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Analysis and Recommendations, Admitted Student Survey, Summer 2014

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Eastern Illinois University

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Analysis and Recommendations, Admitted Student Survey, Summer 2014

By

Jonathan S. Coit

Ph. D., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2004

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULLFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Science in College Student Affairs Degree

In the Graduate School, Eastern Illinois University Charleston, IL

Fall, 2015

I hereby recommend that this thesis be accepted as fulfilling this part of the Graduate Degree cited
above

Thesis Committee:



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Executive Summary and Recommendations

This report investigates and analyzes data collected from a survey of students admitted to EIU, conducted in summer 2014. This report focuses on analyses which illuminate differences between attendees and non-attendees. The survey revealed several points of difference between attendees and non-attendees. Attendees of EIU:

- ranked contact from a faculty member, influence of friends, advice from their high school counselor, and the desires of their parents as more important to their college decision than non-attendees
- ranked ease of getting information, ease of applying, and the campus visit as more important to their college choice
- were more satisfied with EIU than non-attendees were with their chosen institution
- were much more likely to select “feeling that I fit in at this school,” the campus visit, amount of aid they were offered, and “personal attention I received” as one of the top 5 strengths of EIU than non-attendees
- the amount of aid offered and cost of EIU were areas of general concern, and not correlated with a subset of the other categories, with one exception
- “feeling that I fit in,” by contrast, correlated with several specific categories: amount of aid I was offered (but not cost), support for academic success, personal attention I received, social activities, the campus visit, and the community in which the school is located were all categories that tended to be higher for students that selected “fit”

Recommendations

Use financial aid to build attachment to EIU. The data support longstanding anecdotal evidence that college students have imperfect understanding of financial aid and college cost. Financial aid has of course a direct practical impact on college choice. But the data suggests that students may see offers of institutional aid as evidence that the institution wants them, which could help build a feeling that they “fit” at EIU. It is possible that the amount of aid offered is less important than the offer of direct aid from the institution itself.

Develop an appeal targeted to more independent-minded traditional students. Some data indicated that EIU attendees tended to rely more on the opinions of valued others (parents, teachers, advisors or counselors, friends, and EIU faculty) than non-attendees. Respondents who stated they felt they “fit in” at EIU were also more likely to see EIU’s support for academic success as a strength of EIU. This may mean that students who see themselves as ready to be independent, make it on their own, and not rely on others do not feel EIU is for them. EIU’s marketing and campus visit programs emphasize EIU as a close-knit community with a liberal-arts feel, where faculty and staff have close working relationships with students. It’s possible that in the “big enough to matter, small enough to care” slogan, we are over-emphasizing “small enough to care” and driving away students who want a bigger-school experience which EIU can also provide.

Assess points of personal contact across the admissions process. “Personal attention I received” appeared to have a significant positive and negative influence. Attending students were more likely to rank it as a strength than non-attending students; and non-attenders were more likely to rank it as a weakness, especially those students who also selected fit as a top five reason they did not attend. Intuitively it makes sense that, given EIU’s brand as an institution which cares about its students, that if a student has a negative personal contact, the contrast between our branding and their experience may be jarring. Providing better recognition, support, and training of those staff and faculty who often have personal contact with prospective students may help create better experiences across the board.

Reconsider recruitment strategy. EIU has in the past several years responded to a changing student environment by attempting to compete in new markets (e.g. southeast Missouri, west central Indiana), and expanding online offerings. The data suggest these strategies may not be bearing fruit. Interest in online education was extremely low among all students in all survey areas. The location data show that non-attendees come from a much larger geographic area than attendees. This may indicate admitted students comparing EIU with a much broader range of institutions than previously had been the case, a fact attested to by the long and varied list of first- and second-choice institutions. If increasing the pool of markets in which we compete is not working, it might be time to focus on fewer markets and try to build market share.

Methodology

The survey had two main goals. The first was to determine how students admitted to EIU made decisions about whether or not to enroll at EIU. The second was to compare admitted students' impressions of EIU to those of other universities to which they applied. Ultimately the aim was to find perceptions, experiences, or attributes which differed between admitted students who enrolled at EIU and those who did not. The project did not attempt to determine why some students might not choose to apply at EIU. Moreover, it did not attempt to compare the experiences of students who applied but were not admitted to EIU.

Demographics of Respondents

The survey was sent in the summer of 2014. Students were given a \$10 gift card to Amazon as a reward for completing the survey. In all, 888 students completed the survey, with 884 disclosing whether or not they were attending EIU in the Fall of 2014. The data in this report are taken from these 884 students. Of those, 468 students completing the survey stated they would attend EIU in Fall 2014, and 416 said they would not attend EIU. Nearly all survey completers were residents of Illinois (94.14%) and an additional 3.94% stated they came from regions bordering Illinois. Table 1.1 compares the demographics of survey responders to EIU demographics from Fall 2013.

