

4-26-2006

# College Recruiter Behaviors that Influence International Students' Decision to Attend Augsburg College

Marissa Machado  
*Augsburg College*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://idun.augsburg.edu/etd>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

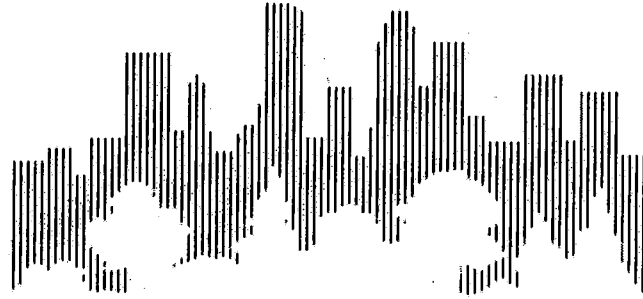
Machado, Marissa, "College Recruiter Behaviors that Influence International Students' Decision to Attend Augsburg College" (2006).  
*Theses and Graduate Projects*. 249.  
<https://idun.augsburg.edu/etd/249>

This Open Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Idun. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Graduate Projects by an authorized administrator of Idun. For more information, please contact [bloomber@augzburg.edu](mailto:bloomber@augzburg.edu).

---

**AUGSBURG**

---



---

**C • O • L • L • E • G • E**

**MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION  
THESIS**

**Marissa Machado**

**College Recruiter Behaviors that Influence  
International Students' Decision to Attend  
Augsburg College**

**2006**

**College Recruiter Behaviors That Influence International Students' Decision to  
Attend Augsburg College**

**Marissa Machado**

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Education**

**AUGSBURG COLLEGE  
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA**

**2006**

MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION  
AUGSBURG COLLEGE  
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This is to certify that the Leadership Application Project of

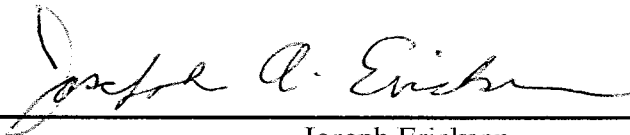
Marissa Kay Machado

has been approved by the Review Committee, and fulfills the requirements for the Master of Arts in Education degree

Date of Oral Defense: Wednesday, April 26, 2006

Date Completed: Wednesday, April 26, 2006

Committee:



---

Joseph Erickson  
Advisor



---

Ron Petrich  
Reader



---

James Trelstad-Porter  
Reader

## ABSTRACT

### College Recruiter Behaviors That Influence International Students' Decision to Attend

Augsburg College

Marissa Kay Machado

January 15, 2006

Leadership Application Project (EDC 585)

Action Research (EDC 587) Final Project

This study will investigate the role of the admissions counselor in influencing an international student to attend Augsburg College. Previous research has indicated that factors such as a student's knowledge of a host country, perceived quality of education, and scholarship awards are determining factors in the college selection process, but very little research has examined what role the international recruiter plays in this process. The number of academic institutions which international students can choose from are varied and numerous, making the role of the international recruiter key in the recruitment process. This research indicates that the admissions counselor can play a pivotal role in an international student's decision to attend a particular academic institution, leading to long term benefits such as increased enrollment, a stronger alumni base, and a stronger reputation as a place of higher learning in the international education market.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL.....	ii
ABSTRACT .....	iii
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Overview .....	1
Background of Research Topic .....	1
Research Question .....	3
Purpose and Importance of Study.....	4
Summary .....	4
II. REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE	
Overview .....	5
Section 1.....	5
Summary .....	8
III. METHODOLOGY	
Overview .....	9
Research Approach and Design .....	9
Subjects .....	9
Consent Procedures and Instrumentation.....	10
Summary .....	11
IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	
Overview .....	11
Section 1.....	11
Section 2.....	13
Section 3.....	15
Section 4.....	18
Section 5.....	20
Section 6.....	22
Section 7.....	23
Section 8.....	25

