and students who entered as



graduate students ( $M=5.68$ ,  $SD=1.91$ ) rated scholarships for international students significantly more influential than students who entered as ESL students ( $M=1.00$ ,  $SD=.00$ ).

**Table 4.21**

*ANOVA for Campus Climate by Student Entry Type*

<u>Level</u>	<u>Sub factor</u>	<u>Stu-type</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Sum of Squares</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
U-A	Campus environment for intl. students	UG Freshman	6.08	18.899	3	3.114	0.031
		UG Transfer	4.50				
		Graduate	6.42				
		ESL	6.80				

***For Campus Climate Influential Category.*** Significant differences were revealed in campus environment for international students influential factor in the case of University A (See Table 4.21). There was a statistically significant difference in campus environment for international students between groups as determined by one-way ANOVA [ $F(3, 79)=3.114$ ,  $p=.031$ ]. A Games-Howell post-hoc test revealed that students who entered as undergraduate freshmen ( $M=6.08$ ,  $SD=1.34$ ), students who entered as graduate students ( $M=6.42$ ,  $SD=1.16$ ), and student who entered as ESL students ( $M=6.80$ ,  $SD=.45$ ) rated campus environment for international students significantly more influential than students who entered as undergraduate transfer students ( $M=4.50$ ,  $SD=2.74$ ). However, the Homogeneity of Variances assumption was violated, so results should be interpreted with caution and GLM (the general linear model) is robust to

violations of assumptions. There were no significant differences revealed by one-way ANOVA between groups in the case of University B.

***For Employment Prospect Influential Category.*** There was a significant difference revealed by one-way ANOVA between groups [ $F(3, 44)=4.618, p=.007$ ] in employment opportunities after graduation influential factor in the case of University B (See Table 4.22). A Games-Howell post-hoc test revealed that students who entered as undergraduate freshmen ( $M=5.93, SD=1.44$ ), students who entered as undergraduate transfer students ( $M=4.60, SD=1.58$ ), and students who entered as graduate students ( $M=5.05, SD=1.84$ ) rated employment opportunities after graduation significantly more influential than students who entered as ESL students ( $M=1.50, SD=.71$ ). There were no significant differences revealed by one-way ANOVA between groups in the case of University A.

**Table 4.22**

*ANOVA for Employment Prospect by Student Entry Type*

<u>Level</u>	<u>Stu-type</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Sum of Squares</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
U-B	UG Freshman	5.93	38.029	3	4.618	0.007
	UG Transfer	4.60				
	Graduate	5.05				
	ESL	1.50				

***For International Student Support Influential Category.*** There was a significant difference revealed by one-way ANOVA between groups [ $F(3, 79)=3.873, p=.012$ ] in

international student support services influential factor in the case of University A (See Table 4.23). A Games-Howell post-hoc test revealed that students who entered as undergraduate freshmen ( $M=6.12$ ,  $SD=1.17$ ), students who entered as graduate students ( $M=6.08$ ,  $SD=1.08$ ), and students who entered as ESL students ( $M=7.00$ ,  $SD=.000$ ) rated international student services significantly more influential than students whose entry student type was undergraduate transfer students ( $M=4.50$ ,  $SD=2.74$ ). However, the Homogeneity of Variances assumption was violated, so results should be interpreted with caution and GLM (the general linear model) is robust to violations of assumptions. There were no significant differences revealed by one-way ANOVA between groups in the case of University B.

**Table 4.23**

*ANOVA for International Student Services by Student Entry Type*

<u>Level</u>	<u>Stu-type</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Sum of Squares</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
U-A	UG Freshman	6.12	19.207	3	3.873	0.012
	UG Transfer	4.50				
	Graduate	6.08				
	ESL	7.00				

**Group Difference by Countries of Origin.** This section provides answers to RQ2b-3. Due to the small sample size of each country of origin (See Table 4.6), the investigator selected the top five countries of origin from overall participants and regrouped them into a new variable: “Countrygroup” in SPSS. The top five countries are:

Nepal ( $n=29$ ), Saudi Arabia ( $n=14$ ), India ( $n=13$ ), China ( $n=8$ ), and Germany ( $n=7$ ). The study conducted the one-way ANOVA between groups analysis by top five countries based on overall student participants from both universities instead of each university. Significant differences among overall participants were revealed and described below.

***For Cost Influential Category.*** Significant differences were revealed by one-way ANOVA between groups in multiple influential factors under cost influential category. Those factors are tuition rate, scholarships for international students, on-campus employment opportunities, and cost of living in this city (See Table 4.24).

There was a significant difference revealed by one-way ANOVA between groups [ $F(4, 66)=8.573$   $p=.000$ ] in the tuition rate influential factor. A Games-Howell post-hoc test revealed that students from four countries, Nepal ( $M=6.72$ ,  $SD=.46$ ), India ( $M=6.15$ ,  $SD=1.07$ ), China ( $M=5.63$ ,  $SD=1.19$ ), and Germany ( $M=5.47$ ,  $SD=2.15$ ) rated tuition rate significantly more influential than students from Saudi Arabia ( $M=4.07$ ,  $SD=2.40$ ). However, the Homogeneity of Variances assumption was violated, so results should be interpreted with caution and GLM (the general linear model) is robust to violations of assumptions. There were no significant differences revealed in tuition rate among students among students from Nepal, India, China, and Germany.

There was a significant difference revealed by one-way ANOVA between groups [ $F(4, 66)=8.368$   $p=.000$ ] in scholarships for international students influential factor. A Games-Howell post-hoc test revealed that students from Nepal ( $M=6.93$ ,  $SD=.26$ ) rated scholarships for international students significantly more influential than students from Saudi Arabia ( $M=4.50$ ,  $SD=2.44$ ), China ( $M=5.13$ ,  $SD=1.55$ ), and Germany

**Table 4.24***ANOVA for Cost by Top Five Countries of Origin*

<u>Influential Factor</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Sum of Squares</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
Tuition rate	Nepal	6.72	0.455	68.588	4	8.573	0.000
	Saudi Arabia	4.07	2.401				
	India	6.15	1.068				
	China	5.63	1.188				
	Germany	5.57	2.149				
Scholarships for intl. students	Nepal	6.93	0.258	65.279	4	8.368	0.000
	Saudi Arabia	4.50	2.442				
	India	6.31	0.630				
	China	5.13	1.553				
	Germany	5.57	2.149				
On-campus employment opportunities	Nepal	6.72	0.455	196.421	4	27.348	0.000
	Saudi Arabia	3.79	2.082				
	India	5.31	1.843				
	China	5.63	1.061				
	Germany	1.43	1.134				
Cost of living in this city	Nepal	6.52	0.829	23.375	4	3.652	0.010
	Saudi Arabia	5.71	1.773				
	India	5.92	1.115				
	China	6.13	0.835				
	Germany	4.57	2.070				

( $M=5.57$ ,  $SD=2.15$ ). However, the Homogeneity of Variances assumption was violated, so results should be interpreted with caution and GLM (the general linear model) is robust to violations of assumptions. It also was revealed that students from India ( $M=6.31$ ,  $SD=.63$ ) rated scholarships for international students significantly more

influential than students from Saudi Arabia ( $M=4.50$ ,  $SD=2.44$ ). There were no significant differences revealed in tuition rate influential factor among students from Saudi Arabia, China, and Germany.

There was a significant difference revealed by one-way ANOVA between groups [ $F(4, 66)=27.348$   $p=.000$ ] in on-campus employment opportunities influential factor. A Games-Howell post-hoc test revealed that students from Nepal ( $M=6.72$ ,  $SD=.46$ ) rated on-campus employment opportunities significantly more influential than students from Saudi Arabia ( $M=3.79$ ,  $SD=2.08$ ), India ( $M=5.31$ ,  $SD=2.15$ ), China ( $M=5.63$ ,  $SD=1.06$ ), and Germany ( $M=1.43$ ,  $SD=1.13$ ). It also revealed that students from Germany rated on-campus employment opportunities significantly less influential than students from all other four countries; and students from Saudi Arabia rated on-campus employment opportunities significantly less influential than students from India and China. However, the Homogeneity of Variances assumption was violated, so results should be interpreted with caution and GLM (the general linear model) is robust to violations of assumptions.

There was a significant difference revealed by one-way ANOVA between groups [ $F(4, 66)=3.652$   $p=.010$ ] in cost of living in this city influential factor. A Games-Howell post-hoc test revealed that students from Nepal ( $M=6.52$ ,  $SD=.83$ ), India ( $M=5.92$ ,  $SD=1.11$ ), and China ( $M=6.13$ ,  $SD=.84$ ) rated cost of living in this city significantly more influential than students from Germany ( $M=4.57$ ,  $SD=2.07$ ). However, the Homogeneity of Variances assumption was violated, so results should be interpreted with caution and GLM (the general linear model) is robust to violations of assumptions. There were no significant differences among students from other countries.

***For Social Links Influential Category.*** Significant differences were revealed by one-way ANOVA between groups in student from home country and friends at the university under social links influential category. There was no significant difference revealed in other influential factors under this influential category.

As Table 4.25 shows, there was a significant difference revealed by one-way ANOVA between groups [ $F(4, 66)=3.855$   $p=.007$ ] in student from home country influential factor. A Games-Howell post-hoc test revealed that students from Germany ( $M=2.29$ ,  $SD=1.80$ ) rated student from home country significantly less influential than students from Nepal ( $M=4.76$ ,  $SD=1.57$ ), Saudi Arabia ( $M=4.93$ ,  $SD=2.06$ ), India ( $M=4.62$ ,  $SD=1.81$ ), and China ( $M=5.38$ ,  $SD=1.06$ ). There is no significant difference revealed among students from other countries.

**Table 4.25**

*ANOVA for Social Links by Top Five Countries of Origin*

<u>Influential Factor</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Sum of Squares</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
Students from home country	Nepal	4.76	1.573	44.536	4	3.855	0.007
	Saudi Arabia	4.93	2.056				
	India	4.62	1.805				
	China	5.38	1.061				
	Germany	2.29	1.799				
Friends at the university	Nepal	4.93	2.017	51.814	4	3.754	0.008
	Saudi Arabia	4.86	2.107				
	India	4.54	1.761				
	China	5.75	1.035				
	Germany	2.29	1.380				

**Table 4.26***ANOVA for Campus Climate by Top Five Countries of Origin*

<u>Influential Factor</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Sum of Squares</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
Campus environment for intl. students	Nepal	6.28	1.279	19.342	4	2.817	0.032
	Saudi Arabia	6.00	1.038				
	India	5.92	1.320				
	China	5.88	0.991				
	Germany	4.43	2.070				
No. of intl. students	Nepal	5.31	1.491	57.192	4	7.404	0.000
	Saudi Arabia	4.86	1.657				
	India	5.46	0.967				
	China	5.13	1.126				
	Germany	2.29	1.254				
Staff attitude	Nepal	6.17	1.197	16.238	4	2.847	0.031
	Saudi Arabia	5.86	1.167				
	India	5.92	1.188				
	China	6.38	0.518				
	Germany	4.57	1.718				
University facilities	Nepal	6.14	1.156	20.872	4	3.503	0.012
	Saudi Arabia	5.71	1.204				
	India	5.38	1.325				
	China	5.75	1.282				
	Germany	4.29	1.254				



There was a significant difference revealed by one-way ANOVA between groups [ $F(4, 66)=3.754$   $p=.008$ ] in friends at the university influential factor. A Games-Howell post-hoc test revealed that students from Germany ( $M=2.29$ ,  $SD=1.38$ ) rated friends at the university significantly less influential than students from Nepal ( $M=4.93$ ,  $SD=2.02$ ), Saudi Arabia ( $M=4.86$ ,  $SD=2.11$ ), India ( $M=4.54$ ,  $SD=1.76$ ), and China ( $M=5.75$ ,  $SD=1.04$ ). There was no significant difference revealed among students from other countries.

***For Campus Climate Influential Category.*** Significant differences were revealed by one-way ANOVA between groups in multiple influential factors under campus climate influential category. The results show that campus environment for international students, number of international students, staff attitude, and university facilities influential factors were rated significantly different among students from the five different countries. Table 4.26 displays the results of significant differences.

As Table 4.26 shows, there was a significant difference revealed by one-way ANOVA between groups [ $F(4, 66)=2.817$   $p=.032$ ] in campus environment for international students influential factor. A Games-Howell post-hoc test revealed that students from Germany ( $M=4.43$ ,  $SD=2.07$ ) rated campus environment for international students significantly less influential than students from Nepal ( $M=6.28$ ,  $SD=1.28$ ), Saudi Arabia ( $M=6.00$ ,  $SD=1.04$ ), India ( $M=5.92$ ,  $SD=1.32$ ), and China ( $M=5.88$ ,  $SD=.99$ ). There was no significant difference revealed among students from other countries.