Table 1.1 Ethnicity and Gender of respondents	Surveyed Students	Fall 2013 EIU Students
White	59.01%	71.58%
Black/African-American	25.34%	16.24%
Hispanic/Latino	9.68%	4.47%
Not reported	1.13%	2.69%
International	0.00%*	2.16%
Multiple	2.59%	1.70%
Asian	1.80%	0.89%
Native American	0.34%	0.21%
Pacific Islander	0.11%	0.06%
% Female	69.59%	59.83%

* “International” appears not to have been available to select as an ethnicity in the survey.

The survey demographics are roughly similar to the demographics of EIU students. In the survey, whites and males are underrepresented, while non-dominant groups are over-represented. The converted data I received did not allow for comparison of responses by gender or race. An analysis which investigated the effect of ethnicity and gender on responses, and on enrolling/non-enrolling status should be performed. In addition to revealing new insights into the data, such a study might also enable additional analyses to correct for the differences in ethnic and gender representation in the survey data.

Survey Questions

The survey asked questions to illuminate the students’ college search and application process, their impressions of EIU in comparison with other institutions, and non-enrollers’ reasons for not attending EIU. The college search process questions begin with asking students from whom they heard about EIU the colleges to which they applied, in order of preference, up to five institutions; and their campus visits. My analysis starts with questions 7-9, which asked the students how important thirty different items were to their decision to enroll at the college of their choice. The items are listed in Appendix A. The intent of questions 7-9 was to assess which factors were important to the student, rather than have them assess their institution of choice using those factors.

With questions 7-9, we get a picture of what admitted students thought were the most important and least important factors in their decisions, rendered on a 5-point Likert scale.

My analysis continues with the next set of questions, 11-12, which asked students to compare EIU to other institutions. The questions were worded to ask students for whom EIU was their first choice to compare EIU to their second choice institution. Students for whom EIU was not their first choice were asked to compare EIU to their first choice. In all cases the responses tell us what the students thought of EIU. Questions 11-12, 13-17, and 18 asked students about a shorter list of topics than questions 7-9. A list of these topics is in Appendix A. The next set of questions, 13-17, asked all students to select EIU's top 5 strengths from the same list as questions 11-12. Question 18 asked non-enrollees to select the 5 of those items that had the greatest effect on their decision to enroll, and Question 19 asked non-enrollees to rank those items from 1 to 5. The final data I analyzed were the information about the location of each respondent.

Results

The main purpose of my analysis was to see if the data could find differences between attending and non-attending students. Because the data were ordinal or rank-order data, I focused my efforts on devising descriptive statistical tests.

Questions 7-9

Questions 7-9 allow comparisons of the importance of different factors in the decision to attend their chosen college between attending and non-attending students. The data summary shows overall how important different factors were to the entire sample, as well as attending and non-attending students, and these results are listed in table 2.1 below:

Table 2.1: Importance of different factors in college decision, attendees and non-attendees combined.	Mean, All
Cost of attending this school	3.65
Availability of my chosen major	3.61
Quality of my chosen major	3.55
Graduates get good jobs	3.49
Quality of the faculty	3.41
Quality of academic resources and facilities (classrooms, laboratories, library, etc.)	3.41
Feeling that I fit in at this school	3.38
Amount of financial aid I was offered	3.34
Campus safety	3.29
My visit to the campus	3.28
College's academic reputation	3.26
Appearance of the campus	3.16
Quality of residence halls	3.15
Ease of getting the information I needed to make a decision	3.13
Social activities	3.08
The personal attention I received	3.06
Size of the school	3.03
Community where the school is located	3.03
Percentage of students who complete their degrees	3.01
Distance from home	2.97
Graduates are accepted at good graduate schools	2.96
Class size	2.94
Information from the college's web site	2.89
Ease of applying to this college	2.69
College's national rankings	2.58
Contact from a faculty member	2.52
High school counselor's advice	2.34
My parents wanted me to go to this school	1.96
Unable to afford my first-choice college	1.84
Friends' influence	1.81
Ability to take courses online	1.12

Of the 31 items, 19 had a mean rating of “important,” i.e. the 4th answer (the means were calculated by rating the 5-point Likert scale from 0 to 4 rather than 1 to 5), and an additional 4 items were very close to a 3.0 average. The overall scores were high, indicating that nearly every factor listed was “important” or “very important” to most respondents. The data enabled direct comparisons between each of the factors for attendees and non-attendees. Table 2.2 compares the differences in the mean values for each item as answered by attending and non-attending students.

