

**A STUDY OF FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH  
STUDENT CHOICE IN THE  
UNIVERSITY SELECTION PROCESS**

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## Abstract

Every year university bound graduating high school students are faced with the problem of selecting a post secondary institution. The selection process typically spans a number of years and involves considering many factors. Identifying those factors that influence students during the selection process was the goal of this study. Two hundred twenty-seven first year university students attending one of three degree granting institutions in Alberta were surveyed by means of a questionnaire to determine those factors considered during the university selection process. Correlations, means, analyses of variance and qualitative data provided the statistical and descriptive information for interpretation.

The principal finding of this study was that parents, particularly mothers, are the most influential persons reported to affect the process. The factors which tend to be important to students at the University of Alberta were not the same factors important to students attending Camrose Lutheran

College and the University of Lethbridge, the two smaller universities. University of Alberta students value reputation of the institution, reputation of the program, variety of courses offered, and proximity to home as important factors in their choice. Camrose Lutheran College and University of Lethbridge students value low student/professor ratio, low student population, and reputation of institution.

This study may provide an increase in understanding of the selection process and thus assist those involved in guiding students through the process.

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CHAPTER 1  
THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Every year graduating high school students are faced with the problem of having to decide on future career paths. The decision whether or not to continue with post secondary education and the choice of an institution to attend are two critical decisions that students make at this time in their lives (Johnson & Chapman, 1979). For those students considering attending a university, the selection process probably assumes high priority. This process typically spans a number of years and may have begun in early childhood when prospective students develop perceptions of universities and university life (Maguire & Lay, 1981). Many factors probably affect the final decision. Graduating high school students may have only a vague notion of future educational needs and benefits (Litten, Sullivan, & Brodigan, 1983), however, the university selection process allows students to investigate various alternatives. Identifying factors that have been considered by recent high school

graduates in Alberta in this decision-making process was the goal of this study.

#### Purpose of the Study

The process of college or university selection and the factors of significant influence have been a frequent research topic during the past fifteen years. The anticipated decrease in enrollment in the late 1970s and early 1980s forced universities and colleges to examine future markets. Numerous variables that affected the choice process were examined in an attempt to understand and ultimately to affect that process.

Researchers surveyed students and others involved to determine factors of influence. Most of the studies have focused on the United States where the population of students, variety of institutions, and financial environments differ greatly from the Canadian situation.

The 1988 fall registration predictions in Alberta indicated that colleges and universities were in a selecting situation. There was an abundance of applications for a limited number of spaces. Government reductions in financial grants to

institutions limited the enrollments and program offerings created a shortage of space. During times of space shortage, understanding the influential factors in the selection process is even more important so that universities can affect the process and attract students most likely to succeed.

The purpose of this study was to identify factors considered by Alberta students to be significant in the process of choosing a university to attend. The study involved only new students who were enrolled in a degree granting institution in Alberta. These students had completed the process of selecting a college or university and were asked to reflect on the process.

#### Significance of the Problem

In terms of academic interest, the study has potential to contribute to what is already known about the process of choosing a college or university. Characteristics of decisions made by students to enter particular colleges or universities are not well understood (Puffet, 1983). The study may increase knowledge about factors that are considered influential. A variety of significant factors may be

considered by Alberta high school graduates; some of these factors may be specific to students enrolled in a particular institution.

The study also has a highly practical significance. The results should be of interest to post secondary institutions (particularly colleges and universities), to high schools, and to those involved in similar recruiting processes. Post secondary institutions invest considerable resources in advertising with the hope of attracting the best students for the number of seats available. The results of the study may yield insight into the importance and effectiveness of marketing approaches and the relative importance of the information disseminated by the institution to prospective students.

High schools and advisors involved with students making this decision may gain greater insight into the process as a result of this study. An awareness and understanding of the selection process and those factors that students consider influential is critical to personnel working with students during this selection process and should assist advisors in helping

students make appropriate choices.

Students are viewed as educational consumers. Deciding to invest in a university education presents relatively high risks to the student. Guseman (cited in Litten, Sullivan, & Brodigan, 1983) describes the choice of college as risky because it is an infrequent "purchase" with a high degree of personal importance, somewhat expensive and accomplished within a small number of alternatives. It is classified as credence goods and requires special consideration; ideally, students should make informed choices.

The economic survival of a college or university depends on students selecting the appropriate institution and successfully completing the program; consequently, institutions should attempt to attract those students who will succeed.

Parental involvement in the selection process may vary from minor to significant. Parents generally provide guidance and financial assistance. The results of this study may help parents to understand the process, the factors involved, and the contribution which they make.

Many researchers have concluded that the student

makes the final decision regarding choice of institution (Murphy, 1981; MacDermott, Conn, & Owen, 1987). However, the student seldom makes the final decision alone since the choice process likely involves dialogue between and among students, parents, advisors, teachers, friends, relatives, and representatives from institutions (Change, 1986). By determining what proportion of the decision is assumed by the student and what proportion is assumed by significant other individuals, major decision makers can be identified. This information may assist in developing more appropriate communication between the decision maker and the information sources.

#### Delimitations and Limitations

The study was delimited to recent grade twelve graduates who enrolled at the University of Lethbridge, Camrose Lutheran College, or the University of Alberta in the fall of 1988. This selection excluded students who had completed grade twelve prior to April 1988 and who had had an opportunity to gain more experience. The questionnaire was distributed during orientation sessions in September and October 1988.

Only two hundred twenty-seven students were involved in the study. A larger sample would have been advantageous, however, the cost involved made this option impractical for the researcher. A further limitation of the study is that results are valid only at the time of the research and within the parameters as described in this report. Generalizing to students in other locations or situations should be made with caution.

The study is retrospective. Participants were asked to reflect and recall situations and decisions that occurred in the past. Although most of the questions refer to the recent past, the problem of accurate recollection must be considered. On the other hand, the time lapse may have served to gain a more objective description of factors affecting choice in that the responses were less "coloured" by an emotionalism which may have initially surrounded the choice. Individuals participating may also have felt a need to justify their choice; this tendency must be considered a possible limitation. As well, participation in the study was voluntary; volunteer subjects are likely to be a biased sample of the target



population (Borg & Gall, 1983). Consideration was given to the degree to which the characteristics of the volunteer sample might affect research results. Those characteristics are addressed individually in the conclusions of the study.

#### Assumptions

The study was based on several assumptions including the following: (1) that students do not carry out the university or college selection process in a vacuum (Puffet, 1983); (2) that students have opinions about which environmental factors are involved in the decision; (3) that students have opinions about who is influential in the decision; (4) that students would be willing and capable of providing the information sought; and (5) that students answered the questionnaire accurately.

CHAPTER 2  
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Prior to 1970 little research was done on the college selection process and factors that influence the process. Admissions staff at colleges and universities were concerned with selecting and rejecting students rather than with recruiting high school seniors. The anticipated decline in college applications and the resulting decreased enrollment motivated post secondary administrators to search for more effective ways to attract new students (Chapman, 1981). A closer examination of the process of college selection was necessary to search for new ways to affect the process. This need produced research literature suggesting different systematic models of influences on college choice.

More recently, the concern regarding public spending on post secondary institutions, student financial aid, and student access has produced an increased interest in the area of choice research. Growing competition for limited space has resulted in a trend to market-oriented research which is particularly

useful to institutions wishing to attract and retain the best students.

The literature dealing with the college selection process and factors that influence the process has focused on the central characteristics of the students' choice process. Several models of the process have been developed to assist college administrators who are responsible for implementing recruitment policy. Their need to understand the process and to be able to identify the pressures and influences involved when developing recruiting policy has been recognized (Chapman, 1981). General conceptual models of student college choice that specify significant influences or "variable sets" and their interrelationships can be used as a resource for guiding both future inquiry and current admissions practices (Chapman, 1981).

Identifying lists of factors considered in the selection process has been the subject of several studies. Students and/or parents and/or counselors have been surveyed to establish the criteria involved in the process. This has produced data for further research that has focused on specific influences and the relevance of the selected influences to the

process. Many of these studies have been sponsored by institutions and administered by their own staff.

There is general agreement among researchers about the factors that are considered the most important in the choice process. Having an understanding of these factors and process has prompted researchers to compare choices made between institutions, to rate individual factors, and to assess the impact of changing external and internal influences on the selection process. Because the evolution of research dealing with the selection process has focused on specific stages and establishing influences, rather than refining the process, a variety of studies not easily grouped has been produced.

The review begins with an examination of process approaches used by researchers to explain the series of steps or stages believed to be used by students during the selection process. The models include a multi-stage approach, a six stage approach, and a variety of three stage approaches to the process of college selection. These approaches vary in the starting point of the process and the inclusion of various influencing factors. A review of studies using factor approaches

follows. The factor approach involves basically the survey research method which has produced lists of factors that have affected the university or college selection process. The last category of literature focuses on specific factors within the process.

#### Process Approaches

The first major detailed analysis of the college selection process which was developed by Lewis and Morrison in 1975 (cited in Sullivan & Brodigan, 1983), set the stage for further studies. High school seniors were interviewed every other week throughout the senior years in high school. The findings of the study provided a list of 13 components or stages in the selection process. A less complicated six-step process was later suggested by Kolter (1976). More recent studies have focused on the process of college selection using a three-stage approach.

A three-stage model designed by Kohn, Manski, and Mundel (1974) suggests that the first stage concerns the option of commuting to campus from home, or living on campus. This choice is determined by the distance from home to college, the family income, and other

variables. The second stage concerns the choice of the "best" college available, given the residency decision made at the first stage. The "best" choice college is affected by the following variables: tuition, board and room charges, average student ability, field breadth, per student revenues, family income ability, and distance from college. The third stage is the choice of whether to enroll at this "best" college or not at all. The variables affecting this stage are determined by parental education, student sex, family income, and the attractiveness of the "best" college alternatives. Kohn, Manski, and Mundel's (1974) perspective on the selection process is unique because it is the first study to focus on a three-stage approach to the process and is often referred to in more recent reports of research.

Several studies in this decade have focused on the three-stage approach using similar categories; that is, deciding to attend a post secondary institution, examining the options, and making the choice (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Litten, Sullivan, & Brodigan, 1983; and Chapman, 1981). These models all share the same starting point; the student is preselected as

university or college bound, but differ from the Kohn et al. model because the issue of commuting is not addressed.

Chapman's (1981) three-stage model (Figure 1) of student college choice is longitudinal and proposes that, to understand a student's choice, it is essential to consider both background and current characteristics, the student's family, and the characteristics of the college (Chapman, 1981). Components of the model are identified as either student characteristics or external influences, such as the influence of significant persons, the fixed characteristics of the institution, and the institution's own efforts to communicate with prospective students. These factors combined with the student's general expectation of college life determine the final choice.