There was a significant difference revealed by one-way ANOVA between groups [ $F(4, 66)=7.404$   $p=.000$ ] in number of international students influential factor. A Games-

Howell post-hoc test revealed that students from Germany ( $M=2.29$ ,  $SD=1.25$ ) rated number of international students significantly less influential than students from Nepal ( $M=5.31$ ,  $SD=1.49$ ), Saudi Arabia ( $M=4.86$ ,  $SD=1.66$ ), India ( $M=5.46$ ,  $SD=.97$ ), and China ( $M=5.13$ ,  $SD=1.13$ ). There was no significant difference revealed among students from other countries.

There was a significant difference revealed by one-way ANOVA between groups [ $F(4, 66)=2.847$   $p=.031$ ] in the staff attitudes influential factor. A Games-Howell post-hoc test revealed that students from Germany ( $M=4.57$ ,  $SD=1.72$ ) rated staff attitudes significantly less influential than students from Nepal ( $M=6.17$ ,  $SD=1.20$ ), Saudi Arabia ( $M=5.86$ ,  $SD=1.17$ ), India ( $M=5.92$ ,  $SD=1.19$ ), and China ( $M=6.38$ ,  $SD=.52$ ). There was no significant difference revealed among students from other countries.

There was a significant difference revealed by one-way ANOVA between groups [ $F(4, 66)=3.503$   $p=.012$ ] in university facilities influential factor. A Games-Howell post-hoc test revealed that students from Germany ( $M=4.29$ ,  $SD=1.25$ ) rated university facilities significantly less influential than students from Nepal ( $M=6.14$ ,  $SD=1.16$ ), Saudi Arabia ( $M=5.71$ ,  $SD=1.20$ ), and China ( $M=5.75$ ,  $SD=1.28$ ). There is no significant difference revealed among students from other countries.

***For Other Influential Factors.*** Significant differences were also revealed by one-way ANOVA between groups in employment opportunities after graduation and international student support services influential factors. Table 4.27 shows the detailed one-way ANOVA between groups analysis result.

**Table 4.27***ANOVA for Other Factors by Top Five Countries of Origin*

<u>Influential Factor</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Sum of Squares</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
Employment opportunities after graduation	Nepal	6.55	0.632	53.691	4	6.750	0.000
	Saudi Arabia	4.43	2.102				
	India	5.92	1.498				
	China	6.00	0.926				
	Germany	4.57	2.225				
Student support services	Nepal	6.41	0.825	12.326	4	3.151	0.020
	Saudi Arabia	5.86	1.351				
	India	5.92	0.954				
	China	6.13	0.641				
	Germany	5.00	1.155				

There was a significant difference revealed by one-way ANOVA between groups [ $F(4, 66)=6.750$   $p=.000$ ] in employment opportunities after graduation influential factor. A Games-Howell post-hoc test revealed that students from Saudi Arabia ( $M=4.43$ ,  $SD=2.10$ ) rated employment opportunities after graduation significantly less influential than students from Nepal ( $M=6.55$   $SD=.63$ ), India ( $M=5.92$ ,  $SD=1.50$ ), and China ( $M=6.00$ ,  $SD=.92$ ). It is also revealed that students from Germany ( $M=5.92$ ,  $SD=1.50$ ) rated employment opportunities after graduation significantly less influential than students from Nepal and India.

There was a significant difference revealed by one-way ANOVA between groups [ $F(4, 66)=3.151$   $p=.030$ ] in student support services influential factor. A Games-Howell post-hoc test revealed that students from Nepal ( $M=6.41$   $SD=.83$ ) and China ( $M=6.13$ ,

$SD=.64$ ) rated student support services significantly more influential than students from Germany ( $M=5.00$ ,  $SD=1.16$ ).

***Country Difference from Student Interviews.*** Student interviewees provided perceptions of most important factors that influenced student abroad college choice in their home countries (see Table 4.9 for interview participants countries of origin distribution). Results from each university case are reported below.

Table 4.28 shows the results from University A student interviewee perceptions. Except for one student from Singapore, all of the other thirteen students perceived influential factors related to cost influential category were most influential or at least among one of the most important factors for students back home. Five students from Brazil, India, Nepal, Singapore, and Vietnam respectively perceived program quality and reputation was one of the most influential factors. Four students from Brazil, China, United Kingdom, and Vietnam perceived having a local helping community from home culture was one of the most influential factors. Three students from China, India and Singapore believed that university ranking was one of the most influential factors for students back home. One student from Bahamas and the student from Singapore believed location and weather were one of the most influential factors for students to consider the destination college. The student from Nigeria perceived campus and local city safety is one of the most influential factors along with cost, and stated: “University ranking and reputation is not an important factor for students from Nigeria at all.”

**Table 4.28**

*Perceived Most Influential Factors from Home Country from Student Interviews (n=14): University A*

<u>Factors</u>	<u>Responses</u>	<u>Countries of origin</u>
Cost Related (e.g. scholarship, tuition rate, cost of living, on-campus employment, etcetera.)	13 (93%)	Bahamas Brazil China Honduras India Nepal Nigeria Sierra Leone United Kingdom Vietnam
Program Quality	5 (36%)	Brazil India Nepal Singapore Vietnam
Helping Community from Home Culture	4 (29%)	Brazil China United Kingdom Vietnam
University Ranking	3 (21%)	China India Singapore
Location/weather	2 (14%)	Bahamas Singapore
Campus Safety	1 (7%)	Nigeria
Job opportunity after graduation	1 (7%)	India

Table 4.29 shows the results from University B student interviewee perceptions. Six students respectively from Germany, India, Nepal, Nigeria, and Saudi Arabia perceived program quality was the most influential or at least one of the most for students back home in general. Five students from India, Nepal, and South Korea perceived Cost

related factors were among the most influential factors. Two students from China perceived campus safety was one of the most influential factors. Two students from Nepal and Saudi Arabia believed that university ranking was one of the most influential factors for students back home. Two students from India and Nepal believed that university location and weather were among the most influential factors for students back home. One student from Nigeria believed learning environment was one of the most influential factors. One student from Germany believed that student activity aspect was one of the most influential factors for students back home.

**Table 4.29**

*Perceived Most Influential Factors from Home Country from Student Interviews (n=10): University B*

<u>Factors</u>	<u>Responses</u>	<u>Countries of origin</u>
Program Quality	6 (60%)	Germany India Nepal Nigeria Saudi Arabia
Cost Related (e.g. scholarship, tuition rate, cost of living, on-campus employment, etcetera.)	5 (50%)	India Nepal South Korea
Campus Safety	2 (20%)	China
University Ranking	2 (20%)	Nepal Saudi Arabia
Location/weather	2 (20%)	India Nepal
Learning environment	1 (20%)	Nigeria
Student Activities	1 (20%)	Germany

### **Satisfaction with College Choice**

Among all University A student participants ( $n=83$ ), 13 students (15.7%) were strongly satisfied with their choice of University A; 34 students (41.0%) were satisfied with college choice; 21 students (25.3%) were somewhat satisfied with their choice; five (6.0%) students stayed neutral; four students (4.8%) reported somewhat dissatisfied with their choice; another four students (4.8%) were dissatisfied with their choice; and finally two students (2.4%) were strongly dissatisfied. Forty students (48.2%) stated that they would definitely recommend University A to their others; 37 students (44.6%) selected “Maybe, it depends;” six students (7.2%) stated that they were not likely recommend University A to others.

Among all University B student participants ( $n=47$ ), seven students (14.6%) were strongly satisfied with their choice of University B; 19 students (39.6%) were satisfied with college choice; 14 students (29.2%) were somewhat satisfied with their choice; three (6.3%) students stayed neutral; three students (6.3%) reported somewhat dissatisfied with their choice; 1 student (2.1%) was strongly dissatisfied with the choice of University B. Twenty three students (47.9%) stated that they would definitely recommend University B to their others; 24 students (50%) selected “Maybe, it depends;” and only 1 student (2.1%) stated not likely to recommend University B to others.

### **Results of Student Perceptions of University Strengths and Weaknesses**

This section provides in-depth information for RQ2 regarding strengths and weaknesses of each university according to students’ perspectives. Questions are consistent with executive perceptions of university strengths and challenges. A total of 58

student participants reported perceptions of their university's strengths from open-ended questions on the student survey as well as in-depth interviews. Student interviewees also reported the reasons (weaknesses of the university) that made them hesitated before decided to enroll and what factor(s) helped them made the final enrollment decision.

**University A.** As Table 4.30 shows, among the 33 University A student participants, 54.5% perceived affordability and good scholarships as university strengths; 36.4% perceived welcoming environment and helpful professors with great qualifications as university strengths; 30% perceived good student services as a strength; 27.2% perceived value of academic programs as well as helpful university staff as university strengths; 15.2% perceived the university location as a strength as it is close to many big cities and convenient; and 12.1% perceived low faculty student ratio as one of the university strengths. Few students (under 10%), noted factors such as the beauty of the campus, on-campus job opportunities, university facilities, helpful international office staff members or diversity, as strengths of the university.

Student interviewees of University A reported hesitations before the final decision to come to their current university and what made them overcome the hesitations and finally enroll. Eleven out of 14 students stated that they had hesitations. Three students claimed that they had no hesitation as the university was their only choice. Among the 11 students who hesitated, six of them hesitated because the university was not well-known; two of them hesitated because of not knowing anybody at the university (Social Links); two of them hesitated because of the financial pressure to their family; and one of them hesitated because of the winter weather.



**Table 4.30***Student Perceptions in University A Strengths (n=33)*

<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Responses</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Affordable cost and good scholarships	18	54.5
Welcoming environment	12	36.4
Great Professors	12	36.4
Good student services	10	30.3
Value of academic programs	9	27.2
Helpful University Staff	9	27.2
Student faculty interactions	6	18.2
Convenient University Location	5	15.2
Low faculty student ratio	4	12.1
Beautiful campus	3	9.1
On-campus job opportunities	3	9.1
University facilities	3	9.1
Great overall	3	9.1
Diversity	3	9.1
Other	4	12.1

Without exception, all 11 students stated the major reason that they still decided to enroll was because of the affordability after comparing costs of University A with other universities (including the relatively low tuition rate and scholarship offers). One student from Nepal stated:

Honestly at first, I did hesitate because I had my mind set on me going to a big city and studying in a somewhat big university and for me University A was not that. It was actually among my last options because it is not in a very developed city and if you don't have a car it is very hard to go places. In summary what

made me doubt was the area where campus is located. The thing that attracted me the most was the fact that I received great scholarships and how affordable tuition was.

**University B.** Twenty-five student participants provided perceptions of University B strengths that they would like future students to know. As Table 4.31 shows, 32% perceived professor qualifications as university strengths; 28% perceived welcoming environment and value of great academic programs as university strengths; 16% perceived university location as a strength given that a small town located in a remote area helps students focus on studies; 12% perceived good international student services, safe campus and town, as well as university facilities as university strengths; and 8% perceived low cost of the university as a strength.

**Table 4.31**

*Student Perceptions in University B strengths (n=25)*

<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Responses</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Professor qualifications	8	32.0
Welcoming environment	7	28.0
Value of academic programs	7	28.0
University Location: Small town in remote area but good for focusing on study	4	16.0
Good international student services	3	12.0
Safe campus and town	3	12.0
University facilities	3	12.0
Low Cost	2	8.0
Other	3	12.0

Among the ten student interviewees from University B, six of them stated that they had hesitations when deciding whether to accept the offer. Four students claimed that they had no hesitation, half of them stated that they did not have any other offer; the other two stated that the university provided what they were looking for (e.g. scholarships or value of degree). Among the six students who hesitated, five of them hesitated because of the university location and the small-town size; one student worried about separation from family in general. Students reported eventually, the friendly town, safe campus, quality of academic programs, and effective international student services were the reasons for their enrollment.