Table 2.2: different factors in college decision, mean difference between attendees and non-attendees	Mean, Attending	Mean, Not Attending	Attending-Not
Ease of applying to this college	2.85	2.52	0.33
Contact from a faculty member	2.66	2.35	0.31
Friends' influence	1.94	1.66	0.28
My visit to the campus	3.42	3.15	0.27
High school counselor's advice	2.46	2.22	0.24
The personal attention I received	3.17	2.94	0.23
Class size	3.05	2.82	0.23
Information from the college's web site	2.99	2.77	0.22
Size of the school	3.13	2.92	0.21
My parents wanted me to go to this school	2.05	1.85	0.2
Ease of getting the information I needed to make a decision	3.21	3.02	0.19
Percentage of students who complete their degrees	3.1	2.93	0.17
Appearance of the campus	3.24	3.08	0.16
Ability to take courses online	1.2	1.04	0.16
Quality of residence halls	3.23	3.07	0.16
Quality of academic resources and facilities (classrooms, laboratories, library, etc.)	3.48	3.33	0.15
Social activities	3.15	3	0.15
Campus safety	3.36	3.22	0.14
Quality of the faculty	3.47	3.35	0.12
Graduates are accepted at good graduate schools	3.01	2.91	0.1
Distance from home	3.01	2.92	0.09
Quality of my chosen major	3.59	3.51	0.08
Feeling that I fit in at this school	3.41	3.35	0.06
College's academic reputation	3.29	3.23	0.06
Cost of attending this school	3.67	3.62	0.05
Graduates get good jobs	3.51	3.46	0.05
Availability of my chosen major	3.61	3.61	0
Amount of financial aid I was offered	3.33	3.34	-0.01
College's national rankings	2.54	2.62	-0.08
Community where the school is located	2.98	3.08	-0.1
Unable to afford my first-choice college	1.76	1.94	-0.18

The data enable some inferences about differences between the attending and non-attending populations. In general, attending students' overall ratings were higher than non-attendees, as in only four of the responses did non-attendees rate a factor as more important than attendees. Looking at the mean difference also allows us to see into the complexity of the college decision process more clearly. Items that attendees found more important than non-attendees in their decision include several factors relating to others' opinions and connections to EIU. Attendees rated contact from faculty members, the influence of friends; the influence of high school counselors; receiving personal attention; and their parents' opinions as more important in their decision than non-attendees. Some caution is required in determining the underlying attitudes revealed in these responses. A low response to "My parents wanted me to go to this school" could mean either that their parents wanted them to attend a different school, or that this factor was overall not a major criteria in the respondent's decision, even if the parents recommended the school. The mean differences of four factors were found to be statistically significant by an independent sample t-test: Ease of applying to this college; my visit to the campus; information from the college's website; and the quality of academic resources and facilities (classrooms, laboratories, library, etc.).

Questions 11-12

Questions 11-12 asked respondents to rate their satisfaction with EIU, and to compare EIU to their most preferred other school, on a 5-point Likert scale. Non-attending students were asked to compare EIU to the institution they had decided to attend. Attending students were asked to compare EIU to their second-choice school. Attending students rated EIU higher than non-attending students, and rated their comparison institution lower than non-attending students, as shown on Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Overall satisfaction with first-choice and comparison institutions, non-attending and attending students	Non-Attending	Attending
Mean rating of EIU	3.71	4.32
Mean rating of comparison institution	4.15	3.66

The most meaningful comparison is between the differences between attending and non-attending respondents' perception of EIU as against other institutions. Attendees saw a bigger difference

between EIU and their comparison institutions than did non-attendees. Put another way, non-attendees did not see as big a difference between EIU and other institutions as did EIU students.

More specificity on this result can be attained by comparing non-attendees rankings of their first choice institution and attendees' ranks of EIU, in effect comparing attendees and non-attendees opinions of their chosen institutions. Table 3.15 shows the results, including values for significance and effect size (Cohen's d).

Table 3.2: evaluation of first-choice institutions	Non-attending mean	Attending mean	Mean Difference	p; *=two-tailed	Cohen's d
Cost of attending this school	3.90	4.23	0.32	0.001*	0.3172
Ease of applying to this college	4.17	4.49	0.32	0.001*	0.3713
Class size	4.12	4.39	0.27	0.083	n/a
Personal attention I received	4.10	4.37	0.27	0.001*	0.3019
Ease of getting the information I needed to make a decision	4.18	4.43	0.25	0.001*	0.3135
Size of the school	4.22	4.46	0.25	0.001*	0.3041
Campus safety	4.17	4.38	0.21	0.211	n/a
Support for academic success	4.30	4.50	0.20	0.001*	0.2563
Feeling that I fit in at this school	4.20	4.40	0.20	0.001*	0.2297
Quality of the faculty	4.19	4.38	0.20	0.084	n/a
Social activities	4.22	4.40	0.18	0.001*	0.2176
Quality of residence halls	4.04	4.20	0.16	0.153	n/a
Campus visit	4.29	4.44	0.15	0.093	n/a
Quality of academic resources and facilities (classrooms, laboratories, library, etc.)	4.23	4.38	0.15	0.008*	0.1814
Quality of my chosen major	4.24	4.39	0.15	0.059	n/a
Graduates get good jobs	4.18	4.33	0.15	0.009*	0.1779
Percentage of students who complete their degrees	4.09	4.23	0.14	0.555	n/a
Availability of my chosen major	4.30	4.43	0.13	0.028*	0.1494
Distance from home	4.15	4.27	0.12	0.058	n/a
Graduates are accepted at good graduate schools	4.17	4.26	0.09	0.115	n/a
Appearance of the campus	4.22	4.28	0.06	0.330	n/a
College's academic reputation	4.17	4.23	0.06	0.320	n/a
Amount of financial aid I was offered	3.83	3.87	0.04	0.596	n/a
College's national rankings	4.02	4.06	0.04	0.490	n/a
Community where located	4.12	4.12	-0.01	0.694	n/a