The Chapman model appears in some ways to be simplistic because it identifies only two sets of influencing factors. However, the variety of variables listed within the sets suggests a complexity that has been recognized by other researchers concerned with the choice process. The complexity of this model offers a

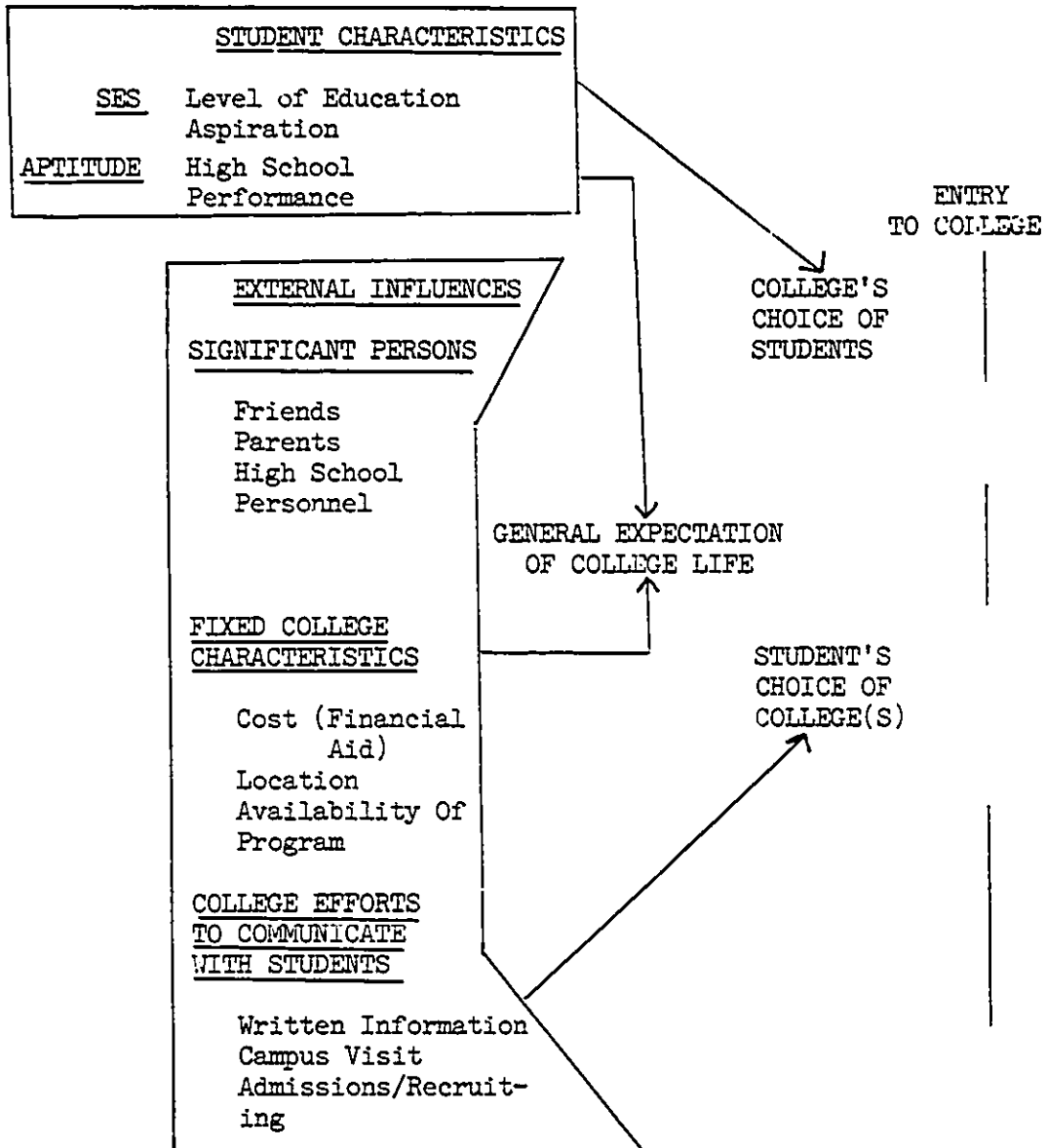


Figure 1. Model of Influences on Student College Choice  
 (Adapted from Chapman, 1981)



variety of variables for researchers to investigate, to control, or to ignore. The Chapman model is frequently referred to in later studies that have focused on variables included in the model.

There are three limitations to the Chapman model. By defining the traditional college student age (18-21) and limiting the study to that group of students, Chapman has effectively avoided a greater number of student characteristics. Including students older than the traditional age would necessitate including special pressures and influences peculiar to older students. Characteristics of the institution are fixed because institutions tend to define the situation in the short-term. If changes are being made such as program additions or deletions, those changes usually involve several levels of authorization resulting in long periods of time between changes. This model is not as flexible as those designed by more recent researchers who consider interaction between the student and the organizational factors much earlier in the process. More recent three-stage models have addressed the limitations of the Chapman model.

A three-stage development model of college choice

is outlined by Litten (1982). This includes a first stage that begins with the intention of attending a college or university, culminating with the decision to attend. The second stage in this process includes the consideration of choices of institutions. The third stage includes the application for admission, acceptance, and enrollment of the student. The model differs from the Chapman model because financial considerations are included in the decision making process. This model focuses on process and detailed external factors not mentioned by Chapman.

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) present another three-phase model that reflects the work of both Jackson (1982) and Litten (1982). This interactive model includes both the attributes of the student and the organizational factors at the pre-college and college level. Factors that are influenced by government and institutional policy at various stages in the process are also included. The stages have been labelled predisposition, search, and choice.

The first phase, predisposition, is basically a development stage that allows students the choice of college or university or other options. The second

phase, search, describes the active investigating students undertake to become familiar with the college or university alternatives. The outcome of this phase is the "choice set" or that list of institutions to which a student will apply (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). The third phase, choice, describes the final single student choice.

Because this model is uniquely interactive, accommodating an extensive variety of factors, it was used as the basis for the present study. In addition to individual factors, organizational factors and the range of pre-college school experiences are accommodated in this model. The diagram presented as Figure 2 demonstrates the opportunity of these factors to exert modest influence on the choice process. The present study focused on the "influential factors" considered by students during phases one, two, and three.

#### Factors Approach

Establishing lists of factors considered significant by students has frequently been a goal of researchers. Although the studies reviewed were based

Model Dimensions	<u>Influential Factors</u>		Student Outcomes
	Individual Factors	Organizational Factors	
Predisposition (Phase One)	Student characteristics  Significant others  Educational activities	School Characteristics	Search For: a. college options  b. other options
Search (Phase Two)	Student preliminary college values  Student search activities	College and university search activities (Search for students)	a. choice set  b. other options
Choice (Phase Three)	Choice set	College and university courtship activities	Choice

Figure 2. A Three Phase Model of College Choice

(Adapted from Hossler &amp; Gallagher, 1987)

in the United States, the literature is relevant to the present study. Many factors considered during the selection process probably are also relevant in Canada. These include student characteristics, institutional characteristics, institutional activities, and persons of influence. Factors which may differ in relevance include tuition costs, financial aid, and entrance examinations. Unfortunately, many studies that focus on the reasons why students choose a particular college are specific to that institution and not available for review (Litten & Brodigan, 1982). For example, Camrose Lutheran College has completed "in house" research on factors of influence to establish student preference and goals and to identify the important features of the college.

An extensive study by Bowers and Pugh (1983) surveyed four thousand Indiana University freshmen and their parents to identify and to rank 22 influences that are considered in the selection process. Since most studies solicit only student opinion, this study is of particular importance because both parents and students were asked to rate the factors. The ratings were then compared for similarities in judgements.

Both groups rated academic reputation of the university and specific reputation of the department or school as the two most important factors in the selection process. The results indicated that although the students and parents were in agreement with the rating of the first two important influences, there tended to be disagreement regarding the relative importance of social climate and finance. Financial, geographical, and academic factors were more important to parents than to students, while students placed more value on social and cultural, and informal factors.

Comparative ratings were established by Litten (1979) to predict matriculation at Carleton University in Minnesota. Litten appears to be a foremost researcher in this field and has published several studies focusing on marketing concerns. The 1979 study is particularly noteworthy. From a list of 22 variables, the following were found to be the most important factors for accepted applicants from two regions: East - social atmosphere, academic quality, geographic location, and cost; North Central - social atmosphere, academic quality, cost, and geographic location.

The Litten (1979) study established the nature of the market segment or student population from which a specific school draws. The conclusions of the study were relevant to the dilemma faced by institutions that have identified strengths that are valued by the students and were deciding factors in the selection process. The dilemma involves the choice of capitalizing on those favored factors by strengthening them at the risk of losing those students who valued "the old ways" and other factors.

Similar research at the University of California (cited in Litten & Brodigan, 1982) surveyed students to rate variables and sources of information according to the influence of each factor. The five general categories reported were: academic program attributes, environmental factors, academic support aspects, student life factors, and educational outcomes. Ratings on these factors varied widely. Information factors were listed in the following order of importance: parents and immediate family, catalogs or college publications, college representatives, current students, and high school counsellors.

Research conducted recently at Washington State

University by Sanders (1986) is relevant because of the geographic proximity of the study to Alberta.

Sanders (1986) identified eight factors students judged most important when selecting a college. These factors were grouped into four categories for analysis: those pertaining to academic environment, the cost/value added environment, the living environment, and the peer/adult influence. This study was initiated because of threatened decreases in enrollment and the recognized need to gather data to assist in identifying the wants and needs of students.

Faced with a similar economic situation and in an attempt to enhance the image of Cornell University, Lolli and Scannell (1983) utilized information obtained by collecting data from matriculants who were asked to rate Cornell and their second choice school on each of 28 variables. Students identified the three most important factors influencing their decision to enroll to be general reputation of institution, location of campus, and size of student body. The findings of this study enabled Cornell University to implement a broad based program of information focusing on characteristics identified as important to students.



The research also demonstrated that a wealth of information is collected during the admissions operation and that universities could use these data to facilitate a better understanding of current conditions and future trends facing the institution (Lolli & Scannell, 1983).

#### Specific Factors

The role of parents in the college selection process is complex and not disputed; parents wield significant power. Other individuals influence students but parents appear to be the most influential (Puffet, 1983; Murphy, 1981; Litten & Brodigan, 1982; Conklin & Dailey, 1981; and MacDermott, Conn, & Owen, 1987). Research literature dealing with parental influence focuses on how parents shape their children's post secondary plans, the qualities sought in a college, parental expectations of student undergraduate years, the influence of parental education level on the final choice, and parental perceptions of "consumer" roles in college choice. Conklin and Dailey (1981) concluded that:

the longer post-secondary education has been taken for granted in the home, the more likely students

are to enter college. It may be that the more time both respondent and parents have had to reflect upon and act on the preparations for college attendance (curriculum and finances), the more realistic are the plans (p. 261).

The early introduction and reinforcement of future college participation was confirmed by Murphy (1981) when students were asked to indicate the grade level at which they started thinking about attending university. A majority of respondents indicated earliest recollections to be during elementary school years.

Parents surveyed by the Carnegie Foundation (Change, November/December, 1986) expressed a strong desire for their children to attend college despite the high cost. College is perceived to be:

one of the principal strategies employed by American families to sustain or improve the social and economic position of their children, and to enhance the quality of their children's lives (p. 31).

Most parents appear to believe that graduation from a good school will improve chances of favourable employment; consequently parents take an active interest in the selection of the college.

Parental education level is related to student college choice. Ihlanfeldt (1980) concluded that

students whose parents did not attend college were likely to chose a college close to home. Although few students travel more than five hundred miles from home to attend university (Astin, 1985), those students whose parents have a college education are more likely to have a broad or national scope of selection (Zemsky & Oedel, 1983; MacDermott, Conn, & Owen, 1987).

Two studies have concluded that the final choice of a college rests with the student. Murphy found that students whose parents had a college education had a tendency to make the choice themselves and that the parents appreciated the student's need to exercise this option. MacDermott, Conn, and Owen (1987) refer to this as parental veto. Students in their study were permitted to make a choice, even though it may not have been the first choice of the parents. Parents stated that their contribution to the decision came earlier in the process when institutions were first being discussed. The final list of colleges was acceptable to them and the final choice made by the student.

An abundance of literature has been published on the cost factor as it affects the college or university choice process. The American situation provides a

variety of public and private institutions that vary from easily affordable to very expensive.

#### Summary

Recent literature concerned with the college or university selection process and the factors involved in that process appears to reflect a response to a need to understand the selection process and influential factors. This need has been recognized by universities and colleges and motivated by the desire to improve marketing strategies.

The literature can be grouped according to focus. The first studies propose models of the selection process and identify the stages within the process. Many similarities are evident among the suggested models. The most recent models incorporate the work of earlier researchers. The second category of literature establishes lists of factors involved in the process. These survey type studies usually produce a list of factors involved in the process and rank factors in order of importance. The third category addresses specific factors of great interest in the process.

The majority of the literature available reflects the post secondary situation in the United States. There is also an abundance of literature that addresses the funding variations among institutions in the United States. The Canadian situation is basically a publicly funded system and was not available in the literature.