### **Results of Research Question 3 – Convergence and Divergence**

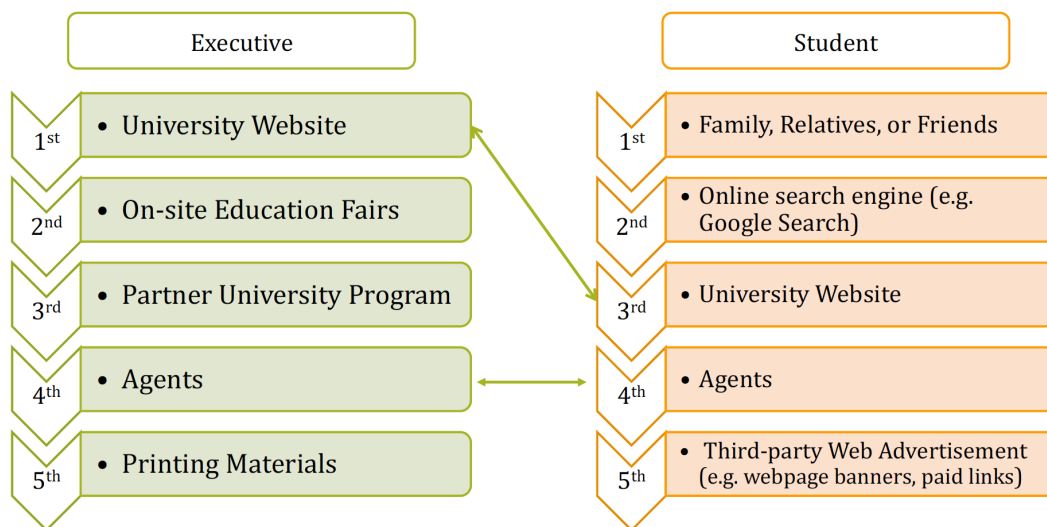
To answer the Research Question 3 of the study, this section reports the findings of convergences and divergences between executive perceptions and student perceptions regarding the university prioritized strategies and influential factors for students. As the comparisons were based on results of RQ1 and RQ2, the study conducted simple content analysis and thematic analysis.

#### **Stage 1 -- Outreach Approach versus Information Access**

**University A.** Convergences and divergences were both revealed in the case of University A based on the information in Table 4.2 (Top Five Most Prioritized Outreach Approaches) and Table 4.10 (Information Access Responses-University A). As a result, as Figure 4.1 shows, two of the top five prioritized outreach approaches perceived by Executive A converged with student perceptions: university website and agents. Getting to know the university through family, relatives, or friends was rated as the most

prevalent way among University A student participants, which did not correspond to Executive A’s perceptions. The second prioritized outreach strategy perceived by Executive A—attending on-site international student recruitment fairs was not on the top five ways of information access rated by students. Partner university program was the third prioritized outreach approach perceived by Executive A but not in the top five ways of information access approach rated by students. However, it was addressed by two student interviewees as the way that they heard about the university.

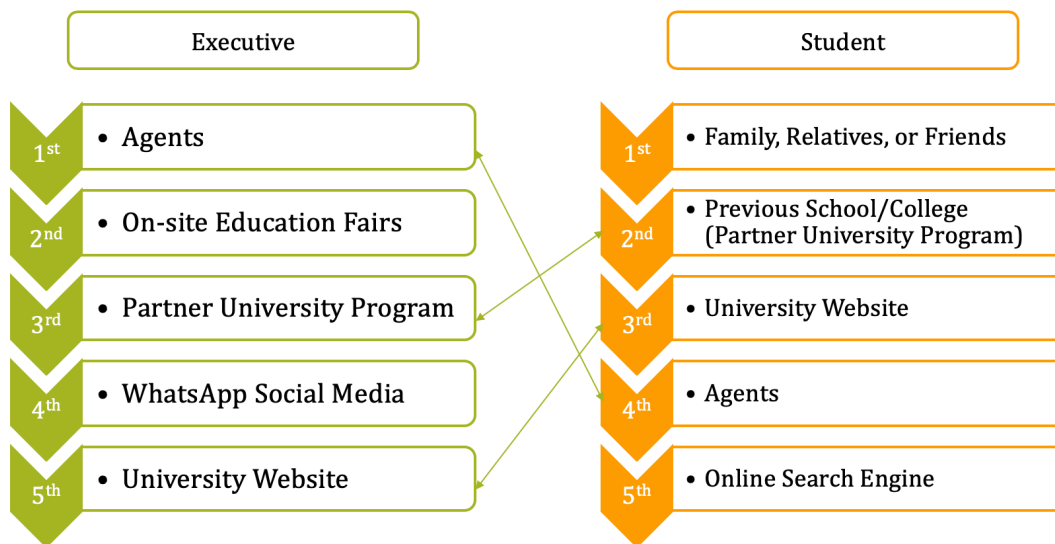
Figure 4.1 Outreach vs Information Access Approaches (Stage 1)-University A



**University B.** Convergences and divergences were both revealed in the case of University B based on the information given by Table 4.2 (Top Five Prioritized Outreach Approaches) and Table 4.12 (Information Access Responses-University B). As a result, as Figure 4.2 shows, three of the top five prioritized outreach approaches perceived by Executive B converged with student perceptions: working with commissioned agents, partner university program, and university website. Similar to University A, getting to

know the university through family, relatives, or friends was rated as the most prevalent way to access information among University B student participants, which did not correspond to approaches noted by Executive B's. The second prioritized outreach strategy—attending on-site international student recruitment fairs was not on the top five ways of information access rated by students.

Figure 4.2 **Outreach vs Information Access Approaches (Stage 1)-University B**



**Stage 2 -- Conversion Strategy versus Student Choice**

Both executives provided perceptions of the top five prioritized enrollment strategies as well as perceived effectiveness in the past four years. The results from student ratings revealed both convergences and divergences from executive perceptions.

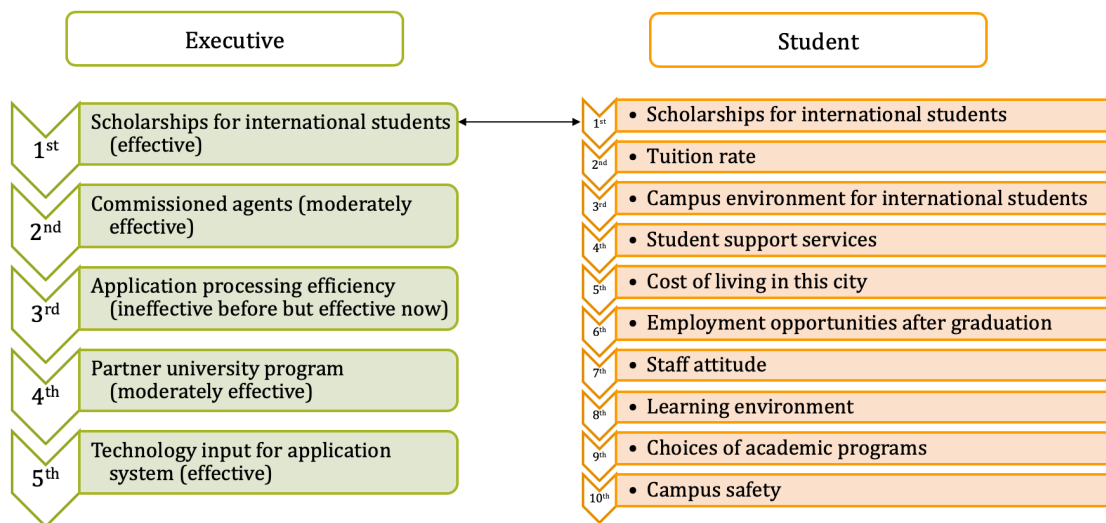
As noted previously, top conversion strategic categories or strategies for University A were: 1. Cost (effective); 2. Commissioned Agents (moderately effective); 3. Admission Process (ineffective before but effective now); 4. Institutional Partnerships

(moderately effective); 5. Admission Technology (effective). For University B: 1. Institutional partnerships (effective); 2. Cost (ineffective). 3. Commissioned Agents (moderately effective). 4. Admission processing efficiency (effective); 5 Admission technology (effective).

**University A.** The comparison between student perceptions and the executive perceptions were based on Table 4.3 (Top Five Prioritized Conversion Strategies), Table 4.4 (Executive Perceptions of Other Conversion Strategies), Table 4.14 (Primary Factor Importance Ranks), and Table 4.19 (Top 15 Influential Factor Ratings). Both convergence and divergence were revealed from the analysis (see Figure 4.3). The most influential factor for students' college choice, according to University A student participants rated was scholarships for international students, followed by tuition rate. These responses converged with the executive perception that the top one prioritized conversion strategy at University A was providing scholarships for international students and maintaining a low tuition rate to be affordable. However, the other top four prioritized conversion strategies perceived by Executive A (commissioned agents, application processing efficiency, Institutional partnership, and technology input for application systems) did not appear on the ten most influential factors rated by students. Notably, the "agents" and "partner university programs" factors were listed among five least influential factors rated by students. Instead, students rated program reputation, international student support, campus environment, and employment prospect as the other most influential factors.

Regarding university strengths, Executive A’s perceptions converged with student perceptions. Executive A perceived the top two strengths of University A were affordability and convenient university location. More than half student respondents reported “good scholarships” for international students as the university’s major strengths. Fifteen percent of student respondents reported “university location” was one of the university’s major strength.

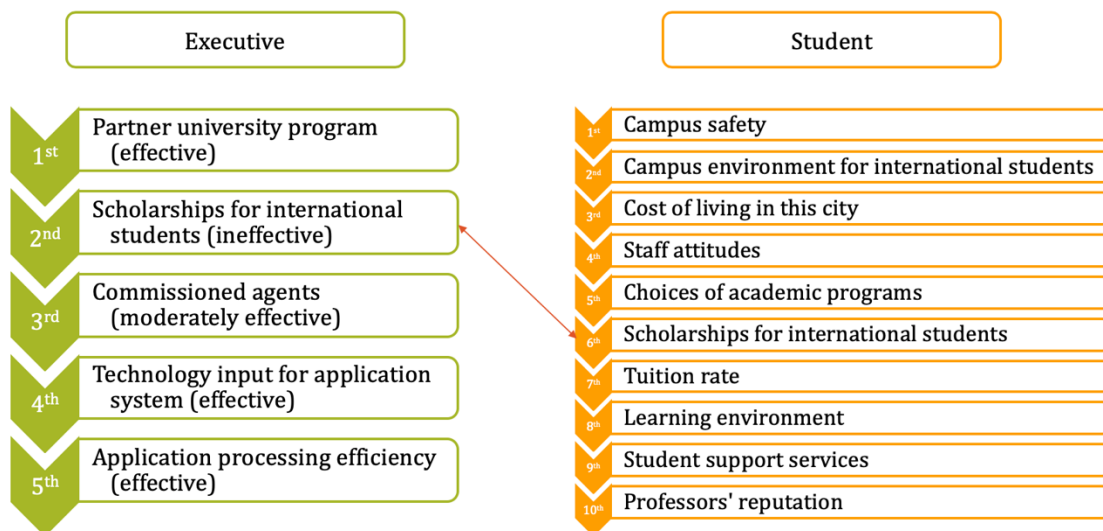
Figure 4.3 Conversion Strategies vs Influential Factors (Stage 2) – University A



**University B.** The comparison between student perceptions and the executive perceptions were based on Table 4.3 (Top Five Prioritized Conversion Strategies), Table 4.4 (Executive Perceptions of Other Conversion Strategies), Table 4.14 (Primary Factor Importance Ranks), and Table 4.17 (Top 10 Influential Factor Ratings at University B). More divergences than convergences were revealed from the analysis in the case of University B (see Figure 4.4). The 2nd prioritized conversation strategy perceived by Executive B: providing scholarships for international students was converged with

student perceptions (6<sup>th</sup> most influential factor) to some extent. However, Executive B perceived this strategy as ineffective, which diverged from the result of student ratings. Although another conversation strategy: partner university program was not rated among the top 10 most influential factors by students, students reported to open-ended questions as well as interviews that they trust partner school programs more than other options. Notably, the 3<sup>rd</sup> prioritized “agents” strategy perceived by Executive B was rated among the five least influential factors by students.

Figure 4.4 Conversion Strategies vs Influential Factors (Stage 2) – University B



Regarding university strengths, Executive B perceived international student services as the top strength of University B. This converged with students perceptions that 12% student respondents perceived good international student services as the university’s strength.