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Overview ..... 28  
Conclusions and Recommendations ..... 28

VI. REFERENCES ..... 33

## **INTRODUCTION**

### *Overview*

In the fall of 2002, a student from Nepal was researching college options in the United States. He contacted several colleges and received a response from a private institution in Minnesota. As a result of timely and personal interaction, a relationship was established that was the reason behind his decision to attend that college. Limited access to education in less developed countries has led to an increase in international students studying overseas (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). Research has shown that most United States colleges and universities have received international students into their programs but have not formulated a strategic recruitment plan. These students self-selected the institution based on family and friends who were acquainted with the university or a faculty member who came into contact with the student or their family while traveling overseas. In the 1980s, more and more institutions started developing plans for the recruitment of international students (Byrd, 1991).

### *Background of Research Topic*

With recruitment plans in place, a question that remains unanswered is what role the college recruiter plays in influencing international students' decision to attend a particular academic institution. An article highlighted by US Journal states, "We'd love to serve every campus that is interested in international student recruitment, but we simply cannot be all things to all people. In this business, success depends an awful lot on the personality of the counselor who travels with us. Extroverts tend to do well" (usjournal.communique, August 2004). There is a need for creating a personal



relationship with prospective international students throughout the recruitment process. When this relationship is established, successful recruitment can take place.

Published research has addressed international students' selection of a host country and individual college selection, but little has been published on the role recruitment plays in an international students' decision to attend a particular college. Joseph and Joseph (1998) identified academic and program concerns, cost of education, location and recreation facilities, and peer and family influences as four of the most important factors that influence international students' choice of institution. Since the variety of academic institutions from which international students have to choose is so large, the decision of which college to attend is overwhelming, therefore, the role of a recruiter could help make the task less daunting.

The global context for attracting international students to study in the United States is another factor influencing recruitment. Globalization is defined as "the closer integration of the countries and peoples of the world which has been brought about by the enormous reduction of costs of transportation and communication, and the breaking down of artificial barriers to the flows of goods, services, capital, knowledge, and (to a lesser extent) people, across borders" (Steiglitz, 2003). In a speech given at 3M on February 2, 2006, President Bush addressed the global competition to attract the world's best brains, especially in science and technology. He stated that we are currently in a situation where there are more high-tech jobs in America than people available to fill them, and emphasized our nation's need to recognize the intelligent engineers and chemists from other countries who are educated in the United States or received their education abroad but want to work here. The fear is that if our nation does not work to fill

these jobs, we will lose the best and the brightest employees to other countries who know how to fill the positions efficiently (Office of the Press Secretary, 2006).

This information is pertinent when considering the recruitment of international students. “According to the Institute of International Education (IIE), the second most popular field of study for international students in the United States is engineering (16.5%) and mathematics and computer sciences (9%). Fields experiencing growth include the physical and life sciences (up 11%)” (Open Doors Report, 2005). The global context for recruiting international students must be taken into consideration by the international admissions recruiter. Providing prospective international students with educational access to job market demands globally, and deliberately marketing this academic strength through the recruitment process, can provide colleges and universities with a recruiting advantage.

### *Research Question*

The purpose of this research is to examine the role international recruitment plays in an international student’s decision to attend a particular institution for higher education. The increase in international student’s studying overseas has driven academic institutions to develop an international recruitment plan. Admissions criteria need to be set that will attract qualified and appropriate students to the institution (Byrd, 1991). The combination of a strategic recruitment plan and a campus-wide effort across departments that is committed to the international goals of the institution will foster the success of international recruitment. The international recruiter’s role strengthens the connection of international students to the institution the year prior to their attendance and will foster

student's success. In conjunction, these factors can contribute to an increase in international student attendance at a specific educational institution.