#### Expanding Research

Using the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) model of college choice, this study attempted to identify a list of factors that were considered by students at three Alberta institutions when selecting a university. The study focused on the influencing factors in the predisposition, search, and choice phases of the selection process. This included identifying sources of information and individuals considered influential, and establishing student characteristics such as gender, ability, values, and goals. The occupations and educational background of the family were identified as possible factors affecting the selection process.

### Research Questions

Four specific questions were addressed in this study.

1. What factors influence students when they choose a university?

Specific factors explored include:

- a) sources of information;
  - b) influential individuals;
  - c) characteristics of student, such as gender, ability, values, goals, and family; and,
  - d) characteristics and activities of institutions.
2. What are the factors of influence specific to students choosing the same university?
  3. How have economic opportunities affected student choice?
  4. Is there a relationship between the socio-economic status of the parents and the college or university selection process?

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

In this descriptive study data were collected in three locations through use of the questionnaire survey method without deliberate manipulation of variables or control over the research settings.

#### Participants

##### Selection of University Students

Several thousand university students are enrolled in colleges and universities in Alberta. All of those students will have experienced a selection process either hastily or with deliberation over varying periods of time. Because this study was retrospective, students who had most recently completed the selection process were chosen as the target population. The researcher attempted to control the effects of judgement based on work experience by selecting first year university students who had completed grade twelve in April or June 1988.

### Selection on the Basis of Location

Three degree granting institutions within the province of Alberta were selected for the study. The diversity among the institutions regarding student population, location, variety of program offerings, physical setting, cultural and religious environment, and reputation were factors considered in the selection.

The University of Alberta (student population 28,804) is a large university located in a major urban centre. A variety of academic programs is offered. The freshmen class of 1988 was approximately 6000 students.

The University of Lethbridge (student population 3,140) is a smaller university located in a small city in the southern part of the province. It is a liberal arts institution offering some professional and transfer programs. The freshmen class of 1988 was approximately 1700 students.

Camrose Lutheran College (student population 800) is a small, private, church affiliated liberal arts college located in a small city in central Alberta. Many transfer programs are also offered. The freshmen



class of 1988 was approximately 475 students. Camrose Lutheran College is the smallest of the three institutions selected.

#### Sample Selection

Approximately 227 students participated in the study: 107 at the University of Alberta, 70 at the University of Lethbridge, and 50 at Camrose Lutheran College. The sample size from each institution was large enough to permit statistical analysis of the data and at the same time small enough to be practical for data collection. With the cooperation of the participating university, the researcher solicited the required number of students to participate in the study by asking for volunteers during the registration or library orientation sessions.

#### Instrumentation

From a review of the literature on questionnaire design and use (Borg & Gall, 1983), the advantages and disadvantages of a questionnaire survey method of data collection were considered. The decision to use a questionnaire was based on the following advantages:

1. compared to other methods of data collecting, it is relatively inexpensive;
2. questionnaires are suitable for large samples;
3. questionnaires are relatively easy for volunteers to complete; and,
4. questionnaires take less time to complete than other data gathering methods such as personal interviews.

Questionnaires do have disadvantages as well.

Some of these are as follows:

1. some people may have a personal bias against questionnaires. This bias may be the result of past experiences with questionnaires, a common research method used to collect data on public opinion;
2. factors within the questionnaire or collection situation such as wording, order, format, timing, and setting may bias responses; and,
3. establishing the validity of responses presents a major limitation.

While these limitations were recognized, a

questionnaire was constructed by the investigator, utilizing information derived from similar studies by Sanders (1986), Lolli and Scannell (1983), Litten, Sullivan, and Brodigan (1983), and Erdmann (1983). The questionnaire was designed to collect information about: parents and family; values and goals of both the student and parents; sources of influence and information; factors of significance; final choice; and personal background information.

#### Nature of the Instrument

The questionnaire which is included in Appendix B, was divided into six separate sections. Most questions could be answered by checking the appropriate space. Questions involving rating of factors were designed with a six-point rating scale following each factor. A few open-ended questions with sufficient space following to allow the student to answer were also included. Explanation and discussion preceded all questions.

Part A focused on parents and family. The first question asked the formal education level of parents and was answered by checking the appropriate box. This

question and the third and fourth questions which asked for the occupation of both mother and father together addressed the research question: "Is there a relationship between the socio-economic status of the parents and the university selection process?" The second question in Part A asked if any immediate members of the family had attended this university. The intend was to discover any traditional allegiance to a particular institution. It also addressed the research question: "Are there factors of influence specific to students choosing the same university?"

Part B examined values and goals of the student. Questions #1, 2, 3, and 4 were designed to ascertain the personal value placed on a university education and the personal educational goals of the student. Question #3 in Part F also addressed this issue. These questions related directly to the first research question: "What factors do students consider when choosing a university?" particularly in relation to characteristics of the student, such as gender, ability, values, goals, and family.

Part B Questions #5 and 6 examined the effects, if any, of the future employment opportunities on the

decision to attend a specific university and to select a specific program. These questions addressed two research questions: "How have economic opportunities in the province affected student choice?" and "Are there factors of influence common to students choosing the same university?" Questions #5 and 6 were open-ended so that students could indicate specific reasons regarding their choice. Information gained from these open-ended questions provided qualitative data and were intended to supplement closed-ended questions.

Parts C and D consisted of lists of sources of information and influence and factors of significance. The lists were based on previous studies by Sanders (1986), Lolli and Scannell (1983), Litten, Sullivan, and Brodigan (1983), and Erdmann (1983). Recommendations from universities participating in this study were also included in the list of factors. Students were asked to rate the importance of each item by circling the appropriate number. A six-point Likert scale with 5 assigned to high importance and 0 to no importance was placed next to each item listed. Space was left at the end for students to list and rate sources not included but personally important to the

student. Parts C and D addressed the first research question: "What factors do students consider when choosing a university?" in relation to sources of information, influential individuals, and characteristics of the institution.

Part E examined the final choice made by students. Question #1 was developed to determine whether students had seriously considered more than one institution during the choice process. Question #2 was designed to identify the most important factors considered by the students. This question addressed the research question: "What are the factors of influence specific to students choosing the same university?" Question #3 applied only to students who were not attending their first choice university. Question #4 was an open-ended question that allowed the student to comment on the quality of the choice that was made. Question #5 was designed to determine if the student or the parent made the final choice of which institution to attend.

Part F contained four short questions dealing with personal background data. Questions #1 and 2 asked gender and grade 12 average. These questions addressed the study question: "What factors do students consider

when choosing a university?" with reference to characteristics of student, such as gender and ability. Question #3 asked what degree the student hopes to earn. This also addressed the same research question and pertains to goals. Question #4 was designed to determine if proximity to home was an important factor considered during the choice process. The data gathered from this question were compared with a similar question in Part D that asked the student to rate closeness to home as an influential factor.

#### Validating the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was validated by three small groups as part of the development process. The first group consisted of six graduate students studying at the University of Alberta who were experienced in the use of questionnaire surveys. The critical comments regarding style, format, and appropriateness of questions suggested by this group were helpful.

The second validation was conducted in June 1988, using a group of seven university bound grade twelve students. It was assumed that this group would be nearing completion of the selection process and would

be able to complete most of the questions on the questionnaire. The group provided useful critical comments on the appropriateness and wording of questions.

The questionnaire was given to faculty members at the University of Lethbridge and Camrose Lutheran College. In both cases additional questions were suggested and critical comment was provided regarding format. After these pretests, minor changes were made to the questionnaire.

#### Data Collection

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Lethbridge. Permission to gather data at the University of Alberta (U of A), Camrose Lutheran College (C L C), and the University of Lethbridge (U of L) was acquired after submitting a final draft of the questionnaire to each institution. Students consented to participate by volunteering to complete the questionnaire. An explanatory letter (see Appendix A) attached to each questionnaire stated the purpose of the research, the role of the student, and the ethical implications for consideration.



The questionnaire was administered to students at the University of Lethbridge during orientation sessions held in August 1988. The researcher collected 35 completed questionnaires at two orientation sessions. A student advisor who was present during the initial collection administered the remaining 33 questionnaires at orientation sessions held one week later.

Students at Camrose Lutheran College completed the questionnaire during orientation sessions held in September 1988. The researcher collected 34 completed questionnaires at three orientation sessions. A student advisor who was present during the initial collection administered the remaining 15 questionnaires at functions for freshmen held on campus during the next few days.

The questionnaire was administered to students at the University of Alberta during library orientation sessions held in September and October 1988. The researcher collected 73 completed questionnaires at 15 sessions. The remaining 34 questionnaires were administered and collected by a graduate student who was conducting the library orientation program and had

been present during several previous sessions.

#### Data Analyses

The responses of the 227 participating students to the questionnaire are described using frequency counts and percentages. The Statistical Program for the Social Sciences X (SPSSX) at the University of Alberta, Division of Educational Research Services, was used to prepare and analyze the data. Where appropriate, statistical tests such as t-tests and analysis of variance were used to determine the significance of differences between and among groups. Statistical significance was assumed when the alpha level was less than or equal to .05. As well, several open-ended questions generating qualitative data were analysed to establishing themes or apparent trends.

Research Question 1: What factors influence students when they choose a university?

Areas of examination included:

- a) sources of information,
- b) individuals of influence,
- c) characteristics of student, such as

gender, ability, values, goals, and family.

The analysis of the data collected in response to those questionnaire items that addressed this question were primarily descriptive, e.g., frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and rankings. The data are presented in tables and graphs. This includes data gathered from:

Part B #1,2,3, and 4	Part C #1-14
Part D #1-17	Part F #1-2

Data from part E provided an alternative and more qualitative approach to addressing Question #1 and was analyzed descriptively to validate information obtained from Parts C and D. Analysis of variance was used to determine possible differential effects of factors such as gender, parental achievement, students goals, and values.

Research Question 2: What are the factors of influence specific to students choosing the same university?

The analysis of the data collected in response to those questions that addressed the second research

question involved calculation of frequencies and qualitative analysis of open-ended questions. This included data gathered from the following questions:

Part A #9-12

Part B #4-6

Part D #1-17

Part E and F only #2.

In addition, graphs and tables similar to those prepared to address Research Question 1 were utilized. Where appropriate, analysis of variance procedures were used to determine whether there were significant differences among the groups.

Research Question 3: How has the economic situation affected student choice?

The data collected in response to those questions that addressed this research question required qualitative analysis. This included data gathered through the following questions:

Part B #5 and 6

Part E #4

Research Question 4: Is there a relationship between the socio-economic status of the parents and the college or university selection process?

Data from Part A #1-8, 13, and 14 were used to

develop categories of socio-economic status for parents. Non-parametric statistics such as chi-square were used to determine whether socio-economic status was a factor in university choice.

#### Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss the development and validation of the instrument, and the assumptions related to the research. The population and sample were described. A discussion of the data collection and analyses procedure concluded this chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

The study involved 227 students: 107 at the University of Alberta, 50 at Camrose Lutheran College, and 70 at the University of Lethbridge. In terms of proportion of the total sample this represents 47% from the University of Alberta, 22% from Camrose Lutheran College, and 31% from the University of Lethbridge.

#### Characteristics of Students

##### Gender

Females formed the majority of participants at each university. The percentage distribution illustrated in Figure 3 indicate that 58% from U of A, 55% from C L C, and 68% from U of L were female. The high percentage of females could be attributed to the collection venues; females may also be more likely to volunteer (Borg & Gall, 1983).