## CHAPTER FIVE

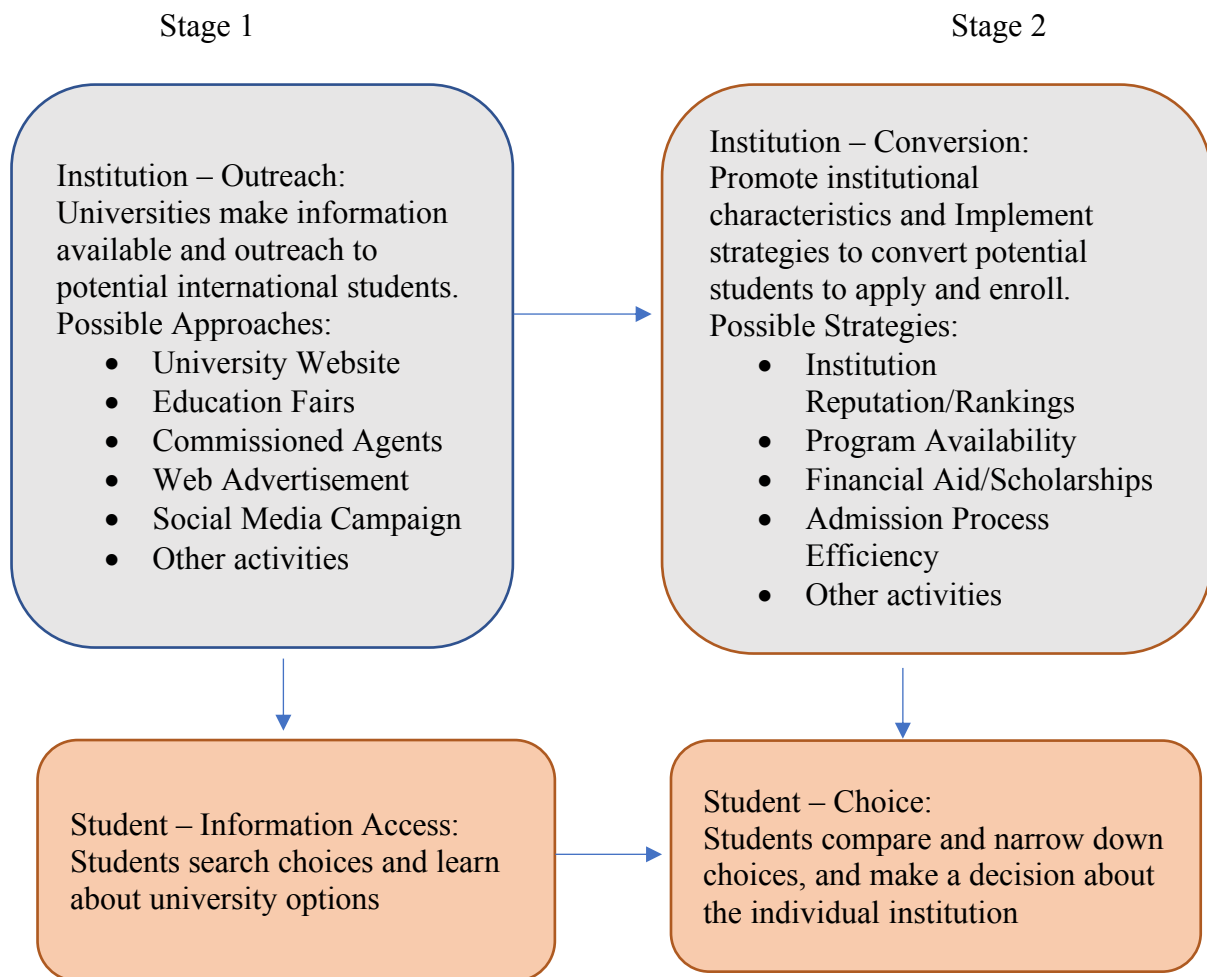
### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses answers to the research questions within the proposed theoretical Two-Stage Model Framework. Also discussed are contributions to the literature, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

#### **Two-Stage Model Framework**

Applying the Two-Stage Model framework, the purpose of this study was to discover the extent to which international student choice mirrors university strategies. As a reminder, Stage 1 of the model framework is the outreach stage where institutions make related information available and outreach to potential international students. Stage 2 involves institutions promotion of their characteristics and implementation of strategies to convert potential students to apply and ultimately enroll. As over 75% of the students surveyed in this study applied to other colleges, these two case study universities were not likely students' first choice. This affirms that universities must implement smart strategies to compete with other institutions, especially those with a competitively similar profile.

**Figure 1.1** Preliminary Two-Stage Model



## **Two-Stage Model Incorporating Results of Research Questions**

### **Stage 1 Incorporating Results of RQ1a, RQ2a, and RQ3a**

The research questions related to Stage 1 were:

RQ1a: What are university administrator perceptions of outreach approaches?

RQ2a: How did students learn about the university?

RQ3a: How do students' and administrators' perspectives converge and diverge in Stage 1: outreach approaches and information access?

Based on the findings of convergences and divergences in Stage 1 of the model, the two universities shared prioritized outreach approaches. For instance, maintaining an informative university website, traveling to overseas recruitment fairs, working with commissioned agents, and utilizing partner student programs were among the top five most prioritized outreach approaches. While university website (both universities), commissioned agents (both universities), and partner university program (University B) converged with the top approaches identified by students; other approaches diverged from the ones students perceived. For example, students in both universities reported that they heard about the university mostly through family, relatives, and friends.

The overall convergences between university executives and students in their emphasis on university website and commissioned agents indicate that the two outreach approaches mostly worked. Informative university website is a necessary infrastructure nowadays for universities to make information available and conduct web-based advertainments. Regarding the use of commissioned agents, students from many counties

(e.g., India, Vietnam, Brazil) perceived that learning about U.S. universities through agents was the most popular way. The convergences in these two approaches suggest that universities with similar profiles continue employing these two approaches to reach out to potential students.

The divergences between executives' and students' perceptions in other approaches (e.g. family, relative, and friends; on-site education fairs) are not surprising. The reasons and indications are discussed below.

**Word of Mouth.** Students from both universities rated family, relatives, and friends as the most popular way that they heard about the university. This means of communication does not have a corresponding outreach approach (i.e., it was not listed in the executive interview questions), nor was it mentioned by the executives. Word of mouth in the marketing field refers to a method that relies on casual social interactions to promote a product. Word of mouth is a free marketing approach triggered by customer experiences (Kenton, 2020). Word of mouth marketing is extremely important, especially in the current digital world. In higher education settings, word of mouth marketing is influenced by student's overall experiences with university life. As most colleges and universities prioritize student services, word of mouth is considered the result of an institution's academic reputation and student services, rather than an outreach approach. Therefore, this approach was not listed as an outreach approach in the executive interview questions, nor was it considered by the executives as one, though it appeared as the most popular way that students learned about both universities. This indicates that

both universities did well in satisfying students and gained recognition in return by word of mouth.

**On-site Educational Fairs.** In the case of University A, traveling overseas to educational fairs was perceived as the second prioritized outreach strategy. However, only eleven student participants from University A (13.3%) reported that they learned about the university for the first time through education fairs. Education fairs were ranked six among the twelve ways of how students heard about the university. In the case of University B, on-site education fairs were reported by students as one of the least effective ways of learning about the university.

In the past forty years, study abroad educational fairs have been dominating the international student recruitment. The fairs provide platforms for colleges and universities to market to a wide range of students from high schoolers to college students. Nowadays, college fairs can be found in all shapes and sizes in every region of the world. However, there is an ongoing debate among international student recruiters as well as among students about the value of on-site educational fairs in the age of wide access to web content, virtual tours, videos, webinars and chat rooms (Barnard, 2018). The size of the audiences for on-site educational fairs has become unpredictable; and empty venues are often reported from some educational fairs in some regions of the world. There is now a question as to whether investing in overseas educational fairs a good return on investment (Choudaha, 2017).

However, many practitioners still believe that in-person recruitment fairs should not be undervalued because human interaction is important and takes precedence over

technology (QsineWS, 2019). In addition, virtual fairs are still emerging and have not yet become one of the most popular ways of student recruitment. Only three out of 83 students (3.6%) from University A and two out of 48 students (4.2%) from University B learned about the university through virtual educational fairs. As this is being written, Covid-19 is now prevalent to the extent that future outreach approaches such as recruiting through virtual fairs are likely to become much more the norm replacing in-person contacts and travel.

**Partner University Program.** Only six out of 83 students (7.2%) from University A reported that they learned about the university through information provided by their previous colleges. In a contrast, 11 out of 48 students (23%) from University B selected this approach as the way they heard about the university. The finding indicates that this outreach approach worked for University B, but not very well for University A. This resonates with the findings of both executives' perceptions. According to the interviews, Executive A perceived an institutional partnership approach as only moderately effective because not many students from partner universities have applied although many agreements have been signed and scholarships have been offered in the past three years. In contrast, Executive B perceived that this approach has been effective in the past years.

One possible reason could explain the different outcomes. As Executive A stated, the international office team was relatively new and the partner university programs were established by the new team. However, University B has a long-standing and consistent international team that established partner programs and maintained them for years.

Because interpersonal relationships are critical to the success of partner programs, it takes both time and the right people to build up the relationships necessary to be successful.

Establishing partner university programs have become more prioritized for international student recruitment in the past two decades, especially for recruiting students from East Asian based on the researcher's professional experience. Most of University A's and University B's partner universities are located in China and South Korea. In the past twenty years, many universities have switched from individually recruiting students to group recruitment through partnerships with specific universities. For example, as larger recruitment agencies now dominate the market, many smaller-sized study abroad agencies in China have switched their business model from traditional individual student recruitment to helping establish programs between universities. As supported by student interview data, another possible reason contributing to the rise of partner program strategy is that students tend to trust partner university study abroad programs more. For example, one student stated: "My current university is one of my Chinese university's partner universities and through a seminar held on campus I paid attention to it. I chose University B with no hesitation because I feel protected by joining a partner university program. My home university advisor provided me guidance throughout my study abroad process."

**Social Media Campaigns.** The social media approach was rated low by student participants from both universities. While Executive A did not perceive social media campaign as a prioritized outreach strategy, Executive B reported that he perceived social media as a prioritized strategy, specifically the use of WhatsApp by a university recruiter.

However, Executive B further explained that they were not investing funds for social media advertisement, instead primarily using social media platforms to answer inquiries. This use is not considered a social media campaign approach and may explain the divergence between executive and student perceptions.

In the last decade, social media has become an integral part of the marketing strategy and is seen by many recruiters as an essential element of their outreach approaches. Most professional associations (e.g. NAFSA, NACAC, etcetera.), provide workshops, seminars, or conference panels for effective social media outreach tools. According to the best practice presented by experts, social media tools are best used in combination with more traditional forms of marketing such as e-mail, print materials, and in-person recruiting activities (Choudaha, 2017). The findings of low rated social media exposure by students may indicate that both universities have not found effective ways to utilize social media platform. This may be something that other similar universities may work on in the future.

**Section Summary.** Both universities prioritized workable outreach approaches: (a) providing an informative university website, (b) working with commissioned agencies, and (c) working with partner university programs. Neither university took full advantage of social media campaign as an outreach approach, which were seen by students as an increasingly popular way to investigate choices. This suggests that: (a) Universities should survey students each semester to learn up to date information about how students heard about the university; (b) universities with similar profiles should allocate more resources for social media campaigns as a potential outreach approach.



Importantly, the use of on-site educational fairs, the traditional dominant outreach strategy, was not popular among students. This suggests university decision makers consider decreasing resources dedicated to on-site educational fairs.

### **Stage 2 Incorporating Results of RQ1b, RQ2b, and RQ3b**

The research questions related to Stage 2 are:

RQ1b: What are university administrator perceptions of conversion strategies?

RQ2b: What factors do student perceive as the most influential in their final college choice?

RQ3b: How do students' and administrators' perspectives converge and diverge in Stage 2: conversion strategies and making final choice?

The findings revealed both convergences and divergences in both cases between executive perceptions and student perceptions in Stage 2. As previously noted, in the University A, only scholarships for international students and tuition rate strategies were consistent between executive and student perceptions; in the University B, only scholarships for international students was consistent to some extent, however, not completely. One possible reason to explain the outstanding divergences in all other strategies between executives' and students' perceptions is that university policy makers usually allocate resources to strategies mostly based on personal experience or recommendations as both executive reported. Therefore, this suggests universities conduct student surveys inside of the university to learn up to date information in order to tailor university strategies. Several implications of the convergences and divergences are complex which are discussed below.

**Reducing Total Cost.** There is no doubt that the higher education cost is expensive in the United States. According to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's latest records in 2019, The United States spends more per student on colleges and universities than other countries in the world. Cost is one of the major concerns that influenced international student college choice based on existing studies (Agrey & Lampadan, 2014; Chen, 2007; James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017; Lee, 2014).

The findings of the study revealed that Executive A perceived reducing total cost for international students as the most prioritized strategy for enrollment conversion at University A and perceived this strategy as effective. Reciprocally, University A students rated the cost related factors as the most influential factors in deciding to attend. Perhaps unsurprisingly, confirming Executive A's perception, University A's scholarship offers were rated by students as the most influential factor that have helped with student college choice. This indicated the strategy of reducing international student total cost by providing considerable scholarships has worked and explains the striking increase of international student enrollment to a great extent in the past four years in University A.