As noted above, attendees' reported satisfaction with EIU was higher than non-attendees' reported satisfaction with their institutions of choice. The means for attendees' responses were all equal to or greater than means for non-attendees' responses, with the exception of the mean for community. Effect sizes for mean differences significant at $p < .05$ were calculated using Cohen's d . Considerable overlap between samples exists for all factors, however, several factors were rated significantly higher by EIU attendees. These include cost of attending, size of the school, ease of applying, personal attention, ease of getting the information I needed, size of the school, academic support, feeling that I fit in, social activities, quality of academic facilities, graduates get good jobs, and availability of my major.

Responses to these questions indicate significant bias toward the respondent's chosen institution, making deeper analysis problematic. Respondents who chose EIU rated it superior to their second-choice institution in **every** category; correspondingly, non-attendees rated their first choice institution as superior to EIU in **every** category. These results are shown in tables 3.2 and 3.3, below. Mean differences were calculated so that nearly all results would be positive.

Table 3.3, Non-attendees comparison between their first choice and EIU	First-Choice	EIU	Mean difference
Feeling that I fit in at this school	4.20	3.51	0.69
Community where the school is located	4.12	3.45	0.67
Campus visit	4.29	3.65	0.64
Appearance of the campus	4.22	3.62	0.60
Quality of my chosen major	4.24	3.67	0.57
Amount of financial aid I was offered	3.83	3.27	0.56
College's national rankings	4.02	3.47	0.55
College's academic reputation	4.17	3.63	0.54
Personal attention I received	4.10	3.58	0.52
Quality of residence halls	4.04	3.53	0.51
Distance from home	4.15	3.65	0.50
Graduates are accepted at good graduate schools	4.17	3.68	0.50
Quality of academic resources and facilities (classrooms, laboratories, library, etc.)	4.23	3.76	0.48
Social activities	4.22	3.76	0.46
Graduates get good jobs	4.18	3.73	0.46
Availability of my chosen major	4.30	3.85	0.45
Size of the school	4.22	3.77	0.44
Support for academic success	4.30	3.89	0.42
Quality of the faculty	4.19	3.78	0.40
Percentage of students who complete their degrees	4.09	3.69	0.40
Class size	4.12	3.83	0.29
Cost of attending this school	3.90	3.68	0.23
Campus safety	4.17	3.96	0.21
Ease of getting the information I needed to make a decision	4.18	4.01	0.17
Ease of applying to this college	4.17	4.21	-0.04

Table 3.4, Attendees comparison between their second choice and EIU	Second Choice	EIU	Mean difference
Cost of attending this school	3.28	4.23	0.94
Personal attention I received	3.50	4.37	0.86
Size of the school	3.60	4.46	0.86
Support for academic success	3.71	4.50	0.79
Campus visit	3.67	4.44	0.78
Class size	3.62	4.39	0.77
Feeling that I fit in at this school	3.63	4.40	0.77
Ease of getting the information I needed to make a decision	3.71	4.43	0.73
Quality of my chosen major	3.71	4.39	0.68
Ease of applying to this college	3.80	4.49	0.68
Campus safety	3.71	4.38	0.67
Social activities	3.73	4.40	0.67
Availability of my chosen major	3.76	4.43	0.66
Quality of the faculty	3.73	4.38	0.66
Quality of academic resources and facilities (classrooms, laboratories, library, etc.)	3.73	4.38	0.65
Distance from home	3.63	4.27	0.64
Amount of financial aid I was offered	3.27	3.87	0.60
Graduates get good jobs	3.75	4.33	0.58
Percentage of students who complete their degrees	3.67	4.23	0.56
Quality of residence halls	3.65	4.20	0.55
Graduates are accepted at good graduate schools	3.73	4.26	0.53
Appearance of the campus	3.76	4.28	0.52
Community where the school is located	3.63	4.12	0.49
College's academic reputation	3.82	4.23	0.41
College's national rankings	3.74	4.06	0.32