### *Purpose and Importance of Study*

In the midst of budget cuts in education and limited resources available to prospective students, it is imperative to continue focusing on the role of the recruiter in providing international students access to higher education. Likewise, for international students living in less developed countries where access to post-secondary options may be limited, the role of the international recruiter is crucial to help educate students to their options in this competitive academic market. By providing accurate information on higher education, counseling throughout the admissions process, and contact through email to faculty and staff on campus, international students are able to make connections and build confidence in their decision to attend a particular institution of higher education. Simply stated, developing a significant relationship with a personal contact is a determining factor in the recruitment process.

### *Summary*

Identifying the role of the international admissions counselor in educating prospective international students on the benefits of higher education and influencing the decision to attend a particular academic institution could potentially lead to an increase in international student enrollment, a universal awareness of the institution's prestige in international communities, and a strong alumni base which could foster success in international student enrollment.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Overview*

This literature review includes a summary and critical analysis of six empirical research studies published between 1986 and 2002. The variety of institutions from which a prospective student can make a choice is so large that the decision to attend a particular institution is likely to be influenced by opinions from friends, family, and education counselors. It is important to note the lack of research available pertaining to the role of admissions counselor in the recruitment of international students. As a result, the literature review may appear small, but provides comprehensive summaries of the specific studies found that pertain to this topic of research.

### *Section 1*

A study of 17 international students enrolled at the University of Southern Mississippi used a Q-methodology to examine the effectiveness of support services available to them as well as the students' decision to utilize these services (Johnson, 1993). Q methodology "combines the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research traditions by providing a way to reveal the subjectivity involved in any situation (e.g. in poetic interpretation, political attitudes, etc)." The findings of this study indicated that the perception of international student services as well as the amount of time that international students utilize the support services was different for all students. The findings also indicated that international students underutilized the services provided to them. Improvements to Johnson's (1993) study could be made by increasing the number of participants, conducting the research at both public and private institutions, and by

doing further research to consider how international support services can be changed so that they will be effective and utilized by international students.

In 2002, 2,485 students across four different Asian countries were asked to identify the reasons why they selected a particular study destination for a variety of academic programs including, but not limited to, secondary school, English language courses, and postgraduate studies (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). This study concluded that the better knowledge a student has of a particular host country the more likely they would be to select it. The findings also indicated that the institution's reputation for quality and word-of-mouth referrals is among the factors that influence a student's decision to attend a particular academic institution. I propose that Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) could improve their study by extending the research to other parts of the world in order to see if this trend remains the same across other continents.

A study of 1,065 international students from 31 United States colleges used a questionnaire to investigate the choice of United States colleges for full time degree seeking students (Zikopoulos and Barber, 1986). The results of the study indicated that the main attraction for international students when deciding which college to attend was based on the perceived quality of education they would receive. Friends, relatives, and private information companies also influenced the decision-making process. In addition, the study also found that the financial cost of attending the school was misleading. The study's validity could be improved by examining the role financial aid and scholarship opportunities play in the decision-making process, as well as determining the percentage of international students who remained at their initial college choice for their degree.

Research done in 2002 used a questionnaire for 110 participants and asked them to identify the choice criteria Indonesian students use when deciding which international academic institution to attend (Joseph and Joseph, 2000). The results indicated that the course and career information provided by the university and the aesthetics of the campus were the most influential decision-making factors for these students. I recommend that by looking at other countries where prospective international students are interested in higher education and developing different strategies for those markets Joseph and Joseph's (2000) study could be improved.

An examination of the information provided by British universities to overseas students inquiring about undergraduate courses was completed in 1997 (Mortimer, 1997). The study briefly discussed the financial income generated from international students, identifying a need to be more intentional about the recruitment process of international students. Mortimer's research found that the main reason international students study in the United States is based on scholarship awards. Other reasons identified were the availability of information and people in their home country they knew who studied abroad. My recommendation to make this study more comprehensive is to research more universities than exclusively those in the U.K. system.