Executive B perceived that although the scholarship strategy was a high priority in the past four years, the results were ineffective. On one hand, scholarships in the past four years were heavily based on merit, which kept many applicants from receiving the awards. On the other hand, even if some students received scholarships, the tuition rate has been increasing in the past three years which made the total cost still too high to afford in many cases. Executive B perceived that the increase in tuition as well as insufficient scholarship offers were the major reasons that led to the decrease in the total

student enrollment in the past three years. The only cost-related factor that was rated among the top five most influential factors was the cost of living in the local city, which is something that University B has little control over. The result from University B student ratings supported Executive B's perceptions. Neither scholarship opportunity nor tuition rate was rated as the five most influential factors by students. University B is now adjusting their strategy by reducing their tuition rate to offer a competitive rate compared to peer universities. The international team expects a bounce back of international student enrollment by the tuition decrease. This indicates that University B policy makers recognize the importance of cost to students' college choice.

**Commissioned Agents Strategy.** In the United States, some colleges and universities partner with commissioned agents to recruit international students is part of a multifaceted enrollment strategy, according to National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC). The value of commissioned agents has been recognized by actors in the student recruitment market in helping higher education institutions to increase international student enrollment (Hulme et.al., 2014). In the case of University A, Executive A perceived the strategy of using commissioned agents as only moderately effective based on data that 20% of applicants were referred by commissioned agents, while fewer than 14% referred students are enrolled. In the case of University B, 50% of applicants were referred by commissioned agents, however, the enrollment rate stays very low that less than 5% referred students are enrolled. Although, agents was rated as one of the most common approaches that students heard about the university, this was not an influential factor in deciding which university was chosen.

Therefore, student perceptions of agent influence is consistent with both executives' perception of the effectiveness of commissioned agent strategy.

Based on the student interview findings, agencies usually assisted students to apply to multiple universities. As stated by Executive A, because of the profit-driven nature of commission agencies, agents usually recommend students to enroll at whichever university pays the most commission. The findings suggest working with commissioned agents is an effective outreach approach for universities, however, not an effective conversion strategy.

**Campus Climate Influential Category.** Surprisingly, influential factors under the campus climate influential category were rated among the five most influential factors by students in both universities. In contrast, no executive perceived this category as most prioritized. Campus safety was rated as the most influential factor among all influential factors by University B student participants, followed by campus environment for international students. Staff attitudes was rated as the fourth most influential factor by students. Although Executive B did not perceive campus safety as a university top prioritized strategy, he did perceive it as a high university priority and stated university recruiters utilized campus safety as a highlight during recruitment activities.

In the case of University A, campus environment for international students and staff attitudes were also rated among the top influential factors. Student interviewees also reported university campus environment as one of the university strengths. However, Executive A perceived campus climate strategic categories as only a moderate priority for recruitment. One possible explanation to this divergence is that campus safety,

environment for international students, and staff attitudes towards international students are not under the control of most international offices. For example, neither university incorporates international student enrollment and services in their strategic plans. This indicates that international divisions in universities with similar profiles need to make continuous efforts to promote campus internationalization to help improve the situation.

**Academic Programs.** The findings of the student survey also revealed that choice of academic programs was among the most influential factors--rated fifth in the case of University B and ninth in the case of university A. Data from the student in-depth interviews supported the findings. Individual academic program availability as well as quality and reputation were reported as the most important reasons that students overcame hesitations and decided to enroll. This suggests that university international practitioners should work with individual programs and involve more faculty to interact with potential students in order to improve the conversion rate.

**Administrative Effectiveness.** None of the administrative effectiveness-related factors were rated by students in the top ten influential factors; neither were they among the least influential factors. This diverged from executive perceptions that application process efficiency and technology support were perceived to be among the top five prioritized and effective strategies to attract students. This is possibly because students view the application system, admission process, and staff guidance as basic infrastructure of every university. This suggests colleges keep up with administrative effectiveness in technology and efficiency to maintain basic customer service expectations.

Another possible explanation for the divergence in views is the actual resources that have been devoted to administrative effectiveness were not as much as executives perceived. For example, based on the findings in the case of University A, there is only one part-time admission staff member for international undergraduate admission work processing over 1,300 applications per year. However, Executive A perceived the resource input to international admission efficiency as the third highest priority.

In contrast, in the case of University B, there are two full-time international undergraduate admission staff members processing about 900 applications per year. Executive B perceived the resource input to international admission efficiency the fifth highest priority. Similarly, for the technology support to administrative effectiveness, both executives perceived it as one of top priorities in the university. However, University A only has an interactive application system for graduate admissions, but not for international undergraduate admissions. In contrast, at University B, both international graduate admissions and undergraduate admissions use the same interactive application systems. An interactive application system allows applicants to upload their application documents through the system directly and check their application status. An interactive system helps staff members to improve work efficiency to a great extent and currently have been employed in higher education (Britt, 2018). This suggest the university decision makers should learn from peer universities and find out the general resource input to improve the administrative effectiveness .

**Group differences (Gender, Country of Origin, Student Entry Type).** The findings discovered statistically significant differences based on gender, student entry

types and countries of origins. The groups differences of influential factors incorporate three sub-questions under RQ2b:

RQ2b-1: Do influential factors differ by gender?

RQ2b-2: Do influential factors differ by category of applicant (e.g., graduate student, undergraduate student, or language student)?

RQ2b-3: Do influential factors differ by country of origin?

In a lone study looking student group comparisons in influential factors of college choice, Tan (2015) found male students consider recommendations from family less influential than female students; the study also found students in different academic levels perceived the most influential factors differently. The findings of the present study expand the evidence of group differences in the literature.

For gender, in the case of University A, female students perceived that university website guidance was statistically more influential than male students for their college choice. In the case of University B, female students perceived that on-campus employment opportunities as well as employment opportunities after graduation were more influential than male students.

For student entry type, statistically significant differences were identified with respect to most group factors, including reputation and academic profile, cost, campus climate, employment prospects, and international student support. For examples, undergraduate freshmen and graduate applicants perceived that university student qualifications were more influential than undergraduate transfer students for their college choice. Undergraduate freshman and graduate applicants also perceived scholarships for

international students more influential than ESL applicants. Undergraduate freshman and ESL applicants perceived campus environment for international students more influential than undergraduate transfer students. Undergraduate freshman and ESL students perceived international student support more influential than undergraduate transfer students.

For countries of origin, several statistically significant differences were identified although they were based on a limited sample size from each country. For examples, students from Nepal, India, and China perceived scholarships opportunities, on-campus employment opportunities and employment prospects after graduation statistically more influential in their college choice than students from Saudi Arabia. The study also revealed that students from China, Nepal, and Saudi Arabia perceived social links (e.g. having friends or students from home country at the university) more influential than students from Germany. Students from Nepal, India, and China perceived employment opportunities after graduation more influential in their college choice than students from Saudi Arabia.

It was anticipated to discover group differences in influential factors of students' college choice. Although one or two factor differences were revealed by gender group in each university, those differences do not play a significant role for tailoring recruitment strategies because none of the three influential factors with differences in gender were among the most influential factor list rated by students. However, the influential factor differences in student entry type and countries of origin provide essential reference for recruiters. For example, for undergraduate transfer students, what matters most for their



college choice usually are: (a) How many credits can be transferred to the new university, and (b) how fast the credit transfer process can be completed. In contrast, because undergraduate freshman, graduate students, and ESL students started their education in the university, their focus is on scholarships, on-campus employment opportunities, campus environment, and student services.

Regarding differences by countries of origin, students from different countries have different emphasis when selecting a university due to the different culture. For example, a Nigeria student stated in the interview that Nigerian students do not care about university rankings at all. Affordability is the major factor to their college choice. In contrast, students from Saudi Arabia did not perceive affordability as influential as students from other countries (Nepal, India, China and Germany). A possible reason could explain this. The cost of college education of majority students from Saudi Arabia are sponsored by their government. Therefore, compared to financially self-sponsored students, tuition and scholarships are not the major concern to them.

The findings of group differences suggest that universities should customize conversion strategies based on the most influential factors by certain student entry types and counties of origins. Specifically, universities might create more informative website information about employment opportunities after graduation in order to recruit more female students or emphasize scholarship opportunities to attract undergraduate freshmen and graduate students from lower-resources countries. Universities should also promote good international student support system to attract more students from Saudi Arabia, Nepal, or China. Based on the interview data that students from certain countries value

social links to a great extent (i.e. helping community or network from people coming from a same home country), universities should consider to prioritize social links strategy for potential students from countries such as Saudi Arabia, Nepal, China, or Vietnam, by bridging them with current students who are from same home countries.

**Section Summary.** Based on findings from student and executive measures, the study suggests the following to maximize resource inputs for increased international student enrollment. First, there is no single formula for all universities. Thus, it is important for university policy makers to identify their distinctive market value and target international student population accordingly. For example, some universities might emphasize low cost, top regional ranking, top individual program rankings, while others emphasize campus safety and excellent international student services.

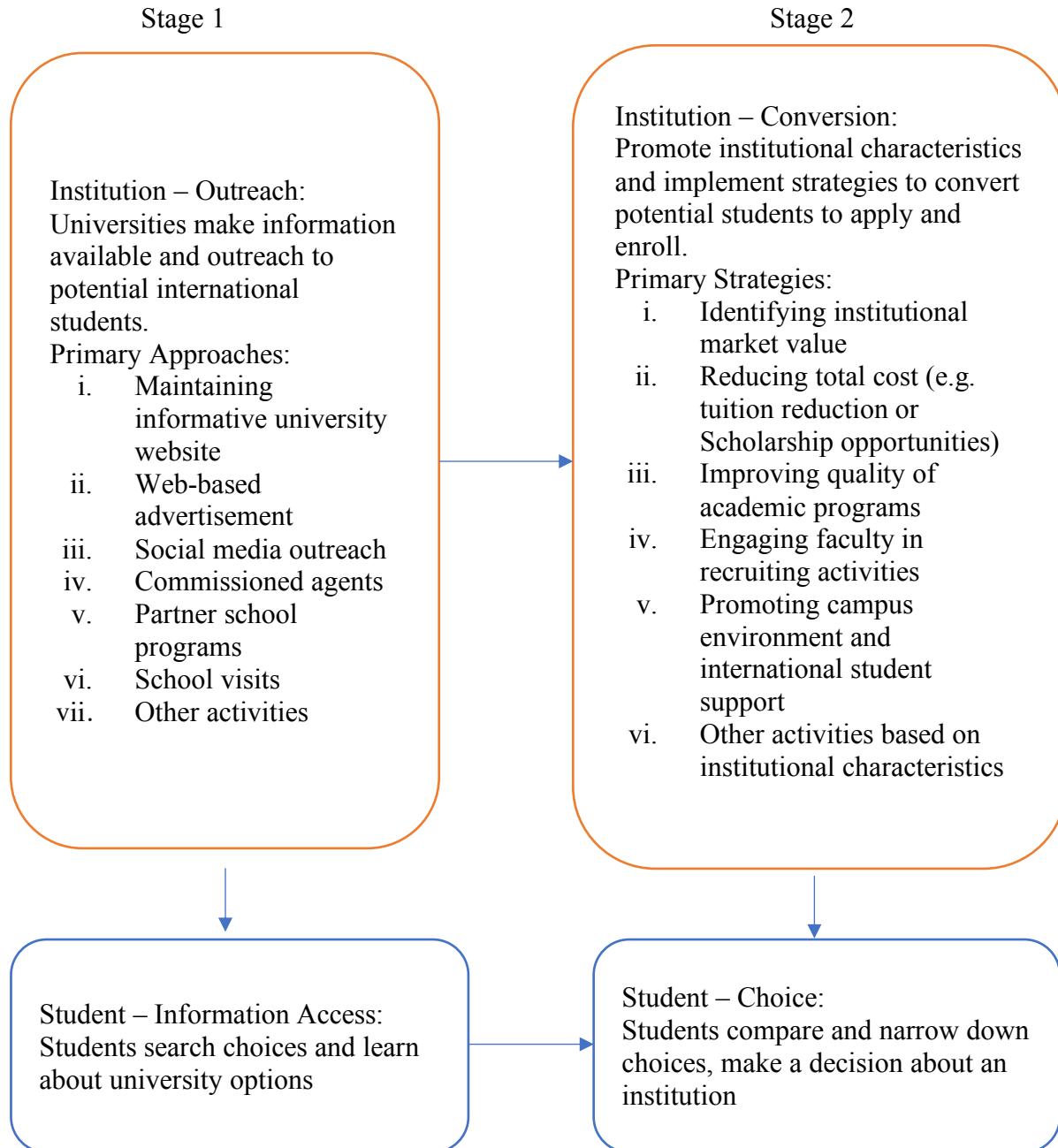
The findings imply several conversion strategies where colleges and universities with similar profiles as the two universities in this study can input more resources on. First, to reduce international students' total cost, either through providing scholarship opportunities or reducing tuition rates. Second, universities should focus on the improvement of individual academic programs. Third, universities should get faculty engaged in recruiting activities and increase interactions between faculty members and potential students. Fourth, universities should utilize the importance of campus environment to students and coordinate all related departments across campus in order to generate recruiting strategies that focused on campus safety and environment. Finally, universities should advertise international student services and caring systems as university strengths in recruitment activities.