Tables 3.3 and 3.4 show what attendees and non-attendees perceived to be the largest and smallest differences between EIU and other institutions. Given the overall bias of respondents toward their chosen institutions, focusing on the rank order of the mean differences would seem to provide the most useful results. However, focusing on rank order creates a false sense of separation

between factors that were generally ranked very close. The top five areas where non-attendees saw EIU as inferior to other institutions were, in rank order: feeling I fit in, community where the school is located, campus visit, appearance of campus, and quality of chosen major, with amount of financial aid I received, national rank, and academic reputation very close. Non-attendees saw EIU as closest to other institutions, in rank order, in: ease of applying, ease of getting information, campus safety, cost of attending, and class size. Attendees saw EIU as most superior to other institutions, in rank order, in: cost of attending, personal attention I received, size, support for academic success, and campus visit, with class size and feeling I fit in very close. They saw EIU as most similar to other institutions, in rank order, in: national rankings, academic reputation, community where the school is located, appearance of the campus, and graduates are accepted at good graduate schools, with quality of residence halls close.

Accounting for the inherent bias of respondents toward their chosen institutions, some overlap between attendees' and non-attendees' perceptions becomes apparent. In this sense, areas in which attendees saw smaller differences between EIU and other institutions can be seen as expressing a similar relationship as areas where non-attendees saw particularly large differences between institutions (i.e. areas of agreed EIU weakness). These areas of overlap were: appearance of the campus, national rank, and academic reputation, and the community where the school is located. Graduation rate is an area of near agreement. Similarly, areas where attendees saw a large difference between EIU and other institutions can be seen as expressing a similar relationship as areas where non-attendees saw small difference between institutions (i.e. areas of agreed EIU strength). Only cost of attending and class size fit both these descriptions. Support for academic success is close to agreement as well.

Examining the data for rank order rather than overall rating also permits identification of areas where attendees and non-attendees perceptions appear to have greatly differed. The key item in this area is feeling that I fit in in this school. In this area non-attendees saw the biggest difference between EIU and other institutions (keeping in mind that all but one of the differences in non-attendees' perceptions ranked their first choice institution as more satisfactory than EIU). For attendees, however, "fit in" was tied for 6th largest difference between EIU and other institutions.

That is, EIU attendees generally felt strongly that they fit in at EIU, while non-attendees felt more strongly that they fit in better at other institutions. Like “fit in,” the campus visit was perceived by attendees as an area of strength, and by non-attendees as an area of weakness.

Questions 13-17

Questions 13-17 asked respondents to choose EIU’s five greatest strengths from a list of 25 provided. Summary data show how many times each selection was chosen by the respondents. Since there are different numbers of attending vs. non-attending students, comparison between attending and non-attending students was accomplished by comparing the percentage of a specific response selected by attending and non-attending respondents. Table 4.1 shows these figures, ranked according to the difference between attending and non-attending students.

Table 4.1: top 5 strengths of EIU	Times chosen, non-attending	Times chosen, attending	% choosing, non attending	% choosing, attending	% difference, attending-non
Feeling that I fit in	64	158	15.38%	33.76%	18.38%
Campus visit	51	112	12.26%	23.93%	11.67%
Amount of financial aid	147	196	35.34%	41.88%	6.54%
Personal attention	67	102	16.11%	21.79%	5.69%
Quality of major	113	149	27.16%	31.84%	4.67%
Graduates get good jobs	38	61	9.13%	13.03%	3.90%
Support for academic success	81	108	19.47%	23.08%	3.61%
Cost of attending	159	193	38.22%	41.24%	3.02%
Class size	144	174	34.62%	37.18%	2.56%
Quality of the faculty	43	56	10.34%	11.97%	1.63%
Graduates are accepted at good graduate schools	28	32	6.73%	6.84%	0.11%
Campus safety	91	102	21.88%	21.79%	-0.08%
Availability of major	127	142	30.53%	30.34%	-0.19%
Quality of residence halls	32	33	7.69%	7.05%	-0.64%
Percentage of students who complete	35	34	8.41%	7.26%	-1.15%
National rankings	32	30	7.69%	6.41%	-1.28%
Quality of academic resources and facilities	58	58	13.94%	12.39%	-1.55%
Social activities	62	62	14.90%	13.25%	-1.66%
Size of the school	105	110	25.24%	23.50%	-1.74%
Community	58	54	13.94%	11.54%	-2.40%
Distance from home	135	134	32.45%	28.63%	-3.82%
Ease of getting information	59	39	14.18%	8.33%	-5.85%
Academic reputation	89	68	21.39%	14.53%	-6.86%
Appearance of the campus	141	121	33.89%	25.85%	-8.04%
Ease of applying	150	56	36.06%	11.97%	-24.09%

Attendees far more frequently chose “fit” and campus visit as one of EIU’s top 5 strengths than non-attendees. The most commonly selected categories overall, for both groups, were amount of financial

aid and cost of attendance, and attendees were slightly more likely to select them than non-attendees. Non-attendees were much more likely to select “ease of applying” (which was the 2nd most-selected response by non-attendees) and “appearance of campus” (5th-most selected by non-attendees). Other analyses suggest that both groups feel EIU is easy to apply to, suggesting this result may be a kind of damning with faint praise.