A study that focused on meeting the needs of international students found that generally, international students come to colleges and universities in the United States on their own initiative (Tanner and Schute, 1999). Thirty schools offering a social work program were involved in the study, and stated that their predominant mode of recruitment was through faculty contact with overseas schools, attendance at conferences, and research. The research also indicated that the international student office played a

role in the process, although there was no explanation what this role was. My suggestion to provide stronger results for this study is to expand the research to include schools other than social work and give more details on the role of the international student office.

### *Summary*

In conclusion, while several studies have focused on students' choice criteria when exploring international education, few previous studies have examined the impact the specific criteria has on students' decision-making process. The variety of academic institutions from which a prospective student can choose is so large that it makes the results of this research even more valuable. Still, the gaping hole that exists in the research is the specific role the international recruiter plays in students' decision-making process. The lack of research on this topic, initiated the decision to focus on one private, liberal arts college. This research intends to answer questions that have not been addressed in previous research and provide a base line for colleges and universities to continue the pursuit of internationalizing campuses worldwide, specifically by examining the role of recruitment and the correlation between international student matriculates.

This research could lead to long term benefits such as increased enrollment, the importance of a "fit" between the student and the institution, and a stronger alumni base that could initiate student referrals and give credibility to a college or universities claim of internationalizing their campus. Past research gives insight into ways that academic institutions can better market themselves for prospective students and better prepare for their arrival, therefore it is imperative that we begin evaluating the role of recruitment in an international student's decision to attend an academic institution.

### **METHODOLOGY**

### *Overview*

This study will investigate the relationship between college recruiter behaviors and international students' decision to attend a particular four-year, private, liberal arts college in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In an effort to generalize the results of this research to focus on the specific needs of international students seeking a smaller academic institution in the Midwest, this particular study will specifically look at Augsburg College.

### *Research Approach and Design*

The method of this research was an in depth qualitative study of incoming and currently enrolled freshman and transfer international students. This information was accessed from *Recruitment PLUS*, a comprehensive data-base solution that coordinates admission and enrollment activities, which is used as a recruitment tool at Augsburg College (*CollegeBoard*, 2005, para. 3).

### *Subjects*

An international student is defined as a person who is a citizen or permanent resident alien of a country or political area other than the United States; has a residence outside the United States to which he or she expects to return; and either is, or proposes to be, a temporary alien in the United States for educational purposes. College recruiters are defined as individuals who help guide prospective international students through the process of learning about and applying to the college. This is done by establishing and maintaining an informational, active communication system with prospective international students, their parents, and financial sponsors by means of high school and



community college visits, college fairs, telerecruiting, on campus visits, and email interactions to promote Augsburg College.

#### *Consent Procedures and Instrumentation*

Participants in this study were contacted through an email and letter invitation from the international admission counselor at Augsburg College. Three students participated in an audiotaped focus group and seven students responded to the focus group questions through email. The focus group and gathering of email responses took place over the summer break in 2005.

The focus group questions were determined based on an extensive literature review and experience working with students in college admissions. For this study, students were asked nine open-ended questions regarding the recruitment process factors that influenced their decision to attend Augsburg College (See appendix A-1 for a list of questions).

As a result of limiting this research to Augsburg College, there is sampling bias because the researcher is only able to study the accessible population at the college. In addition, as the international admissions recruiter at Augsburg College and the individual administering the focus group questions, there is an additional risk for sampling bias to occur. This could bring about misleading results. Another concern of the researcher is that international students may interpret the focus group questions differently based on their cultural and ethnic backgrounds. As a result, any generalizations will be made with considerable caution.

### *Summary*

The data for this study will compare the frequency of the responses, categorized by the researcher, in order to determine the role of the admissions counselor in influencing international students to attend their college.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### *Overview*

In order to determine the role of the admissions counselor in the decision of an international student to attend Augsburg College, we begin with considering the students' perception of their admissions process. In order to do this, students responded to eight questions pertaining to the recruitment process. Based on the final results, it can be inferred that when the international recruiter has a strong connection with the prospective student during the year prior to their attendance, a stronger tie is created between the student and the academic place of learning. Therefore, the admissions counselor can play a pivotal role in an international student's decision to attend a particular academic institution. The results are captured in the section below.