Finally, the findings further imply that working with commission agents was proved to be an effective outreach approach, though not an effective conversion strategy. Focusing on improving administrative effectiveness should be considered as infrastructure rather than a conversion strategy. University policy makers should also customize recruiting strategies based on different regions and student entry types as influential factors differ based student characteristics.

### **Revised Model**

Based on the study's findings, the preliminary Two-Stage Model was revised and renamed Jiang's Two-Stage Enrollment Model (See Figure 5.1) after university primary approaches were validated by research data of the study. The primary outreach approaches for universities in Stage 1 were revised to: maintaining informative university website, web-based advertisement, social media outreach, commissioned agents, partner school programs, school visits, and other customized activities based on a university's distinctive character. The primary conversion strategies for universities in Stage 2 were revised to: identifying institutional market value, reducing total cost (e.g. tuition reduction or Scholarship opportunities), improving quality of academic programs, engaging faculty in recruiting activities, promoting campus environment and international student support, and other activities based on the institutional characteristics.

**Figure 5.1 Jiang's Two-Stage Enrollment Model**



## **Contributions**

The study contributes to the existing literature in several ways. First, this study created new knowledge regarding how university strategies and influential factors for students' college choice converge and diverge. Second, the study adapted a two-stage theoretical framework (see Figure 1.1) from the existing literature. No existing literature clearly differentiated outreach approaches and conversion strategies regarding university international student enrollment. Third, the study created Jiang's Two-Stage Enrollment Model (see Figure 5.1) based on the findings. The revised model provides primary outreach and conversion strategies suggested by the study based on the evidence. Fourth, the study added to the very limited and mostly qualitative literature with a mixed research method.

The study also makes a contribution in providing similar universities with a set of tools (e.g. the model, student survey, and executive interviews) to assist university policy makers, institutional planners, and international education practitioners to implement or tailor strategies for international student enrollment. Additionally, the study identified current workable outreach approaches and conversation strategies verified through student data. Finally, the study provided evidence that influential factors differ by study entry types and countries of origins. This can assist international student recruiters to customize their recruiting materials emphasis based on different student groups.

## **Limitations**

While contributing scientific evidence to the area of international student enrollment, the study does have several limitations. First, the sample size of executives

was a limitation. However, Patton (2014) stated: “there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry” because the sample size depends on the specific purpose of inquiry, the credibility of informants, and the availability of time and resources (p.311). The study interviewed the two executives who have the most knowledge of their university international student enrollment. And the executive perceptions also served as contextual information for the study rather than statistical data. The investigator also followed up with executive several times for data validity purposes before confirming the final transcripts.

Second, the student sample size based on countries of origin is limited which only allowed a comparison analysis of just a few countries. However, this limitation is inevitable because the overall student countries of origin at each university are unevenly distributed. To reduce the impact of the limitation, the study conducted in-depth student interviews to increase the data validity.

A third limitation is self-reported data. Students were surveyed at various stages of their college studies from newly enrolled to seniors. As a result, some of these responses were several years from the actual decision of selecting the university, and student recall may not be accurately reflected. Finally, as only enrolled international students were surveyed, their actual campus experience may have impacted their responses either positively or negatively.

### **Recommendation for Future Study**

For future studies, the following strategies are recommended. Although colleges and universities in the United States share some commonalities, there are also significant

differences among institutions regarding international student enrollment. Further research is required to determine applicability of Jiang's Two-Stage Enrollment Model to other institutions in size, ranking, cohort, market value, country, and university location. For university prioritized strategies, future researchers may interview multiple related decision makers from one university and collect quantified information on resource inputs to increase data reliability.

Future studies might enlarge the sample size by including students who were admitted but did not choose the university. This can help get more insights into strategies that institutions might have missed and what could be improved. The study also recommends to survey students who are newly enrolled or admitted, but not enrolled for no more than one semester. This would most likely help create better information because student perceptions would be recorded closer to the actual decision and not likely to be affected by on-campus experience. A larger sample size from each country of origin is also recommended for future studies to conduct comparison analyses. Finally, the study suggests that future research provide alternative methods for in-depth student interviews besides phone calls. Most ESL students and newly enrolled student participants addressed their nervousness through E-mails. They were not confident talking on the phone due to their limited listening and speaking skills.

### **Conclusions**

Currently, most colleges and universities are facing challenges to maintain or increase international student enrollment. With limited resources, universities must learn how to allocate resource inputs and maximize the outputs. This study conducted research

in two universities located in Midwestern United States. The study discovered administrator perceptions of university outreach approaches and conversion strategies regarding their priorities and effectiveness. The study then explored student perceptions through student survey and in-depth interviews. It discovered most popular ways that students learned about the university and most influential factors for them to make enrollment decisions. Based on data, the study revealed the convergences and divergences between the administrator perceptions and student perceptions.

From perceptions of executives, the study showed detailed international student enrollment strategies for outreach and conversion strategies. The two executives perceived four common top prioritized outreach approaches: maintaining an informative university website, working with commissioned agents, attending on-site educational fair overseas, and working on partner university programs. In the case of University A, student perceptions converged with administrator perceptions with respect to their emphasis on the university website and commission agents; however, diverged in other outreach approaches. The most popular way of learning about a university reported by students was through family, relatives, and friends, followed by university website, agents, and website advertisements.

In the case of University B, student perceptions converged with administrator perceptions with respect to three approaches: partner university programs, university website, and commission agents; however, they diverged with respect to other outreach approaches. The most popular way of learning about a university reported by students



was also through family, relatives, and friends, followed by partner university programs, university website, and commission agents.

Regarding conversion strategies, Executive A's perceptions and student perceptions converged in cost related factors. Students also perceived campus environment for international students, international student support services, employment opportunities, and academic programs as among the top influential factors, which diverged from the list of most prioritized strategies perceived by the executive. The most influential factor that University B student participants rated was campus safety, followed by campus environment for international students, academic programs, scholarships, learning environment, student support services, and professor reputations. These perceptions to a great extent diverged from the executive perceptions about the top prioritized conversation strategies. Influential factors differences by student entry types and countries of origin were also revealed and discussed.

The findings of the study provided evidence and recommendations for policy makers in universities with similar profiles. To successfully attract more international students, colleges and universities are recommended to recognize their own market value, emphasize values of academic programs, get departments and faculty involved in the recruitment process, maintain good student services, and finally customize strategies based on different student types and countries of origin.

## APPENDICES

Appendix A

**In-person Interview Questions for Executives**

**Part I – Information about You**

1. Please confirm your work title and university  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. How many years have you been working on international student enrollment?  
\_\_\_\_years
3. How many years have you worked at your current position? \_\_\_\_years

**Part II – Branding Efforts**

4. Is your institution currently employing or has it employed any of the following outreach approaches to potential international students? If yes, please rate how each item has been prioritized based on the following scoring scale: 1. Not a priority; 2. Low priority; 3. Somewhat priority; 4. Neutral; 5. Moderate priority; 6. High priority; and 7. Essential priority. Please specify additional strategies which are not addressed here.

a. Informative university website	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6	<input type="checkbox"/> 7
b. Google AdWords Advertisement	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6	<input type="checkbox"/> 7
c. Facebook Campaign	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6	<input type="checkbox"/> 7
d. YouTube Campaign	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6	<input type="checkbox"/> 7

e. Attending virtual international student recruitment fairs	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6	<input type="checkbox"/> 7
f. Traveling to international student recruitment fairs on site	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6	<input type="checkbox"/> 7
g. Working with commissioned agencies	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6	<input type="checkbox"/> 7
h. Investing third-party online Ad platforms	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6	<input type="checkbox"/> 7
i. Partner university program	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6	<input type="checkbox"/> 7
j. Other, specify							

5. Please rank those most prioritized strategies you just indicated.

Top 1: \_\_\_\_\_ (most prioritized)

Top 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Top 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Top 4: \_\_\_\_\_

Top 5: \_\_\_\_\_

...(Least prioritized)

### Part III Enrollment Strategies

6. What is the enrollment conversation rate in the past four semesters (F19, S19, F18, and S18)? (e.g., How many applications you received and how many students ended up enrolled?)

7. Has your university set up a goal for international student enrollment?
  - 7.1 If yes, what is it? And have you achieved the goal in the past 3 or 4 years?
8. Please check the box for each question and answer the follow-up question if applicable.

**8.1 Reputation and Academic Profile** (e.g. university ranking, students' qualifications, academic program reputation, research facilities, learning environment, faculty qualifications, etcetera.)

- a. How has your institution prioritized the resources support to improve the academic profile? Please rate how each item has been prioritized based on the following scoring scale: 1. Not a priority; 2. Low priority; 3. Somewhat priority; 4. Neutral; 5. Moderate priority; 6. High priority; and 7. Essential priority.
- b. Please specify the strategies your institution has employed to improve the academic profile in the past four years, if any.
- c. In your perspective, how effective were the above strategies (if applicable)? Please rate how effective based on the following scoring scale: 1. Very ineffective; 2. Ineffective; 3. Somewhat ineffective; 4. Neutral; 5. Moderately effective; 6. Effective; and 7. Very effective.

**8.2 Cost** (e.g. Tuition rate, Application fee, Scholarships for international students, Employment opportunities on campus, etcetera.)

- a. How has your institution prioritized the resource supports related to reducing international student total costs? Please use the same rating scale as above.
  - a) Reducing tuition fee or other costs
  - b) Providing scholarships/assistantships
  - c) Increasing on-campus employment opportunities
- b. Please specify the measures which has been taken related to reducing international student total costs. Please be as detailed as possible.

- c. In your perspective, how effective were the above measures (if applicable) taken? Please use the same rating scale as above.

**8.3 Program Availability** (e.g. Choices of academic programs, Available ESL program, etcetera.)

- d. How has your institution prioritized the resource supports related to academic program availability to attract more international students?

Please use the same rating scale as above.

- a) Expanding or optimizing academic programs
- b) Expanding or optimizing ESL program

- b. Please specify the measures which have been taken related to academic program availability to attract more international students. Please be as detailed as possible.

- c. In your perspective, how effective were the measures (if applicable)?

**8.4 Individual Influence** (Working with commissioned agents, university faculty and students, university alumni, etcetera.)

- a. What is the average percentage of students referred by your university-signed agents in the past two years? \_\_\_\_\_
- b. What is the average percentage of students referred by Alumni?
- c. What is the average percentage of students referred by university faculty or staff?
- d. Please rate how your institution has prioritized the resources related to individual influence. Please use the same rating scale as above.
- e. In your perspective, how effective were the measures taken to increase enrollment through individual influence? Please use the same rating scale as above.

**8.5 Social Links** (e.g. Introducing and utilizing current student resources for potential international applicants from same countries, etcetera.)

- a. How has your institution prioritized the resource supports related to building students' social links? Please use the same rating scale as above.
- b. Please specify what platforms are available if any.
- c. In your perspective, how effective were these strategies (if applicable)? Please use the same rating scale as above.

**8.6 Administrative Effectiveness**

**8.6.1 Technology Input**

- a. How do prospective international students apply to your university?
  - 1 Through online application system (interactive). Please indicate what system you are using \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2 Through online application system (non-interactive). Please indicate what system you are using \_\_\_\_\_
  - 3 Using PDF forms;
  - 4 Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Please rate how your institution has prioritized the technology support for the international application system (e.g. providing informative and easy navigating website, interactive online application system, etc.). Please use the same rating scale as above.
- c. In your perspective, how effective were technology inputs (if applicable)? Please use the same rating scale as above.

**8.6.2 Staff Qualifications**

- a. How many full-time staff members are working as recruiters? \_\_\_\_\_
- b. How many part-time staff members are working as recruiters? \_\_\_\_\_
- c. How many full-time staff members are working for international admissions?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- d. How many part-time staff members are working for international admissions (including graduate assistants)? \_\_\_\_\_

- e. Do you have a documented protocol about customer service manners for your admissions staff?  Yes  No
- f. Do you provide professional training opportunities for international admissions staff (e.g., evaluation workshops, NAFSA conference, etc.)?  
 Yes  No

If yes, how often does each international admission staff member get trained?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ times per Month/Year (please circle one).

- g. Please rate how your institution has prioritized the assessment of international admission staff work. Please use the same rating scale as above.
- h. In your perspective, how effective has your professional development for international admission staff been? Please use the same rating scale as above.