The category, “feeling that I fit in at this school,” has appeared as an important category in many of the results. Questions 13-17 and Question 18 offer means to show what this category might have meant to participants by assessing which other categories were more commonly chosen by students that also chose “fit.” Questions 13-17 allow for assessing student “fit” among both attendees and non-attendees. Table 4.2 shows the frequency of selection of the other 24 categories for EIU’s top five strengths, comparing those who chose “fit” and those who did not. Since 221 respondents chose fit, while 652 did not, percentage of respondents choosing each category was used to rank and compare the groups.

Table 4.2: comparison of strengths chosen, respondents selecting "fit" vs. those who did not select "fit"	Number of "fit" respondents selecting each response	Number of other respondents	Percentage of "fit" respondents selecting each response	Percentage of other respondents	Difference between percentages
Support for academic success	54	132	24.43%	20.25%	4.19%
Personal attention I received	49	118	22.17%	18.10%	4.07%
Social activities	32	92	14.48%	14.11%	0.37%
Quality of residence halls	16	49	7.24%	7.52%	-0.28%
Campus visit	40	122	18.10%	18.71%	-0.61%
Graduates get good jobs	23	75	10.41%	11.50%	-1.10%
Percentage of students who complete their degrees	13	55	5.88%	8.44%	-2.55%
Graduates are accepted at good graduate schools	10	50	4.52%	7.67%	-3.14%
National rankings	10	51	4.52%	7.82%	-3.30%
Quality of the faculty	19	78	8.60%	11.96%	-3.37%
Cost of attending	82	266	37.10%	40.80%	-3.69%
Quality of academic resources and facilities	23	93	10.41%	14.26%	-3.86%
Campus safety	42	151	19.00%	23.16%	-4.15%
Ease of getting information	17	81	7.69%	12.42%	-4.73%
Community	20	91	9.05%	13.96%	-4.91%
Distance from home	59	209	26.70%	32.06%	-5.36%
Class size	70	247	31.67%	37.88%	-6.21%
Size of the school	43	170	19.46%	26.07%	-6.62%

Appearance	52	209	23.53%	32.06%	-8.53%
Financial aid offered	72	270	32.58%	41.41%	-8.83%
Quality of major	94	340	42.53%	52.15%	-9.61%
Academic reputation	22	132	9.95%	20.25%	-10.29%
Availability of major	48	220	21.72%	33.74%	-12.02%
Ease of applying	22	184	9.95%	28.22%	-18.27%

This table compares those both attending and non-attending respondents who selected “fit” against attending and non-attending responses who did not select “fit” as one of EIU’s top 5 strengths. Note that the nature of this analysis, like the previous, is highly speculative. Because respondents who selected “fit” could at most only select four other responses, their percentages for the other responses are all lower than those of respondents who did not select “fit.” Respondents who selected “fit” were less likely to select the more popular responses. Respondents who did not select “fit” were more likely than those who did select “fit” to select quality of their chosen major, amount of financial aid, cost of attendance, class size, quality of my chosen major, and distance from home.

Question 18

Question 18 was asked only to non-attending respondents. It asked them to pick the top five factors that had the greatest influence on their decision not to enroll. The data summary ranked each item in order of the number and percentage of non-attending respondents who chose that item are shown in table 5.1, and the average rank of each choice for the respondent who chose it is shown in table 5.2, below.

Table 5.1: top 5 factors chosen by non-attending respondents	Times chosen	%
Amount of financial aid I was offered	197	47%
Distance from home	165	40%
Cost of attending this school	155	37%
Community where the school is located	121	29%
Feeling that I fit in at this school	121	29%
Quality of my chosen major	99	24%
Appearance of the campus	77	19%
Availability of my chosen major	79	19%
Quality of residence halls	77	19%
Personal attention I received	74	18%
Campus visit	72	17%
Size of the school	68	16%
College's academic reputation	61	15%
College's national rankings	54	13%
Quality of academic resources and facilities (classrooms, laboratories, library, etc.)	49	12%
Social activities	49	12%
Class size	47	11%
Graduates get good jobs	33	8%
Ease of getting the information I needed to make a decision	31	7%
Campus safety	24	6%
Ease of applying to this college	25	6%
Graduates are accepted at good graduate schools	26	6%
Percentage of students who complete their degrees	27	6%
Support for academic success	24	6%
Quality of the faculty	22	5%