##### Grade 12 Average

Respondents were asked to recall their grade 12 average. Each university sets a minimum average entrance requirement. Both U of L and C L C accept

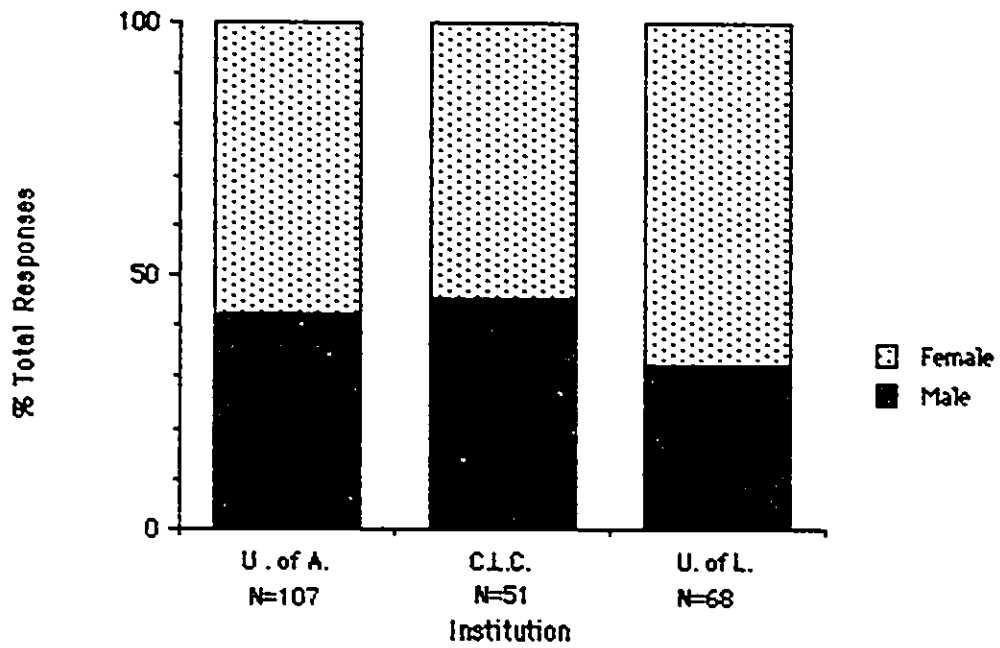


Figure 3: Percentage of Female and Male Respondents

students with a minimum of 60%, while the U of A requires a minimum of 70%. Table 1 indicates the distribution of averages reported for each university. The U of L has the broadest range reported with a minimum of 60% and a maximum of 97%. C L C and the U of A reported similar ranges with 60-89% and 70-97% respectively. Three different patterns emerged when the reported averages were graphed (see Figures 4, 5, and 6). The majority of the students from the U of A sample had averages between 75% and 90%. Students at C L C were more evenly distributed within the range. A high incidence of students from the U of L reported averages between 65% and 70%. These data address the research question: "What are the factors of influence specific to students choosing the same university?"

The differences among the mean scores were statistically significant at  $p < .05$  according to the results of analysis of variance. Further post-hoc statistical investigation using the Scheffe procedure indicated the U of A sample was significantly higher than either the C L C and U of L samples, but that mean self-reported grades of C L C and U of L samples were not significantly different.



Table 1

## Self-Reported Grade Twelve Averages of Respondents

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University	Mean	Median	Mode	Range	SD
U of A	83.02	82.00	82.00	70.00-97.00	6.38
C L C	73.79	73.00	60.00	60.00-89.00	8.49
U of L	71.69	70.00	70.00	60.00-97.00	7.40

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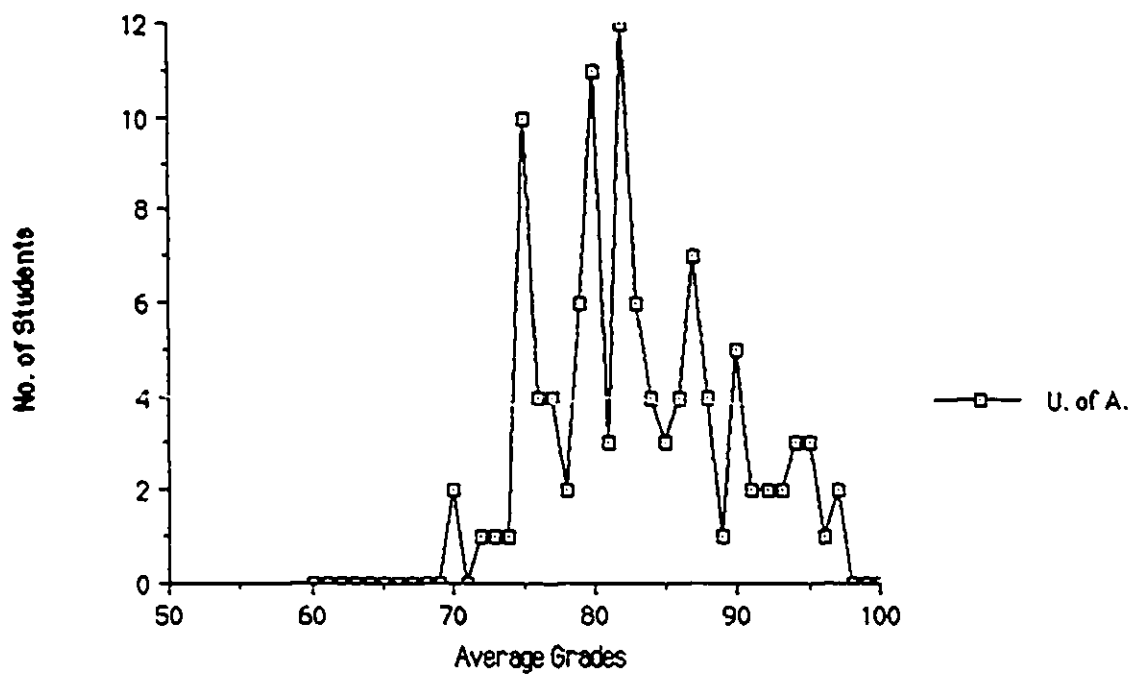


Figure 4: Distribution of Self-Reported Grade 12 Averages of University of Alberta Respondents

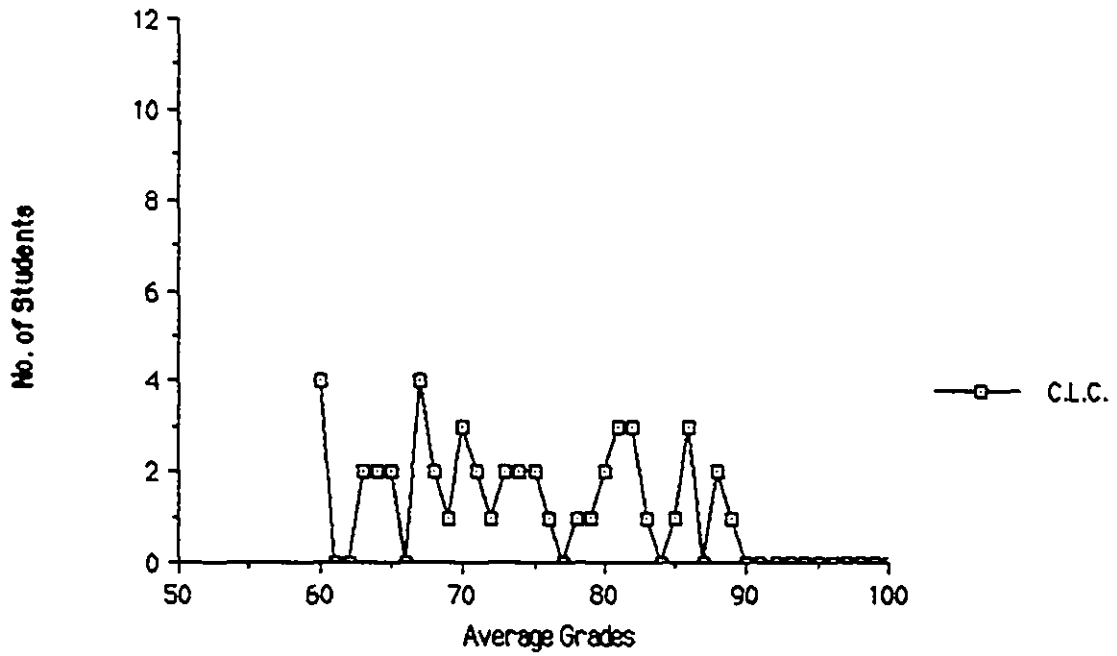


Figure 5: Distribution of Self-Reported Grade 12 Averages of Camrose Lutheran College Respondents

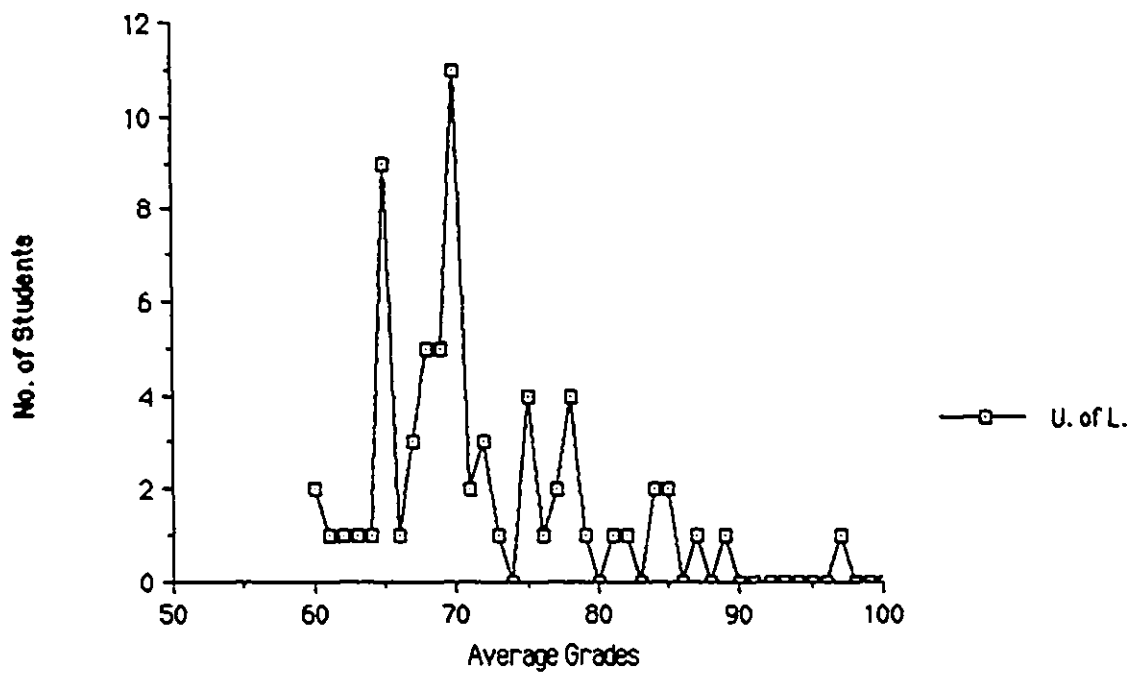


Figure 6: Distribution of Self-Reported Grade 12 Averages of University of Lethbridge Respondents

Degree

When students were asked to state the degree sought, 16 choices were mentioned (see Table 2). Students attending U of A listed the most variety in degrees sought. This was to be expected since the U of A is the largest university in the study. Science was the choice of 35% of U of A students. This high percentage could be attributed to the data collecting location. The library orientation sessions at the U of A were held in the Cameron Library where the science collection is stored; more science students may have attended these sessions because of the location.

Equal numbers of students at C L C stated plans to transfer to another institution, or to stay at C L C and to complete an Arts degree. C L C has traditionally been a transfer institution and only recently (1985) gained degree granting status. The U of L sample indicated that the majority sought either a degree in Education or in Management. Again, this may not reflect the university population because approximately 50% of students pursue Education or Management.