### **8.6.3 Processing Efficiency**

- a. What is your average response time for admission inquiries? \_\_\_\_\_ Business day(s)
- b. What is your turn-around time for international undergraduate admissions after a student's application is marked complete? \_\_\_\_\_ Day(s)
- c. What is your turn-around time for international graduate admissions after a student's application marked complete? \_\_\_\_\_ Day(s)
- d. Please rate how your institution has prioritized the support for international admission processing efficiency. Please use the same rating scale as above.
- e. In your perspective, how effective was your admission team work? Please use the same rating scale as above.

**8.7 Campus Climate** (e.g. campus safety, suitable environment for international students, portion of international students, staff attitudes towards international students, university facilities, etc.)

- a. What efforts has your institution made to improve campus climate?
- b. Please rate how your institution has prioritized Campus Climate for international students. Please use the same rating scale as above.



c. In your perspective, how effective were these efforts (if applicable)? Please use the same rating scale as above.

**8.8 Employment Prospects** (e.g. Employment opportunities after graduation)

- a. How has your institution prioritized the resource supports to improve employment opportunities for international student after graduation (including internship)? Please use the same rating scale as above.
- b. Please specify what policies have been issued if any.
- c. In your perspective, how effective were these strategies (if applicable)? Please use the same rating scale as above.

**8.9 International Student Support** (e.g. immigration compliance services, academic support, cultural activities, etc.)

- a. Please specify what resources have been put in places for international Student Support.
- d. b. Please rate how your institution has prioritized these services. Please use the same rating scale as above.
- c. In your perspective, how effective were your international student support strategies? Please use the same rating scale as above.

**8.10 Institutional Partnerships** (Student mobility programs with partner universities)

- a. How has your institution prioritized the resource supports to partner university student mobility programs? Please use the same rating scale as above.
- b. Please specify what benefits (e.g. tuition waiver, scholarships, etc.) your institution provides to partner university students or to partner universities.
- c. In your perspective, how effective were these strategies (if applicable)? Please use the same rating scale as above.

**8.11 Other**

Please specify if there are any other strategies your institution has employed to improve international student enrollment?

**9.** Please rank the TOP 5 most prioritized strategies we just discussed.

Top 1: \_\_\_\_\_ (most prioritized)

Top 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Top 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Top 4: \_\_\_\_\_

Top 5: \_\_\_\_\_ (Least prioritized)

**10.** With limited budget, how did the decision maker(s) at your university decide the allocation of resources for different strategies to improve international student enrollment? (Check one or more boxes)

- 1-based on research conducted inside of the university
- 2-based on research conducted outside of the university
- 3-based on personal experience or recommendations
- 4-based on best practice learned from peer universities
- 5- Other, please specify:

**11.** Do you apply different marketing strategies for different countries or regions? If yes, please specify.

**12.** Have there been any changes in recruiting strategies in the past four years? If so, what have they involved?

**13.** What strengths do you think your institution has that are attractive to international students?

**14.** Please specify what any challenges you are facing to attract international students to your institution.

Thank you very much for your contribution!

## Appendix B

The student survey below was exported from Qualtrics Survey Tool.

### **Survey of International Student College Choice**

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Start of Block: Default Question Block

#### **Factors Influencing International Student College Choice**

##### **KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCH STUDY**

**Voluntary Consent:** Dr. Mark Small is inviting you to volunteer for a research study. Dr. Mark Small is a Professor and Director of Institute on Family and Neighborhood life at Clemson University conducting the study with Ms. Shuiping Jiang. You may choose not to take part and you may choose to stop taking part at any time. You will not be punished in any way if you decide not to be in the study or to stop taking part in the study.

**Alternative to Participation:** Participation is voluntary and the only alternative is to not participate.

**Study Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to discover: (a) factors influencing international student college choice; (b) administrator perceptions of the goals and effectiveness of their international student enrollment strategies; (c) how those recruiting strategies associate to factors influencing student choice in medium-sized Master's universities in the United States.

**Activities and Procedures:** Your part in the study will be to provide your perspectives about what factors have influenced your decision in selecting your current university. You will be filling out the following survey to participate in this study. You may be invited to participate in a follow-up phone interview.

**Participation Time:** It will take you about 15 minutes to be in this study. If you agree to participate a follow-up phone interview and are invited, it will take you around 20-30 minutes to complete phone interview.

**Risks and Discomforts:** We do not know of any risks or discomforts to you in this research study.

**Possible Benefits:** You may not benefit directly for taking part in this study, however, your inputs are critical to help your college and other colleges to improve international student enrollment and diversify U.S. college campuses.

**EXCLUSION/INCLUSION REQUIREMENTS** There is no requirement to filling out this Survey. However, after this Survey is conducted, 10 students from your university will be invited to have in-depth interviews to provide in-depth

information. The following basic criteria will be applied to the selection of students for in-depth interviews: (a) Students must have completed the Student Survey; (a) students must have checked “Yes” to the last question of the Student Survey: “Would you like to be invited to a following up phone interview?” (c) Ten students will be selected from at least 5 different countries. **INCENTIVES** Invited students for follow-up phone interviews will receive a \$25 Amazon digital gift card in three weeks after the interview is completed.

**PROTECTION OF PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY** If you will participate to this survey only and do not plan to participate a follow-up phone interview, no identifiable information will be collected. This procedure will be anonymous. All data collected from this survey will be confidential. If you agree to participate the follow-up interview and are selected, you will need to provide your best contact email address to the investigator. Your name or your nickname is optional. Investigator will code your name or nickname as numbers in this study. Your email address will be deleted from the investigator’s research record three weeks after the follow-up interview is done. No identifiable information will be shown in the study. All data collected from the in-depth phone interview will be confidential. The results of this study may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations. The information collected during the study could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from the participants or legally authorized representative.

**CONTACT INFORMATION** If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-0636 or [irb@clemson.edu](mailto:irb@clemson.edu). If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC’s toll-free number, 866-297-3071. The Clemson IRB will not be able to answer some study-specific questions. However, you may contact the Clemson IRB if the research staff cannot be reached or if you wish to speak with someone other than the research staff. If you have any study related questions or if any problems arise, please contact Ms. Shuiping Jiang at Clemson University at [shuipij@g.clemson.edu](mailto:shuipij@g.clemson.edu).

**CONSENT** By clicking “I consent, begin the study” option below, you indicate that you have read the information written above, been allowed to ask any questions, and you are voluntarily choosing to take part in this research. If you do not want to participate this study, you may leave this page now.

- I consent, begin the study (1)
- I do not consent, I do not wish to participate (2)

Please select your institution from the list:

- 1. XXXXX University (1)
- 2. XXXXX University (2)

**End of Block: Default Question Block**

---

**Start of Block: Part I**

1. What year are you in college?

- 1 (1)
  - 2 (2)
  - 3 (3)
  - 4 (4)
  - 4+ (5)
-

2. Your Gender:

Male (1)

Female (2)

---

What country are you from?

▼ Afghanistan (1) ... Zimbabwe (1357)

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Page Break

4. What type of applicant were you when you applied to your current university?

- 1 Undergraduate Freshman (1)
- 2 Undergraduate Transfer student (2)
- 3 Graduate Student (3)
- 4 ESL Student (4)

5. Your Current Study Area

- 1 Business/Economics (1)
- 2 Liberal Arts & Social Sciences (2)
- 3 STEM (3)
- 4 Fine Arts (4)
- 5 Health Sciences (5)
- 6 Education (6)
- 7 ESL Program (7)
- 8 Other, specify (8) \_\_\_\_\_

6. How are you financing your current studies? Please select all that apply.

1 Parental support (1)

2 Self-financing (2)

3 Scholarships (3)

4 Government Sponsorship (4)

5 Other, please specify (5) \_\_\_\_\_



7. How did you learn about your current university? Please select all that apply.

- a. Family, relatives, or friends (1)
- b. University Alumni (2)
- c. Agent (3)
- d. Website Advertisement (4)
- e. Online search engine (web-links) (5)
- f. University Website (6)
- g. Facebook (7)
- h. YouTube Advertisement (8)
- i. Online/virtual Educational Fair (9)
- j. Educational Fair (on site) (10)

k. Your previous school/college (11)

l. Other, please specify (12) \_\_\_\_\_

**End of Block: Part II**

---

**Start of Block: Part III-1**

8. To how many other universities did you apply to the same term as you applied to your current university?

\_\_\_\_\_

9. How many admission offers have you received from other universities for the same term?

\_\_\_\_\_

10. Please respond to the questions below and indicate how important each item was in helping you make your final college choice. Please mark only one response on each item.

-----

10.1 Reputation and Academic Profile

	Not impor tant at all 1 (1)	Low importance 2 (2)	Slightly important 3 (3)	Neutral 4 (4)	Moderately important 5 (5)	Important 6 (6)	Very important 7 (7)
a. Overall ranking (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Student qualifications (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Its reputation in my home country (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Research facilities (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Learning environment (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. Professors' reputation (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10.2 Cost

	Not important at all 1 (1)	Low importance 2 (2)	Slightly important 3 (3)	Neutral 4 (4)	Moderately important 5 (5)	Important 6 (6)	Very important 7 (7)
a. Tuition rate (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Application fee (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Scholarships for international students (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. On-campus employment opportunities (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Cost of living in this city (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10.3 Program Availability

	Not important at all 1 (1)	Low importance 2 (2)	Slightly important 3 (3)	Neutral 4 (4)	Moderately important 5 (5)	Important 6 (6)	Very important 7 (7)
a. Choices of academic programs (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Available ESL program (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



10.4 Reference Group

	Not important at all 1 (1)	Low importance 2 (2)	Slightly important 3 (3)	Neutral 4 (4)	Moderately important 5 (5)	Important 6 (6)	Very important 7 (7)
a. Recommendation from family or relatives (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Recommendation from friends (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Recommendation from university alumni (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Recommendation from my study abroad agent (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10.5 Social Links

	Not important at all 1 (1)	Low importance 2 (2)	Slightly important 3 (3)	Neutral 4 (4)	Moderately important 5 (5)	Important 6 (6)	Very important 7 (7)
a. There are students from my home country on campus (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. I have friends at this university (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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10.6 Administrative Effectiveness

	Not important at all 1 (1)	Low importance 2 (2)	Slightly important 3 (3)	Neutral 4 (4)	Moderately important 5 (5)	Important 6 (6)	Very important 7 (7)
a. Guidance from the international admission website (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Guidance from the online application system (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Guidance from admission staff members (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. The application process (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10.7 Campus Climate



	Not important at all 1 (1)	Low importance 2 (2)	Slightly important 3 (3)	Neutral 4 (4)	Moderately important 5 (5)	Important 6 (6)	Very important 7 (7)
a. Campus safety (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Campus environment for international students (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Number of international students studying at this university (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Staff attitude towards international students (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. University facilities (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10.8 Employment Prospects

	Not important at all 1 (1)	Low importance 2 (2)	Slightly important 3 (3)	Neutral 4 (4)	Moderately important 5 (5)	Important 6 (6)	Very important 7 (7)
a. Employment opportunities after graduation (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10.9 International Student Support

	Not important at all 1 (1)	Low importance 2 (2)	Slightly important 3 (3)	Neutral 4 (4)	Moderately important 5 (5)	Important 6 (6)	Very important 7 (7)
a. International student support services (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. International student activities (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10.10 Physical Geography

	Not important at all 1 (1)	Low importance 2 (2)	Slightly important 3 (3)	Neutral 4 (4)	Moderately important 5 (5)	Important 6 (6)	Very important 7 (7)
a. Location of the university (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Reputation of the city (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10.11 Institutional Partnerships

	Not important at all 1 (1)	Low importance 2 (2)	Slightly important 3 (3)	Neutral 4 (4)	Moderately important 5 (5)	Important 6 (6)	Very important 7 (7)
a. Partner school program (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

---

**10.12 Only Choice--**

This is the only university that offered me admission.

1. Yes (1)

2. No (2)

---

**10.13 Other factor(s) Other reason(s), please specify**

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**End of Block: Part III-1**

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**Start of Block: Part III-2**

11. Please rank the following primary factors that have affected your college decision in order of importance from 1 most important to 13 least important or does not apply. You may drag one item to move up and down.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Reputation and Academic Profile (1)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Cost (2)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Program Availability (3)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Individual Influence (4)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Social Links (5)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Administrative Effectiveness (6)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Campus Climate (7)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Employment Prospects (8)
- \_\_\_\_\_ International Student Support (9)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Physical Geography (10)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Institutional Partnerships (11)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Only Choice (12)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other factor(s) (13)

-----

12. Are there any factors about this university discouraged you from making your decision of selecting it? If Yes, please specify.