### *Section 1*

***ITEM 1: Did you attend high school or college in the United States prior to attending Augsburg College? If yes, how did this experience influence your decision in choosing a college?***

How important is it to prepare students for the North American college experience? The results of this question indicate that intentionality in preparing an international student for the United States educational experience can be of great benefit.

Three of the participants had not attended high school in the United States prior to attending Augsburg College. Six respondents had attended college or high school in the United States prior to attending Augsburg (see Table 1). Of the six participants who had attended high school or college in the United States prior to arriving at Augsburg, four had attended college and one had attended high school.

One student noted that the high school experience aided in determining the type of college environment for which they were looking and helped them make their decision by giving them another educational experience which to compare their college search (see Table 2). This student also said that this experience was beneficial in providing a more realistic view of college based on conversation with a college counselor. In addition, the student was able to prepare for national exams required for acceptance to United States colleges and universities. One person indicated that their prior experience in college made did not effect their decision to attend.

This evidence indicates that international students' previous educational experience in the United States could better prepare them for their college search. Admissions counselors should take this into consideration when working with different applicants, recognizing that international applicants who have not experienced the education system in the United States may need more assistance through the application process.

**TABLE 1: Item 1.A**

**Did you attend high school or college in the United States prior to attending Augsburg College?**

<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Percent</u>	
No	5	50%	
Yes	6	50	(1 h.s. / 5 college)

**TABLE 2: Item 1.B**

**If yes, how did this experience influence your decision in choosing a college?**

<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Experience...	4	80%
College Search...	1	20

*Section 2*

***ITEM 2: Did you work with an admissions counselor during the year prior to your attendance at Augsburg College? If yes, what were the benefits of this relationship?***

This section emphasizes the importance of creating a positive relationship with the applicant early in the admissions process. This can benefit the college in recruitment, and clarify expectations for the student and the institution of higher learning.

All ten respondents worked with the admissions counselor prior to their attendance at Augsburg (see Table 3). It is important to note that over half of the respondents who filled out the questionnaire indicated that they did not work with an admissions counselor. This implies that students may have been unclear on the definition of admissions counselor or may have misinterpreted the question. Further research could address the interpretation internationally of the word “counselor” and the perception that many international students have when hearing the word. In addition, English Language Learners from countries spanning the globe have several different interpretations for the usage of admissions jargon. The subjectivity of all words for all people should be considered as a factor in further research.

Several benefits were listed by participants, including five respondents indicating that the positive relationship the student had with the admissions counselor was the most important aspect (see Figure 1). The friendliness and general knowledge of the admissions counselor was specifically noted as a benefit. Students had a comfort and confidence in their decision to attend because of the accessibility to the counselor during the year prior to attendance. One participant indicated that remembering a student's name made them feel like they were wanted at Augsburg.

Four responses noted that timeliness in the counselor's follow-up was important. Receiving admissions materials promptly upon request gave a student confidence in the academic institution and fostered a feeling of commitment by the academic institution.

Other benefits of working with the admissions counselor prior to attendance were the positive attitude of the admissions counselor, the image of the college created by the counselor, the relationship between the counselor and advisor of international student advising, and being put in communication with current Augsburg students, faculty, and staff during the recruitment process.