Table 2  
 Percentage Distribution of Respondents at  
 Each Institution by Degree Sought

Degrees	U of A N = 94	C L C N = 45	U of L N = 55
Transfer	2%	38%	9%
Engineering	10	-	-
Arts	17	38	11
Science	35	22	13
Education	2	-	35
Fine Arts	2	-	-
Pharmacy	3	-	-
Music	-	2	-
Commerce	13	-	-
Sc. Nursing	1	-	-
Management	-	-	26
Dentistry	1	-	-
Law	2	-	-
Graduate or Doctoral	10	-	-
Medicine	2	-	-
Arts & Science	-	-	6

### Distance from Home

Data gathered regarding distance from the family home to the university were grouped in three categories: 0 - 25 kilometres; 26 - 200 kilometres; and 200 - 9999 kilometres. Two hundred kilometres was arbitrarily chosen as the distance which allows students to go home on weekends. Figure 7 indicates that 49% of the U of A students live in Edmonton and an additional 21% live within 200 kilometres. Only 4% of C L C students reported Camrose as home, however, an additional 55% live within 200 kilometres. The U of L sample indicated the highest percentage of students (63%) traveling distances greater than 200 kilometres. The ten students who traveled distances greater than 1248 kilometres attended U of A and comprised 9% of that sample (see Figure 7).

### Family Backgrounds

#### Education Level of Fathers and Mothers

The data generated from this question were originally grouped in the eight categories listed on the questionnaire (see Appendix B). The categories were combined so that the data could be displayed in

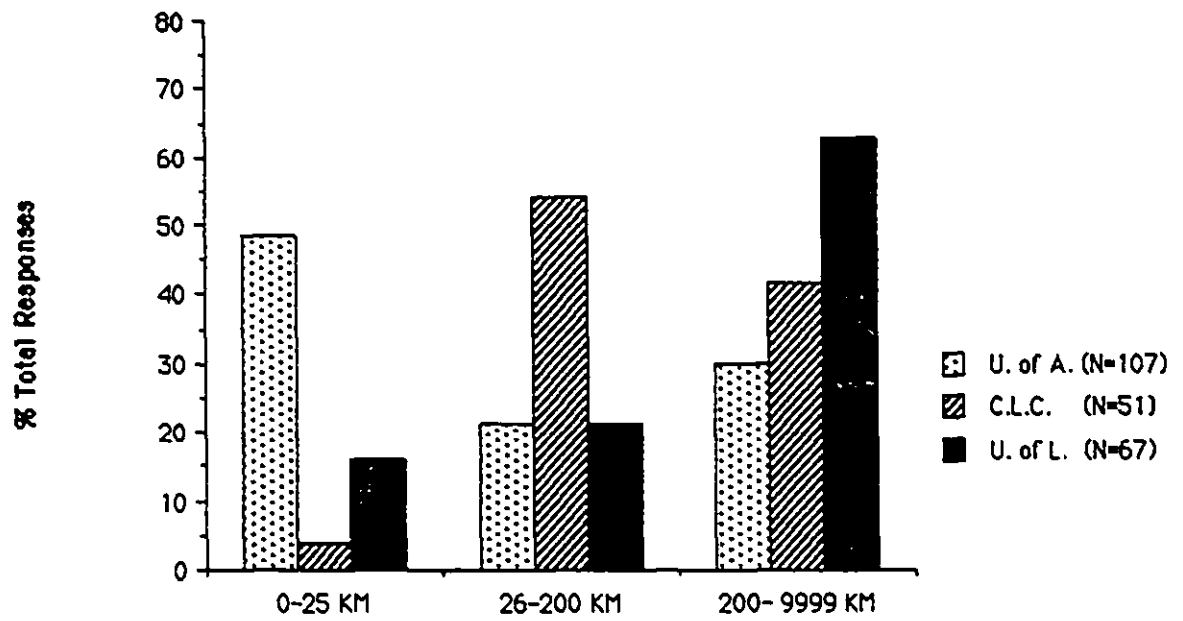


Figure 7: Comparison of Respondents at Three Institutions on Distance from Family Home to School



four broader categories (see Figures 8 and 9). This provided an opportunity to examine the difference among educational levels of parents of respondents at the three institutions.

Among fathers of U of A students, 45% had graduated from university. This was almost double the percentage reported by students at the other two universities. Among fathers of U of L students, 41% had completed some college or apprenticeship training. This proportion represents the largest group at this university.

A chi-square analysis indicated that there was a significant relationship between the education achieved by the father and the university choice ( $\chi^2=.014$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p<.05$ ) which suggests a true difference among the groups.

The data gathered on the education level achieved by the mothers indicate that the majority of the mothers had some post secondary education such as nursing or a university education. Twenty-nine percent of mothers of the C L C students had a university education. This percentage is higher than the same category of mothers of students at the other

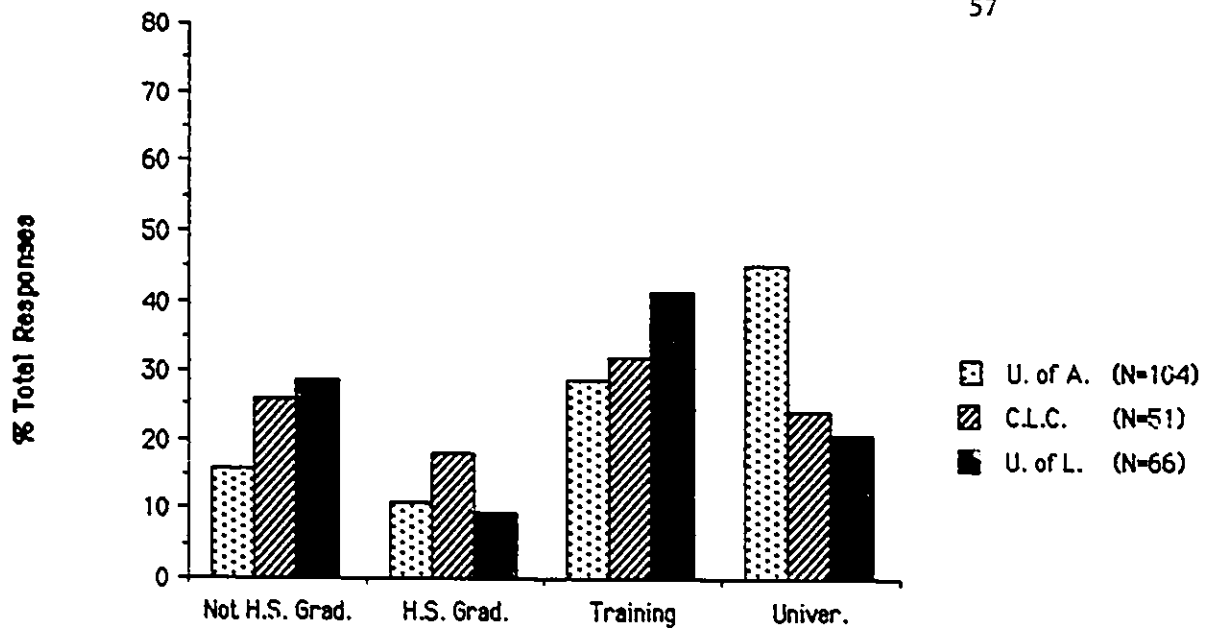


Figure 8: Comparison of Respondents on Education Level of Father

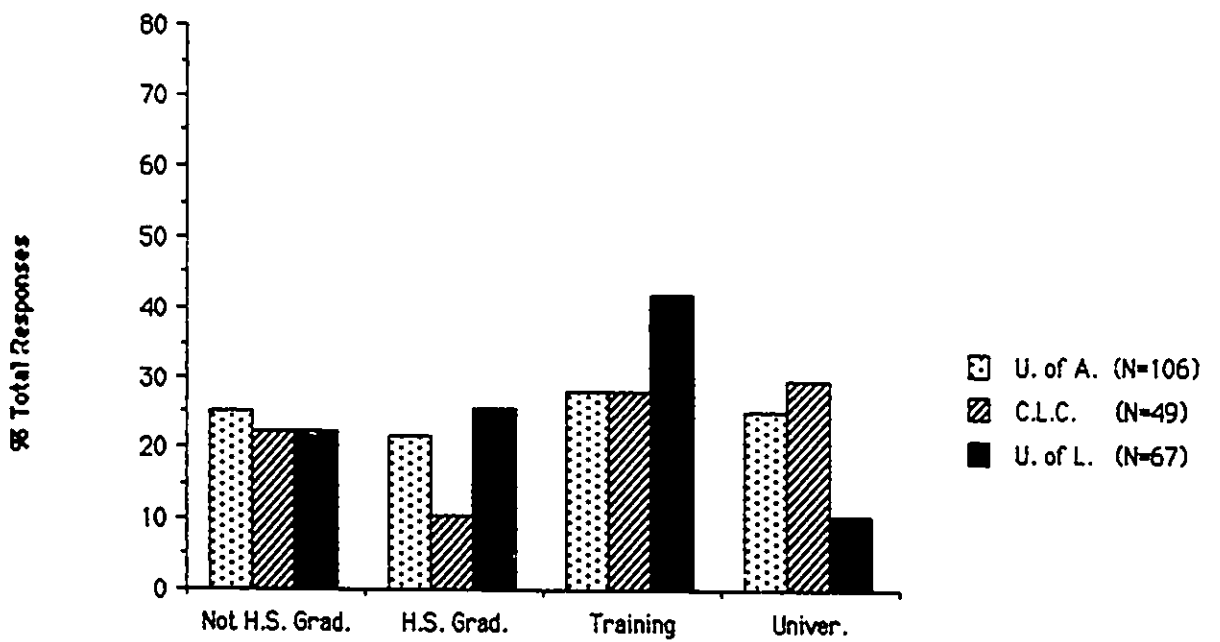


Figure 9: Comparison of Respondents on Education Level of Mother

universities. A chi-square analysis indicated that there was no significant relationship between the education achieved by the mother and the student choice of institution ( $X^2 = .069$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p>.05$ ).

#### Occupations of Fathers and Mothers

Students were asked to name the occupation of both mother and father. This question produced a list of 225 different occupations. In order to simplify coding and reporting, occupations were grouped by skill levels into the following 10 categories: deceased or no answer, labour, homemaker, service or clerical, technical or trades, manager, professional, self employed or entrepreneurial, and student. The criteria used for classifying these occupations included the amount and level of training or education required.

The pattern of distributions (Table 3) indicates that most mothers were classified as either homemakers, service/clerical, or professionals. The U of A students reported the highest percentage (32%) of mothers in the professional category. The U of L students reported the highest percentage of homemakers (35%) while C L C students were equally high in both categories (29%). The clerical/service category had

Table 3  
 Percentage Distributions by Occupation of  
 Mothers and Fathers of Respondents

Categories	% Mothers			% Fathers		
	U of A	C L C	U of L	U of A	C L C	U of L
	N=101	N=51	N=63	N=104	N=51	N=64
Deceased	2.0	-	3.2	1.9	-	1.6
Labour	5.9	3.9	6.3	4.8	2.0	9.4
Homemaker	16.8	29.4	34.9	-	-	-
Service/Clerical	21.8	19.6	19.0	5.8	5.9	18.8
Technical/trades	10.9	7.8	9.5	22.1	25.5	17.2
Manager	2.0	2.0	4.8	9.6	13.7	10.9
Professional	31.7	29.4	15.9	43.3	21.6	14.1
Entrepreneurial/ self employed	5.9	5.9	4.8	12.5	31.4	26.6
Student	2.0	2.0	1.6	-	-	1.6

approximately 20 percent at each university.

The pattern of distributions indicates that most of the fathers were classified as either trades/technology, professional, or self employed/entrepreneurial. U of A students reported the highest percentage of fathers in the professions (43%) while the other two universities each reported less than half this number. Self employed or entrepreneurial fathers rated similarly with C L C (31%) and U of L (27%) students, compared with U of A (13%) students. This could be attributed to the number of farmers and rural agri-business men represented in the self employed/entrepreneurial category. Both C L C and U of L are located in farming communities, perhaps resulting in a higher incidence of fathers in this category.

The results of this question compared with the data regarding the educational achievements of parents addressed the study question: "Is there a relationship between the socio-economic status of the parents and the college or university selection process?" There appears to be such a relationship; students with university educated fathers are more likely to chose

the large public university. This relationship is probably compounded by the location of the university in a large city with an abundance of employment opportunities for educated men.