Table 5.2: Average rank of each factor.	Times chosen	Average rank
Amount of financial aid I was offered	194	1.51
Availability of my chosen major	79	1.77
Appearance of the campus	77	2
College's academic reputation	60	2.17
Cost of attending this school	154	2.27
Campus safety	24	2.29
Campus visit	71	2.46
College's national rankings	52	2.56
Class size	46	2.57
Community where the school is located	121	2.64
Distance from home	161	2.88
Feeling that I fit in at this school	119	3.05
Ease of applying to this college	24	3.17
Ease of getting the information I needed to make a decision	30	3.27
Graduates are accepted at good graduate schools	26	3.27
Quality of my chosen major	99	3.36
Graduates get good jobs	33	3.39
Percentage of students who complete their degrees	27	3.78
Personal attention I received	74	3.8
Quality of residence halls	77	3.94
Quality of the academic resources and facilities	49	3.94
Size of the school	68	3.96
Quality of the faculty	22	4.14
Social activities	49	4.24
Support for academic success	22	4.41

Financial aid and cost appear high on this list. However, as will be discussed below, other data will complicate the implications of this finding. A consistent result with previous data is that non-attending students see distance from home as a significant factor against enrolling at EIU. The community EIU is located in, and feeling of fit ranked 4th and 5th in this dataset. Looking at the top choices in each rank reinforces some of this picture. Financial aid offers were the most frequently chosen 1st rank item; cost of attending the most frequently chosen 2nd rank item; distance the most frequently chosen 3rd and 4th rank item; and quality of residence halls the most frequently selected

5th rank item. Moreover, “no factor” outnumbered other factors chosen beginning with the 3rd rank. All 415 non-attending respondents selected a 1st rank item. 56 did not select a 3rd rank item, while 43 selected distance for that rank. Only 281 students selected a 5th rank item. I performed an additional analysis, which tested whether those students who chose feeling I fit in for this item chose differently in their other top 5 items. Students who chose fit were more likely to select the community, size, and personal attention than students who did not select fit. They were correspondingly less sensitive to cost, financial aid, and the availability of their chosen major than non-attending respondents who did not choose fit.

Latitude and Longitude

One underdeveloped area of analysis is with location, both respondent location as well as the alternate institutions chosen by non-attending respondents. The survey collected the latitude and longitude of each respondent. While the average of latitude and longitude were similar, their variances were much different. The standard deviations for attending respondents was 1.9 degrees latitude and 6.4 degrees longitude, while for non-attending respondents the same figures were 4.4 degrees latitude and 17.6 degrees longitude. This indicates that non-attending respondents originated from a much larger area than attending respondents. It may also indicate that they are more likely to compare EIU with schools outside Illinois.

Discussion

Amount of financial aid offered and cost of attending EIU appear fairly consistently at the top of responses to all question ranges, both among attendees and non-attendees of EIU. “Cost of attendance” was ranked the most important factor in making college decisions (questions 7-9), and ranked 3rd in reasons given for non-attendees for not attending EIU (question 18). “Amount of financial aid I was offered” was ranked as the 6th most important factor for the college decision, and was the reason most chosen by non-attendees for not attending EIU. One might be tempted to conclude that the main finding of the survey is that cost and amount of financial aid offered are the

main factors separating attendees from non-attendees, and conclude that the most pressing need to increase EIU enrollment is to lower EIU's cost and increase the amount of financial aid offered.

The survey results suggest this conclusion would be faulty. First, the results from both questions 7-9 and question 18 indicate that for prospective students, the college decision is a complex one, in which multiple factors must be weighed and balanced. Both groups of students ranked all but 8 of 31 factors at or near an average of "important," while only a minority of non-attendees chose either "aid" (47%) or "cost" (40%, and often the same students) as among their top 5 reasons they chose not to attend EIU. This means that between 50-60% of the sample chose other reasons, even when they could choose up to five. Moreover, respondents who chose cost and aid also chose other reasons that influenced their decision as well. Lastly, in the responses to question 13-17 (top 5 strengths of EIU) over 40% of respondents identified cost and aid as among their top 5 strengths. If 40-50% of non-attendees ranked cost and aid as major reasons for not attending EIU, a similar percentage of attendees listed cost and aid as strengths of EIU. In a somewhat speculative analysis comparing the satisfaction responses of attendees and non-attendees, it was concluded that cost was seen as an area of EIU strength by both attendees and non-attendees. Non-attending students were less satisfied with the cost of their chosen institution and the amount of aid offered than any other factor, meaning that they chose to attend that institution despite its high cost and lower aid offer.