\_\_\_\_\_

**End of Block: Part III-2**

---

**Start of Block: Part IV**

13. I have been satisfied about my decision of selecting this university.

- 1 Strongly disagree (1)
  - 2 Disagree (2)
  - 3 Somewhat disagree (3)
  - 4 Neither agree nor disagree (4)
  - 5 Somewhat agree (5)
  - 6 Agree (6)
  - 7 Strongly agree (7)
- 

14. How likely that you will recommend your current university to your relatives or friends?

- 1 Not likely (1)
- 2 Maybe, it depends (2)
- 3 Yes, definitely (3)

15. What are the strengths of your current university that make you feel that you made a good decision (if applicable)? Please provide as much detail as possible.

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16. In what area(s) could your current university do a better job to attract more international students? Please provide as much detail as possible.

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17. Would you like to be invited to a follow-up phone interview? Selected interviewees will receive \$25 Amazon gift card.

Yes (1)

No (2)

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*Display This Question:*

*If 17. Would you like to be invited to a follow-up phone interview? Selected interviewees will rece... = Yes*

17.1 If checked “Yes,” please provide your best contact email address:

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**End of Block: Part IV**

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## Appendix C

### **Questions for Student Follow-up Interviews**

#### **Your Code X-01**

1. In the first survey you completed, you indicated that you learned about your current university through *\*\*\*Customized field\*\*\**. Could you please describe in detail how you got to know your university for the first time? (e.g., Through what event(s), individual, or other sources did you become familiar with your current university?)
2. After learned this university for the first time, at what point did you decide to apply? How did you learn more details to help you decide whether to apply later on?
3. In what ways, in your perspective, could your university outreach to more student or parent population in your home country?
4. You indicate a few factors are the most important factors that have affected your decision to attend this university. What do you think the important factors would be for other students from your country? Will they be the same or similar as yours?
5. When you received the admission offer, did you make you mind to accept it immediately, or did you have any hesitation? If you had hesitation, could you please share with me what made you hesitated and how did you still decided to come to your current university?

What did your university attract you most before you come here and discovered more its other strengths?

6. What are the strengths that your current university has however you did not know when you were applying for it? In other words, what selling points do you think you university has them but has not advertised which will actually help your university attract more international students?
7. In what areas that you think your university should establish or do better so that they can be advertised and help attract more international students?

## Appendix D

### Information about Being in a Research Study Clemson University-Executive **Factors Influencing International Student College Choice**

#### **KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCH STUDY**

**Voluntary Consent:** Dr. Mark Small is inviting you to volunteer for a research study. Dr. Mark Small is a Professor and Director of Institute on Family and Neighborhood life at Clemson University conducting the study with Ms. Shuiping Jiang. You may choose not to take part and you may choose to stop taking part at any time. You will not be punished in any way if you decide not to be in the study or to stop taking part in the study.

**Alternative to Participation:** Participation is voluntary and the only alternative is to not participate.

**Study Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to discover: (a) factors influencing international student college choice; (b) administrator perceptions of the goals and effectiveness of their international student enrollment strategies; (c) how those recruiting strategies associate to factors influencing student choice in medium-sized Master's universities in the United States.

**Activities and Procedures:** Your part in the study will be to provide your perspectives about what recruiting strategies your institutional have prioritized and employed in the past few years, how effective they were, and whether your institutional goal of international student enrollment has been fulfilled. I would like to schedule an online video interview (one on one) with you to learn those in details.

**Participation Time:** It will take you about one and half hour to be in this study.

**Risks and Discomforts:** We do not know of any risks or discomforts to you in this research study.

**Possible Benefits:** This study will help peer universities understand influence of factors on different international student populations, adjust resource investments for international student enrollment to maximize the enrollment, and hopefully tailor their strategies to improve diversity among international student population. The findings of this research will be shared with you which in return may provide useful information for you and your team to effectively tailor recruiting strategies for future international students.

## **INCENTIVES**

The findings of this research will be shared with you.

## **AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDING AND PHOTOGRAPHS**

Our online video interview will be recorded for the purpose of information accuracy because of the nature of heavy text. The recorded data will be confidential and will not be shared with any other individual nor be shared publicly. The investigator will send you the transcript to confirm the accuracy in three weeks after the interview. After the accuracy of transcription is confirmed, the recording data will be deleted from investigator's WebEx account.

## **PROTECTION OF PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

The results of this study may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations. The one on one online video call interview will be conducted in a private setting to protect privacy. The recorded interview will be confidential. The recorded data will be stored in the investigator's personal WebEx (online video meeting tool) account which requires username and password to access and is not shared with any other individual. After the accuracy of transcription is confirmed, the recording data which contains identifiable information will be removed from investigator's WebEx account. The de-identified information will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-0636 or [irb@clemson.edu](mailto:irb@clemson.edu). If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC's toll-free number, 866-297-3071. The Clemson IRB will not be able to answer some study-specific questions. However, you may contact the Clemson IRB if the research staff cannot be reached or if you wish to speak with someone other than the research staff.

If you have any study related questions or if any problems arise, please contact Ms. Shuiping Jiang at Clemson University at [shuipij@g.clemson.edu](mailto:shuipij@g.clemson.edu).

## **CONSENT**

**By participating in the study, you indicate that you have read the information written above, been allowed to ask any questions, and you are voluntarily choosing to take part in this research. You do not give up any legal rights by taking part in this research study.**

A copy of this form will be given to you.

## Appendix E

### Script-Information about Being in a Research Study Clemson University

#### **Factors Influencing International Student College Choice**

##### **KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCH STUDY**

**Voluntary Consent:** Dr. Mark Small is inviting you to volunteer for a research study. Dr. Mark Small is a Professor and Director of Institute on Family and Neighborhood life at Clemson University conducting the study with Ms. Shuiping Jiang. You may choose not to take part and you may choose to stop taking part at any time. You will not be punished in any way if you decide not to be in the study or to stop taking part in the study.

**Alternative to Participation:** Participation is voluntary and the only alternative is to not participate.

**Study Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to discover: (a) factors influencing international student college choice; (b) administrator perceptions of the goals and effectiveness of their international student enrollment strategies; (c) how those recruiting strategies associate to factors influencing student choice in medium-sized Master's universities in the United States.

**Activities and Procedures:** Your part in the study will be to provide your perspectives about what factors have influenced your decision in selecting your current university. You will be filling out the following survey to participate in this study. You may be invited to participate in a follow-up phone interview.

**Participation Time:** It will take you about 15 minutes to be in this study. If you agree to participate a follow-up phone interview and are invited, it will take you around 20-30 minutes to complete phone interview.

**Risks and Discomforts:** We do not know of any risks or discomforts to you in this research study.

**Possible Benefits:** You may not benefit directly for taking part in this study, however, your inputs are critical to help your college and other colleges to improve international student enrollment and diversify U.S. college campuses.

##### **EXCLUSION/INCLUSION REQUIREMENTS**

There is no requirement to filling out this Survey. However, after this Survey is conducted, 10 students from your university will be invited to have in-depth interviews to

provide in-depth information. The following basic criteria will be applied to the selection of students for in-depth interviews: (a) Students must have completed the Student Survey; (a) students must have checked “Yes” to the last question of the Student Survey: “Would you like to be invited to a following up phone interview?” (c) Ten students will be selected from at least 5 different countries.

### **INCENTIVES**

Invited students for follow-up phone interviews will receive a \$25 Amazon digital gift card in three weeks after the interview is completed.

### **PROTECTION OF PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

If you will participate to this survey only and do not plan to participate a follow-up phone interview, no identifiable information will be collected. This procedure will be anonymous. All data collected from this survey will be confidential.

If you agree to participate the follow-up interview and are selected, you will need to provide your best contact email address to the investigator. Your name or your nickname is optional. Investigator will code your name or nickname as numbers in this study. Your email address will be deleted from the investigator’s research record three weeks after the follow-up interview is done. No identifiable information will be shown in the study. All data collected from the in-depth phone interview will be confidential.

The results of this study may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations. The information collected during the study could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from the participants or legally authorized representative.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-0636 or [irb@clemson.edu](mailto:irb@clemson.edu). If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC’s toll-free number, 866-297-3071. The Clemson IRB will not be able to answer some study-specific questions. However, you may contact the Clemson IRB if the research staff cannot be reached or if you wish to speak with someone other than the research staff.

If you have any study related questions or if any problems arise, please contact Ms. Shuiping Jiang at Clemson University at [shuipij@g.clemson.edu](mailto:shuipij@g.clemson.edu).

### **CONSENT**

**By clicking “I consent, begin the study” option below, you indicate that you have read the information written above, been allowed to ask any questions, and you are**

**voluntarily choosing to take part in this research. If you do not want to participate this study, you may leave this page now.**

- I consent, begin the study
- I do not consent, I do not wish to participate

## Appendix F

This Appendix lists a series of tables of detailed data analyses results.

### Primary Factor Ranks-Friedman Test Results

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<u>Primary Factor</u>	<u>Overall Mean</u>	<u>University A Mean</u>	<u>University B Mean</u>
	<i>n=127</i>	<i>n=81</i>	<i>n=46</i>
Cost	2.75	2.36	3.26
Program Availability	3.09	3.20	2.80
Reputation and Academic Profile	3.18	3.35	2.72
Reference Group	5.76	5.79	5.54
International Student Support	6.13	5.44	7.17
Administrative Effectiveness	6.63	6.59	6.48
Employment Prospects	6.74	6.43	7.04
Social Links	7.34	7.42	6.96
Campus Climate	7.43	7.52	7.04
Physical Geography	9.22	9.20	8.89
Institutional Partnerships	9.33	9.47	8.74
Other Factor(s)	12.03	11.23	11.35

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**Descriptive Statistics: Influential Factors -- University A**

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	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Std.</u> <u>Deviation</u>
Overall ranking	83	4.99	1.534
Student qualifications	83	5.42	1.241
Its reputation in my home country	83	4.17	1.962
Research facilities	83	5.28	1.556
Learning environment	83	6.00	1.288
Professors' reputation	83	5.51	1.618
Tuition rate	83	6.29	1.384
Application fee	83	4.80	1.651
Scholarships for international students	83	6.42	1.279
On-campus employment opportunities	83	5.78	1.781
Cost of living in this city	83	6.01	1.477
Choices of academic programs	83	6.18	0.977
Available ESL program	83	3.69	2.208
Rec from family or relatives	83	4.42	1.795
Rec from friends	83	4.27	1.788
Rec from university alumni	83	4.77	1.625
Rec from my study abroad agent	83	4.20	1.955
Students from home country	83	4.52	1.863
Friends at the university	83	4.69	2.147
University website guidance	83	5.53	1.347
Online application system guidance	83	5.60	1.370
Online application system guidance	83	5.69	1.219
Application process	83	5.73	1.159



Campus safety	83	5.95	1.489
Campus environment for is	83	6.06	1.476
Number of international students	83	4.87	1.765
Staff attitude	83	5.99	1.550
University facilities	83	5.93	1.286
Employment opportunities after graduation	83	6.02	1.506
Student support services	83	6.05	1.352
Student activities	83	5.69	1.561
university location	83	4.90	1.519
city image	83	4.69	1.615
Partner school program	83	4.40	1.746

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### Descriptive Statistics: Influential Factors -- University B

	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Std.</u> <u>Deviation</u>
Overall ranking	48	4.90	1.225
Student qualifications	48	5.02	1.120
Its reputation in my home country	48	4.83	1.602
Research facilities	48	4.69	1.504
Learning environment	48	5.48	1.473
Professors' reputation	48	5.48	1.487
Tuition rate	48	5.38	1.996
Application fee	48	3.81	1.996
Scholarships for international students	48	5.44	2.062
On-campus employment opportunities	48	4.10	2.336
Cost of living in this city	48	5.73	1.608
Choices of academic programs	48	5.63	1.482
Available ESL program	48	3.29	2.202
Rec from family or relatives	48	4.08	1.944
Rec from friends	48	4.31	1.847
Rec from university alumni	48	4.25	1.862
Rec from my study abroad agent	48	3.63	1.852
Students from home country	48	3.85	2.124
Friends at the university	48	3.81	1.996
University website guidance	48	5.29	1.414
Online application system guidance	48	5.13	1.453
Online application system guidance	48	5.15	1.544
Application process	48	5.25	1.437

Campus safety	48	5.77	1.448
Campus environment for is	48	5.71	1.529
Number of international students	48	4.42	1.648
Staff attitude	48	5.56	1.570
University facilities	48	5.19	1.454
Employment opportunities after graduation	48	5.06	1.838
Student support services	48	5.38	1.539
Student activities	48	4.85	1.786
university location	48	4.81	1.539
city image	48	4.58	1.661
Partner school program	48	4.35	2.068

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