#### Family Tradition

Responses from the question regarding tradition ("Have any of your family members attended this university?") indicated that the U of A was the only university that showed a tendency to tradition, that is, of other family members having attended the same institution. Figures 10 to 13 illustrate the percentage of mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers who had attended the same university. In each case the U of A shows a consistently higher percentage than the other universities.

These results are consistent with the ratings tabulated when students were asked to rate family tradition as a factor in the choice process (Part D #15). One third (35%) of the U of A students responded indicating a high importance compared to 19% at C L C and 4% at U of L. This may be a logical outcome of the

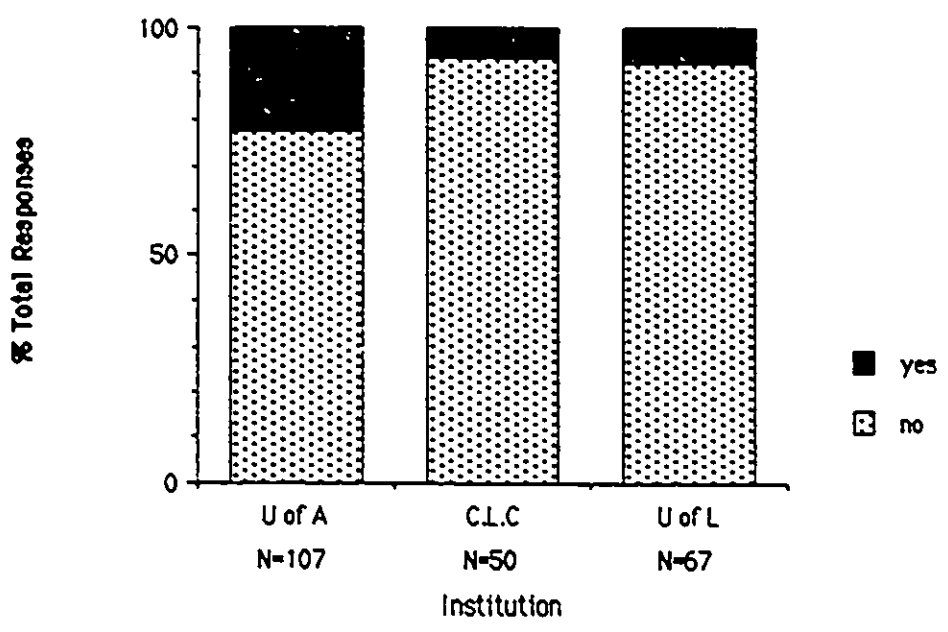


Figure 10: Percentage of Fathers of Respondents Who Attended Same University

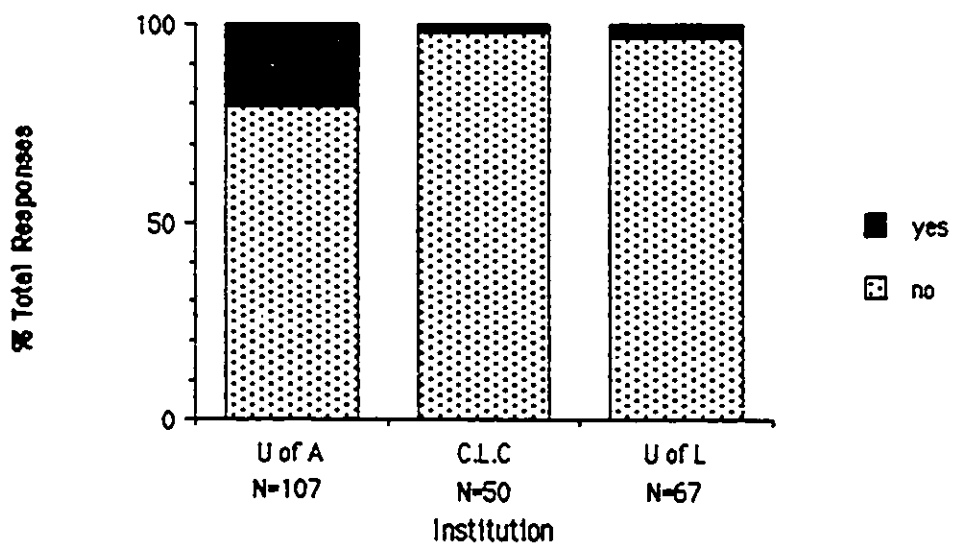


Figure 11: Percentage of Mothers of Respondents Who Attended Same University

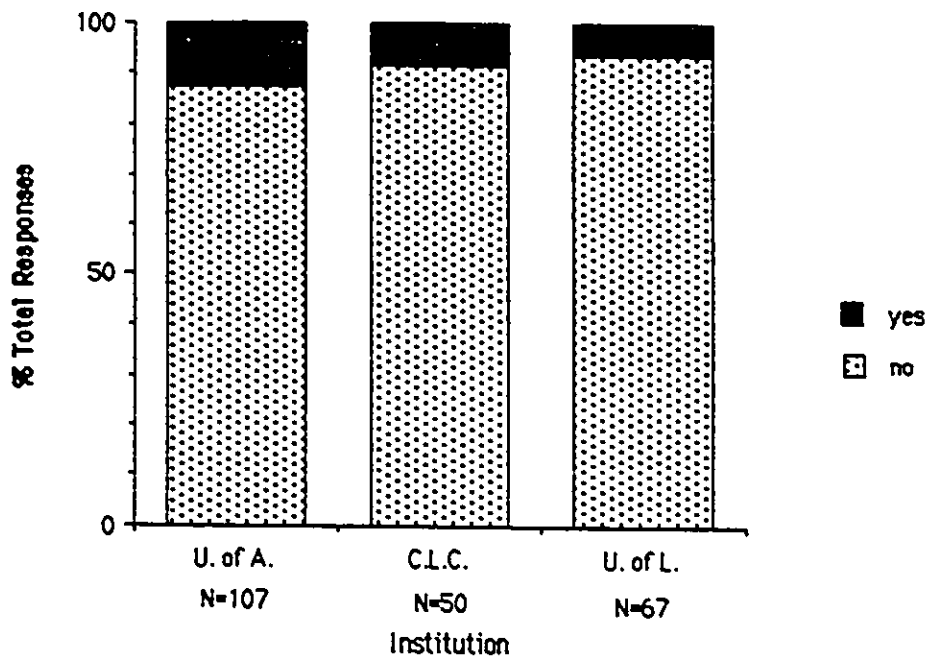


Figure 12: Percentage of Brothers of Respondents Who Attended Same University

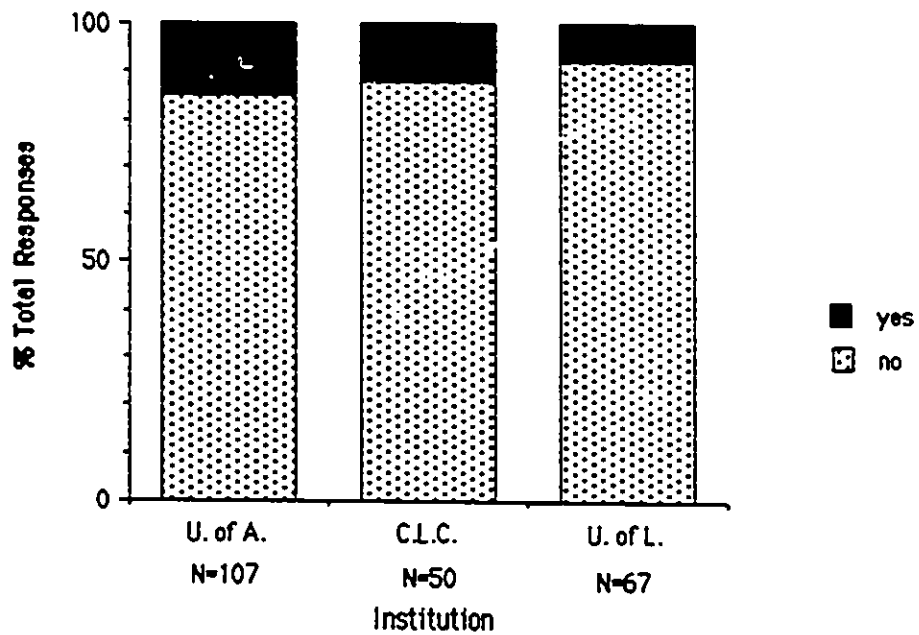


Figure 13: Percentage of Sisters of Respondents Who Attended Same University



age of the university, a key factor in the evolution of tradition.

#### Values and Goals

Responses from the "values and goals" questions (Part B #1, #2, #3, and #4) were compared in order to address one component of Research Question 1: "What factors influence students when they choose a university?" At least two thirds of the sample from each university indicated that: "it had been taken for granted that you will pursue a university degree after completing high school."

Students did vary at what grade level they first considered attending university (Question B #2) but differences were not statistically significant (see Table 4). More than half of U of A students tended to remember considering attending university earlier than the other students. This early interest during grades K-6 could be attributed to the high percentage of university educated fathers and the likelihood that a university education is a valued goal in those homes. The majority of U of L students (70%) and C L C students (58%) reported first considering attending

Table 4

Percentage Distribution of Respondents By Grade Level  
At Which They First Considered Attending University

University	N	Grade Level			
		K-3	4-6	7-9	10-12
U of A	104	19.2%	32.7%	31.7%	16.3%
C L C	50	14.0	28.0	32.0	26.0
U of L	67	9.0	20.9	35.8	34.3

university during grades 7-12. This later consideration may be a result of increased awareness of educational opportunities that takes place during junior and senior high school.

The relationship between choice of university and plans for graduate work was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 24.05$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The percentage of responses to this question (B #3) listed in Table 5, indicated the highest percentage of students (56%) who had plans for graduate school attended the U of A. This could be attributed to an awareness of graduate programs that are offered at that university. The students at the U of L tended to respond to the undecided category (62%), indicating that the option was seen as a possibility. C L C students indicated most strongly (24%) that graduate work was not planned. For these students obtaining a bachelor's degree seems to be the primary goal.

When students were asked directly "Did plans for graduate work affect your choice . . .", the responses were surprisingly similar from all universities ("yes" 28%-31%). Perhaps the knowledge of graduate work shared by freshmen at universities is similar.

Table 5  
 Percentage of Respondents Indicating  
 Whether Or Not They Have Future Plans  
 For Study Beyond A Baccalaureate

University	N	No	Yes	Don't Know
U of A	105	12.4%	56.2%	31.4%
C L C	51	23.5	31.4	45.1
U of L	69	5.8	31.9	62.3

Generally students gain information regarding graduate school while completing an undergraduate program.

Responses from the "employment opportunity" questions (B #5 and #6) were compared in order to address the question: "How has economic opportunity affected student choice?" The results from all universities were similar; 70% - 75% of the students felt that the economic conditions and employment opportunities had not affected choice of university. Slightly more students attributed the knowledge of future employment opportunities with program selection than with university selection (see Table 6). The students at the public universities indicated a slightly higher "yes" response, although this difference was not statistically significant.

#### Sources of Information and Influence and

#### Factors of Significance

In order to determine comparative ratings for the sources of information and influence and factors of significance listed in Parts C and D of the questionnaire and to highlight differences, categories five and four (high importance) were combined, category

Table 6

Percentage of Respondents Indicating  
Whether Or Not Program Choice Was  
Affected by Economic Opportunities

---

University	N	No	Yes
U of A	106	52.8	47.2%
C L C	51	60.8	39.2
U of L	68	54.4	45.6

---

three was omitted because it indicated neutral importance, and categories two and one (low importance) were combined. Category zero indicated not considered or no information attributed to the factor or source listed. These frequencies were not included in the calculation of high or low importance. The resulting ratings are presented in Tables 7, 8, and 9.

There were some differences among the responses of students from the three universities.