The factors that separated students who attended EIU from students which did not could be found in responses for each of the questions. EIU attendees tended to rank contact from a faculty member, the influence of friends, their high school counselor's advice, and the desires of their parents as more important factors for their college choice than non-attendees. They also tended to rank the ease of getting information and applying, as well as their campus visit, as more significant factors. The satisfaction survey suggests that EIU attenders saw a bigger difference between EIU and their second choice, while non-attenders tended to rank their satisfaction with their second choice (EIU) slightly more highly and their first choice slightly lower. EIU students were significantly more satisfied with EIU's cost, ease of getting information and applying, and quality of academic resources than non-attenders were with their first-choice schools. They were also significantly more satisfied

with the personal attention they received, the feeling of “fit,” and with EIU’s social activities as compared to non-attenders satisfaction with their chosen schools. Attenders were much more likely to choose “feeling that I fit in,” “campus visit,” “amount of financial aid I was offered,” and “personal attention I received” as one of EIU’s top strengths than non-attenders.

The data suggest that a multivariate analysis might provide more useful results. Some suggestions of what such an analysis might conclude can be seen in analyzing the results of investigations into the factor of “feeling that I fit in at this school.” Aid and cost were fairly constant among all groups of students; regardless of how the groups were divided, aid and cost did not appear to correlate with any other concerns. Fit, however, appeared connected to several of the other categories. Respondents who selected or prioritized fit also were more likely to select and prioritize “support for academic success,” “personal attention I received,” and “social activities” among their top 5 strengths in questions 13-17. Non-attendees who selected “fit” as one of their five reasons for not attending were more likely to select “Community where the school is located,” and “personal attention I received” than those who did not. That attending students selected “fit” and “aid” may suggest that the offer of aid helps students feel wanted by the institution. Noting that students who attended were more than twice as likely to select “fit” as one of EIU’s top 5 strengths suggests it is an important factor in attendance.

Future analysis

The current dataset offers more possibilities for analysis. My analysis grouped respondents who selected “fit” in questions 13-17 and 18, and compared their responses in those questions to those who did not. Comparisons could be made between these groups and answers to questions 7-9 (factors for college choice) and 11-12 (satisfaction with EIU and a comparison institution). Such comparisons could tell us more about this broad but important category.

Different methodologies could also yield clearer results. This analysis was mainly based on frequency statistics and means, and comparisons. The hypotheses developed in this analysis could inform a multivariate analysis. A multivariate analysis would be especially useful to understand how much each factor contributes to choice overall.

The results of this survey are rich enough to warrant doing additional surveys. Future surveys should be reviewed by staff or faculty experienced in quantitative methods to ensure the survey avoids pitfalls such as experienced in questions 11-12, and hones in on vital information in the way questions 13-17 and 18 were constructed. Questions 11-12 did not account for the bias students would likely feel towards their chosen institution. Future surveys could focus solely on categories identified in this survey as significant, and eliminate categories respondents saw as unimportant or which did not result in significant differences between attendees and non-attendees. In addition, future surveys should change how the common factors of aid and cost are assessed. Follow-up questions could be used for respondents selecting aid and cost to ensure we know what they mean. Are they referring to their total aid package, the quantity of loans, or some other issues with aid? By cost, do respondents mean total cost of EIU (tuition, fees, room and board), tuition (or some other element of cost) only, unmet need, or amount of private loans they require? Follow-up questions could also test whether (and how much) psychological value respondents attach to direct aid from the institution irrespective of the impact of that aid on the actual cost of college. Finally, there should be at least one section that asks respondents to rank or prioritize decision factors without reference to cost or aid offered.

Appendix A: Categories rated by students

Below are listed the categories as they appeared in the survey, listed by question. The categories for questions 11-18 are listed on the following page.

Questions 7-9

Ability to take courses online
Amount of financial aid I was offered
Appearance of the campus
Availability of my chosen major
Campus safety
Class size
College's academic reputation
College's national rankings
Community where the school is located
Contact from a faculty member
Cost of attending this school
Distance from home
Ease of applying to this college
Ease of getting the information I needed to make a decision
Feeling that I fit in at this school
Friends' influence
Graduates are accepted at good graduate schools
Graduates get good jobs
High school counselor's advice
Information from the college's web site
My parents wanted me to go to this school
My visit to the campus
Percentage of students who complete their degrees
Quality of academic resources and facilities (classrooms, laboratories, library,etc.)
Quality of my chosen major
Quality of residence halls
Quality of the faculty
Size of the school
Social activities
The personal attention I received
Unable to afford my first-choice college

Questions 11-12, 13-16

Amount of financial aid I was offered
Appearance of the campus
Availability of my chosen major
Campus safety
Campus visit
Class size
College's academic reputation
College's national rankings
Community where the school is located
Cost of attending this school
Distance from home
Ease of applying to this college
Ease of getting the information I needed to make a decision
Feeling that I fit in at this school
Graduates are accepted at good graduate schools
Graduates get good jobs
Percentage of students who complete their degrees
Personal attention I received
Quality of academic resources and facilities (classrooms, laboratories, library, etc.)
Quality of my chosen major
Quality of residence halls
Quality of the faculty
Size of the school
Social activities
Support for academic success