U of A students rated the most important sources of information and influence as follows: 1) mother (58%), 2) father (53%), and 3) visits to campus (39%). The most important factors of significance were rated to be: 1) reputation of institution (78%), 2) reputation of program (64%), 3) closeness to home (64%), and 4) variety of courses offered (59%).

Students at C L C rated the most important sources of information and influence as follows: 1) mother (80%), 2) father (65%), 3) visits to campus (57%), and 4) recommendation of former students (51%). The most important factors were: 1) size of student body (78%), 2) student/professor ratio (73%), and 3) reputation of university (67%).

Table 7

Percentage of Respondents at Each Institution  
 Indicating Relative Information of Selected Persons

Persons of Influence and Information	<u>U of A</u>			<u>C L C</u>			<u>U of L</u>		
	N	%** High	% Low	N	% High	% Low	N	% High	% Low
Religious advisor	22	3	14	30	10	41	21	2	20
Relatives/siblings	86	36	27	45	35	39	51	19	40
Friends	102	44	28	49	37	31	63	37	35
Father	100	53	16	50	65	10	60	47	22
Mother*	99	58	8	51	80	8	60	47	25
High School Counsellor	90	30	30	49	33	35	60	32	38
Teachers	95	29	30	45	29	33	52	35	18

\* Chi-square significance at  $p < .05$

\*\* Percents will not add up to 100 because middle category is omitted



Table 8

Percentage of Respondents at Each Institution  
 Indicating Relative Importance of Sources of Information and Influence

Sources of Influence and Information	<u>U of A</u>			<u>C. L. C.</u>			<u>U of L</u>		
	N	†** High	† Low	N	† High	† Low	N	† High	† Low
Campus visit *	93	39	22	46	57	12	47	29	24
University Representative	71	18	28	40	36	22	39	27	19
Phone calls *	32	4	19	35	26	28	30	6	21
Letters *	61	10	24	45	39	24	49	17	24
Publications	74	22	22	45	27	26	45	17	33
Student Recommendation	83	35	22	44	51	20	47	35	22

\* Chi-square significance at  $p < .05$

\*\* Percents will not add up to 100 because middle category is omitted

Table 9  
 Percentage of Respondents at Each Institution  
 Indicating Significance of Selected Factors

Factors of Significance	U of A			C L C			U of L		
	N	% <sup>**</sup> High	% Low	N	% High	% Low	N	% High	% Low
Close to home *	100	64	19	49	53	18	56	35	29
Location	97	44	25	51	65	16	64	43	13
Housing	74	38	13	49	49	22	54	38	19
Cost of Living	85	42	14	49	31	27	58	41	19
Tuition *	91	32	29	48	24	33	60	43	17
Scholarship	89	32	27	44	45	22	49	19	28
University Reputation	104	78	5	48	67	10	67	58	13
Program Reputation *	101	64	9	47	41	27	64	58	14
Religious Atmosphere *	44	3	27	41	31	39	28	9	25
Athletics	67	12	30	43	26	35	53	19	36
Student Population *	84	21	40	50	78	4	67	58	12
Special Program	91	46	24	47	33	31	64	30	45
Variety of Courses *	98	59	14	51	31	37	64	30	30
Student/Professor Ratio *	64	12	29	49	73	8	60	62	7
Tradition *	54	15	28	34	10	41	25	1	32
Grad School Prep.	68	31	20	42	31	20	39	16	24

\* Chi-square significance at  $p < .05$

\*\* Percents will not add up to 100 because middle category is omitted

Students at U of L rated the most important sources of information and influence to be: 1) mother (47%) and father (47%), 2) friends (37%), and 3) student recommendation (35%). The most important factors were: 1) student/professor ratio (62%), 2) size of student body (53%), reputation of institution (58%), and reputation of the program (58%).

Several sources and factors were rated highly by students at all universities. A chi-square analysis indicated that there was a significant relationship between the choice of university and the following factors: mother, personal letters from institution, telephone calls from institution, visits to campus, closeness to home, tuition costs, reputation of program, religious atmosphere, size of student population, specialized programs offered, variety of courses offered, student/professor ratio, and family tradition.

This summary is confined to only those factors and sources to be considered of major importance. Religious atmosphere of the university was rated to have low importance to both public institutions, U of A (27%) and U of L (25%), and of high importance by only

44% of C L C students. Religious atmosphere was not considered (rated 0) by 59% of students at both U of A and U of L, and by 20% of students at C L C. High school counsellors were rated as unimportant by all institutions.

#### Final Choice

The majority of students surveyed indicated that they considered and applied to only one or two universities. Only 76 (33%) of the 227 students surveyed indicated that they were not attending the university of first choice. Table 10 indicates the distribution of students and the variety of reasons offered to explain the situation.

The cost factor prevented some students at the U of A from attending the University of Toronto (4) or the University of British Columbia (4). Similarly, the cost factor prevented some respondents at the U of L from attending the University of Victoria (3), Brigham Young University (2), or other institutions in Alberta (3). The reasons for not attending the first choice university classified as "other" included: "not ready for University of Victoria yet", "parents don't

Table 10

Frequency of Mention of Reasons For Not  
Attending the First Choice University

Reason	Institution			Total N
	<u>U of A</u>	<u>C L C</u>	<u>U of L</u>	
G.P. A. too low	1	3	6	10
Cost factor	10	3	11	24
Lacking academic credentials	1	6	4	11
Too far from home	6	3	6	15
Other	6	8	7	21

approve of school so far away (U.C.L.A., U.W.O.)", "too large", "letter of acceptance arrived too late", "homesickness", "no friends there", "will go there for grad studies (U of T)", "applied for a sports scholarship there and didn't get it (Ohio State)", "no art portfolio (A.C.A.)", "education second choice to photography (Ryerson)", and "applied too late".

Students were asked if the university they were attending was their parents' first choice for them (Part E #4). The response was overwhelmingly "Yes" at U of A (76%) and C L C (64%), but only 38% "Yes" at U of L. The high "No" response by U of L parents is difficult to explain. As students at the U of L travel greater distances to school, parents may prefer students to attend closer to home.

#### Qualitative Analysis

Open-ended questions in Part E asked students to state the single most important reason for selecting the university they were attending and to comment on how they felt about the choice. Students at the U of A responded with a variety of reasons; however, closeness to home, program availability, and reputation of

program were the most mentioned reasons. Size of institution and the caring atmosphere were the two reasons mentioned most frequently by students at C L C. Closeness to home, size, and low student/teacher ratio were the most frequently mentioned factors at U of L. These answers are consistent with the ratings established earlier in Part D, which involved rating the factors of significance.

Most students stated they were satisfied or pleased with their choice. Several added that it was also a "scary" experience. This comment appeared to be more frequent among the U of A students, even though, the data were collected at the U of A several days and weeks after classes had commenced allowing students time to adjust to the university setting.

#### Summary

This study was designed to determine those factors that students considered influential or significant during the university or college selection process. The results show that there are sources of information and influence and factors of significance which are important to the majority of students. The most

influential persons and information sources are mothers and fathers. Collectively mothers were rated the more influential person.

Students reported that visits to campus were very important influential factors and sources of information. Both the U of A and C L C encourage prospective students to visit the campus before making a final decision. The recommendation of former students was established as another source of influence which is important for students attending C L C and the U of L, the two smaller universities.

The factors which tend to be important to students at the U of A were not the same factors important to students attending C L C and the U of L. U of A students rated reputation of the institution, reputation of the program, variety of courses offered, and proximity to home as important factors in their choice. C L C and U of L students rated student/professor ratio and student body size as most significant factors. These students rated reputation of the institution and reputation of the program as other important factors. Results of the study indicate that students who attend smaller universities tend to



value size of the institution and the different learning environment.

The recent popularity of business and medical professional schools within universities prompted the question about the apparent discrepancy between enrolling in these programs and economic opportunities for graduates. The findings indicate that students do not engage in serious analysis of the economic situation even though some consider this factor when choosing a university.

Smaller institutions appear to attract students whose parents have less formal education as indicated by the educational background the occupation(s) of the parents.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following section includes a discussion of the major findings of the study organized according to each research question. Implications of the study and recommendations for further research are also discussed.

#### Major Findings According to Research Questions

The Hossler & Gallagher model of student choice was used to guide the study. This model was adapted to include specific factors relevant to the conditions of the study. A questionnaire was used to identify the factors that influence Alberta students in the university selection process. This questionnaire consisted of items taken from similar studies by Sanders (1986), Lolli and Scannell (1983), Litten, Sullivan, and Brodigan (1983), and Erdmann (1983) and items designed by the researcher.

Research Question 1:

What factors influence students when they choose a university?

Areas of examination included:

- a) sources of information,
- b) individuals of influence,
- c) characteristics of student, such as; gender, ability, values, goals, and family, and
- d) characteristics and activities of institutions.

The findings reported in Chapter 4 regarding factors that influence students in selecting a college or university are similar to the findings of previous research. Students from all institutions reported that mothers were the most important source of information and influence. This rating perhaps could be attributed to the active role most mothers are believed to play in their children's moral and secular education. Mothers also tend to disseminate information. Students at U of A and C L C rated mothers as clearly the single most important person in a position to influence. Mothers and fathers were rated as equally important by U of L students. Isherwood (1988) reported similar

findings after surveying English speaking high school students in Quebec.

Students who chose to attend the U of A, the large public institution, appeared to be influenced by reputation of the institution and programs, variety of courses, closeness to home, and specialized programs. The course offerings tended to dominate the decision making process. Since 49% of the U of A students had family homes in the Edmonton area, proximity to home may be a more important factor than was reported. Rating the course offering as a very influential factor in the selection process is intellectually a more respectable response.

Students who chose C L C or U of L valued the size of the student population and the student/professor ratio and reputation of the university. The first two features are characteristic of smaller institutions and obviously influential factors for students wanting to attend a university where student population and the student/professor ratio are low. In-house research at C L C has produced similar findings (Camrose Lutheran College, 1988-89).

The reputation of the program and tuition costs

were also rated as influential factors by U of L students. The U of L programs mentioned by those students were Education and Management, both well established and highly reputed. The rating of tuition costs as an influential factor at U of L is a puzzle. Tuition costs among the publicly funded universities vary little. The privately funded C L C levies tuition fees that are twice as high as the publicly funded universities. A possible explanation for this rating could be that students confused total living costs with tuition costs and concluded that living in a smaller city would be less expensive than in the large city. Another possible explanation could be that students compared the fees at U of L with the other small universities in the province (Concordia College and Kings College) and did find them to be much lower.

The characteristics of the student did vary from one university to another. A majority of students from the U of A indicated that deciding to attend university had occurred as early as elementary school. These students also indicated most often that graduate work was planned. It appears that U of A students have made educational plans and set goals earlier than the other

students. Since there are more university graduates among U of A fathers, a university education probably is valued and encouraged in these families.

Students at the U of A appeared most academically able, based on self-reported grade twelve average as the measure used to assess ability. The entrance requirements dictate that no student will be accepted with an average lower than 70%. The calculated mean was 83%; however, this may have been affected by the method of data collection at the U of A. The majority of U of A students had attended library orientation sessions in September and, therefore, completed the questionnaire earlier than did respondents at the other two institutions. The library orientation sessions may have been perceived as important to students who had strong academic records. The remaining students who attended library orientation sessions in October and who completed the questionnaire, reported having lower averages. The October sessions appeared to be attracting the "normal" student who had been to classes for a month and discovered the need for the session or was required by a professor to attend the session. The mean average of the respondents may not reflect the

academic record of the typical student at U of A.

Students who chose to attend C L C and U of L had similar grade 12 averages (72 and 73% respectively). The entrance requirements at both colleges require a minimum of 60%. The distribution of averages indicates an even distribution of averages across the range. The U of L students reported a high number of students with averages between 60% and 70%. These students would not be admitted to the U of A. Perhaps the U of L is accommodating the less able student who wishes to attend a public university.

Some characteristics and activities are specific to individual universities. Campus visits are rated as important events by students at both U of A and C L C. Students at C L C rated campus visits and personal letters from the institution as influential factors. Perhaps the size of the institution makes these activities successful. The religious atmosphere of C L C was rated by 31% of the students as an important factor. The religious atmosphere is perceived as advantageous to these students and is obviously acceptable to the other students.

Research Question 2:

What are the factors of influence specific to students choosing the same university?

Students at the U of A reported the highest percentage of university educated fathers, the highest percentage of students whose family home is in the area, and the highest high school averages. These students also pursued a wide variety of degrees.

Students attending C L C usually lived within 200 kilometres of the institution. This finding was consistent with in-house statistics of the 1988 freshmen class (E. Pinno, personal communication, September 29, 1989). Most stated that a small university with smaller class sizes is very important. One half of the students planned to complete a bachelor's degree and the other half planned to transfer to another institution. One third of the students were enthusiastic about the religious atmosphere of the college while the other two thirds had no objection to it or did not comment.

Students at the U of L stated that they valued the small public university and low student/professor ratio. The students were as likely to come from



distances greater than 200 kilometres as less than 200 kilometres to attend. In-house statistics of the 1988 freshmen indicated that 60%-70% of students come from distances less than 200 kilometres (P. Haney, personal communication, September 29, 1989). The U of L appears to serve a large geographic area. The most unusual factor identified among students was that the U of L was not the first choice of 62% of the parents. These students appear to have made a decision which was contrary to the parents' wishes.

Research Question 3:

How have economic opportunities affected student choice?

This question was included because of the apparent trend for students to seek degrees in the fields of business and medical sciences. The results of the survey indicated that an equal number of students consider economic opportunities as do not consider economic opportunities when choosing a university. The open-ended question allowed the students to comment on this question. None of the answers indicated a serious analysis of the economic prospects for the future.

Most responses followed the pattern "there will always be a need for doctors or whatever".

Research Question 4:

Is there a relationship between the socio-economic status of the parents and the college or university selection process?

Students at U of A reported the highest incidence of university educated fathers and professional occupations. The parents of students at C L C and U of L had less formal education and reported a high percentage of homemaker mothers and self employed or entrepreneurial fathers. The differences in the economic and geographical settings of the institutions may affect the relationship between the socio-economic status of the family and the educational opportunities or expectations for students in the family.

Implications for Institutions

The findings of this study have implications for the participating universities. Results indicate that each institution is using a variety of marketing strategies to provide students with information and to

encourage students to apply for admission. Since results of this research indicate that parents, particularly mothers, are clearly the most influential person in the process, it is recommended that universities also advertise to mothers. This may involve articles in publications read by women, specific information made available at community locations, or a direct approach in the literature sent to the student.

The students at U of A reported having contemplated a university education while still in elementary school. Students at both C L C and U of L reported having made the decision to attend university at a later grade level. These findings indicate that students do plan at various grade levels in elementary, junior, and senior high schools. Universities generally focus marketing strategies at high school students, however, directing appropriate information to students in elementary and junior high school could be another effective approach to influencing student choice.

Universities employ marketing strategies to identify potential students and to provide information

to those students. Vigorous marketing may fail to identify the potential student or to portray the institution accurately if the factors students consider in the selection process as identified here are not considered.

#### U of A

Students choosing to attend the U of A value the reputation of the institution and programs, the variety of courses and specialized programs offered, and the close proximity to home. These features or characteristics of the university should be promoted in marketing the university. The convenience of living close to or at home and at the same time attending a well respected institution was important for approximately one-half of the sample of freshmen students surveyed. If the university can maintain and publicize the reputation of a wide variety of programs, it can probably anticipate attracting numerous students from the Edmonton area.

#### C L C

Students who choose to attend C L C value the size

of the student body, the student/professor ratio and the rural location. Marketing procedures at C L C have included personal telephone calls to interested students and open house style campus visits. Several students were influenced by these marketing strategies. C L C marketing should emphasize a reputation for offering a good program with a better than normal responsiveness between faculty and student body. The limited course offerings do not seem to be a drawback because the programs offered are transferable to other institutions. Although the institution is degree granting, the transfer option is attractive to students wishing to adjust to university life gradually by attending a small institution for the first years of a degree.

C L C should consider the consequences of expansion on the established group of students who find the institution a first choice. Those students who value the small, personalized, and caring aspects may not favor significant enrollment increases that may change the nature of the institution.

U of L

Students attending the U of L indicated different influential factors than either C L C or U of A. They travel much farther from home to attend. Many have indicated that their parents did not agree with the choice. This disagreement with parental choice was consistent across the respondents and was not limited to students with either high or low reported grade 12 averages. The students also value the small university setting, low student/professor ratio, and the reputation of the specialized programs.

Marketing strategies should promote those characteristics of the institution that the students' value. If the university wishes to develop a broader student appeal it would be wise to direct information to students designed to reassure them that quality and characteristics of a "small" university will not be sacrificed due to increased enrollment.

Recommendations for Further Research

Clearly mothers are influential people in the college or university selection process. Further research investigating the nature of the role of

mothers would be of value. Does the mother affect the process through information dissemination or is her involvement more personal? The economic contribution modern mothers are making to the family may have changed the nature of role of mother in the choice process.

Further research into the role of the traditional information givers, that is, high school counsellors and university representatives would be beneficial. These sources were rated by the majority of students as of little or no importance. This apparent ineffectiveness could be attributed to method of delivery or change in tradition; however, this finding is consistent with other research.

Although few students acknowledged that academic grade 12 standing determined university choice, further research might clarify the situation. Degree granting institutions in the province of Alberta do not have standardized entrance requirements. This factor may have a profound effect on the development of existing institutions and the creation of new institutions in the future.

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APPENDIX A  
VOLUNTEER CONSENT LETTER



The  
University of  
Lethbridge

4401 University Drive  
Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada  
T1K 3M4  
403-329-2251

101  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

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September 1988

Dear Questionnaire Respondent:

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this research project. The questionnaire should take only fifteen or twenty minutes of your time to complete.

The questionnaire survey is a major part of a study being conducted at three universities and designed to provide information about factors that influence students during the college/university selection process. The results of the study will be published in a thesis that is required for partial fulfillment of a graduate degree.

There are no identifying marks on the questionnaire ensuring that your participation will be kept anonymous. You are under no obligation to complete the questionnaire and may withdraw at any time. However, a high response rate is essential if the results of the survey are to contribute to a better understanding of the factors affecting the college/university choice process. Accordingly, your completed questionnaire is an important and valued part of the study.

Thank you for your time. If you have any questions please feel free to call me at 444-0083 or my supervising professor, Dr. Myrna L. Greene, at 329-2424. Please hand in the questionnaire as you leave the room.

Sincerely,

*Roslyn Beswick*

Roslyn Beswick  
Faculty of Education Graduate Studies  
The University of Lethbridge

APPENDIX B  
QUESTIONNAIRE

### Survey of First-Year University Students

All references to 'university' refer to both college and university. Please respond to the following items by checking the appropriate response or by printing the information requested.

#### Part A: Parents and Family

Please indicate the highest level of formal education achieved by your parents. Place a check mark on the space next to the appropriate description for each parent.

	Father	Mother
1. less than high school	_____	_____
2. some high school	_____	_____
3. graduated from high school	_____	_____
4. college or apprenticeship training	_____	_____
5. professional diploma (e.g. RN)	_____	_____
6. bachelor's degree (e.g. B.A., B.Sc.)	_____	_____
7. advanced degree (M.Ed., M.B.A., M.D.)	_____	_____
8. other (please specify) _____	_____	_____

Have any of your family members attended this university?

- |            |           |          |                |           |          |
|------------|-----------|----------|----------------|-----------|----------|
| 9. Mother  | Yes _____ | No _____ | 11. Brother(s) | Yes _____ | No _____ |
| 10. Father | Yes _____ | No _____ | 12. Sister(s)  | Yes _____ | No _____ |

13. Mother's occupation is \_\_\_\_\_.

14. Father's occupation is \_\_\_\_\_.

#### Part B: Values and Goals

1. Would you say that in your home it has been taken for granted that you will pursue a university degree after completing high school? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
  2. At what grade level did you first consider attending university? Check the appropriate level.  
 K - 3 \_\_\_\_\_      4 - 6 \_\_\_\_\_      7 - 9 \_\_\_\_\_      10 - 12 \_\_\_\_\_
  3. Do you plan on earning more than a bachelor's degree? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ Don't know \_\_\_\_\_
  4. If yes, did your plans for graduate work affect your choice of this university? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
  5. Was your choice of a university affected by your knowledge of future employment opportunities? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_  
 If yes, please specify. \_\_\_\_\_
  6. Was your choice of program (e.g. education, fine arts, business) affected by your knowledge of future employment opportunities? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_  
 If yes, please specify. \_\_\_\_\_
-



**Part C: Sources of Information and Influence**

The following is a list of persons or contacts which may have influenced you when making a choice of a university to attend. Please indicate the degree of importance of each item by circling the appropriate number according to the following scale:

- 5 High importance  
 4  
 3 Moderate importance  
 2  
 1 Low importance  
 0 Not important

	Very Important			Not Important		
1. teachers	5	4	3	2	1	0
2. high school counsellors	5	4	3	2	1	0
3. mother	5	4	3	2	1	0
4. father	5	4	3	2	1	0
5. friends	5	4	3	2	1	0
6. relatives/siblings	5	4	3	2	1	0
7. religious advisor (e.g. pastor)	5	4	3	2	1	0
8. recommendation of former student	5	4	3	2	1	0
9. college publications	5	4	3	2	1	0
10. personal letters from institution	5	4	3	2	1	0
11. telephone calls from institution	5	4	3	2	1	0
12. university representatives	5	4	3	2	1	0
13. visits to campus	5	4	3	2	1	0
14. other (please specify and rate) _____	5	4	3	2	1	0
_____	5	4	3	2	1	0

**Part D: Other Factors of Significance**

The following is a list of factors you may have considered when you were making your choice of a university to attend. Please indicate the degree of importance of each item by circling the appropriate number according to the following scale:

- 5 High importance
- 4
- 3 Moderate importance
- 2
- 1 Low importance
- 0 Not important

	Very Important				Not Important	
1. Closeness to home	5	4	3	2	1	0
2. Location (e.g. size of city or town)	5	4	3	2	1	0
3. Availability of housing	5	4	3	2	1	0
4. Cost of living	5	4	3	2	1	0
5. Tuition costs	5	4	3	2	1	0
6. Scholarships available	5	4	3	2	1	0
7. Reputation of institution	5	4	3	2	1	0
8. Reputation of program	5	4	3	2	1	0
9. Religious atmosphere	5	4	3	2	1	0
10. Athletic opportunities	5	4	3	2	1	0
11. Size of student population	5	4	3	2	1	0
12. Specialized programs offered	5	4	3	2	1	0
13. Variety of courses offered	5	4	3	2	1	0
14. Student/professor ratio	5	4	3	2	1	0
15. Family tradition	5	4	3	2	1	0
16. Preparation for graduate school	5	4	3	2	1	0
17. Other important factors you considered:						
_____	5	4	3	2	1	0
_____	5	4	3	2	1	0

Part E: Final Choice

1. Please list in order of preference the universities which you considered attending. Indicate with a check if you applied for admission and if you were accepted by that institution.

	Universities Considered	Applied for Admission	Accepted
1.	_____	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____

2. What was the single most determining factor in the selection of the university you are currently attending?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. If you are not attending your first choice university, please indicate the reasons why by checking the appropriate space.

G. P. A. too low \_\_\_\_\_

Cost factor \_\_\_\_\_

Lacking academic prerequisites \_\_\_\_\_

Too far from home \_\_\_\_\_

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

4. How do you feel now about your choice of a university?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Part F: Background Information

1. Sex: Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_
2. What was your grade twelve average? \_\_\_\_\_ %
3. What degree do you hope to earn at this university? \_\_\_\_\_
4. How far is this university from your family home? \_\_\_\_\_ km

Thank you