**TABLE 3: Item 2**

**Did you work with an admissions counselor during the year prior to your attendance at Augsburg College?**

<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Percent</u>
No	0	0%
Yes	10	100

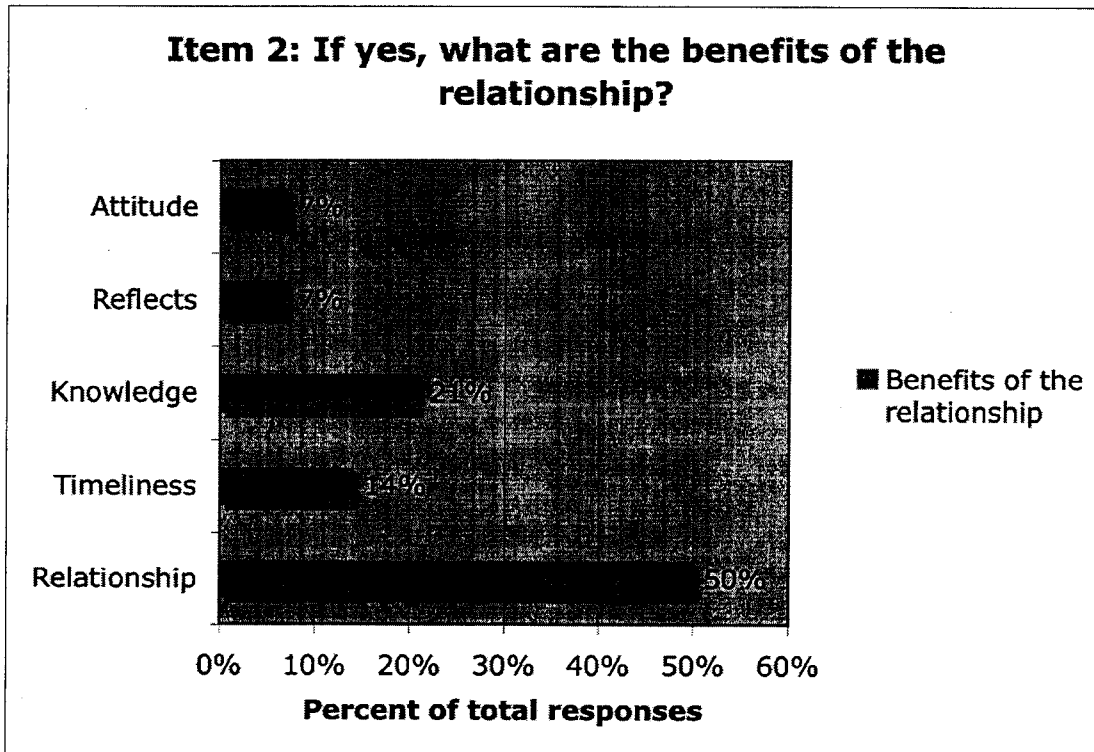


FIGURE 1: Benefits of working with an admissions counselor during the year prior to attendance at Augsburg College.

*Section 3*

***ITEM 3: What suggestions could you offer that would have made the admissions process go more smoothly?***

This segment of the study indicates the importance of initial contact and follow-up by the admissions counselor. You only get one opportunity to make a good first impression. Providing direct and clear information on college websites and in publications is crucial to the decision-making process of a prospective international student. These results also suggest that the admissions counselor cannot be successful alone. A team of people can best support and strategize in order to attract international students.

A suggestion reiterated by two students was to provide better communication with international students who arrive to campus prior to international student orientation. They suggested such things as providing information on restaurants on campus or in the area and the location of banks and how to open an account. They also indicated a need to provide information on the seasons in Minnesota and the range of temperatures, as well as a description of the difference between streets and avenues and how to read a map. This indicates that many of these students choose to attend colleges and universities in locations of the United States of which they have limited knowledge, therefore comprehensive information should be provided in such a way that students can begin preparing for their experience and what to expect when they arrive, before they leave their home country. For example, this information can be provided when sending students admissions accept or deposit letters for your academic institution. An example of this is to include additional information in the admissions packet such as fun facts on the area, a map, locations of banks, and emergency contact numbers.

Other suggestions included sending mail correspondence. Several students requested receiving letters more promptly and wanted a better explanation of the visa application process. International students know the difficulty in receiving an F-1 Visa (Issued to students who want to study or conduct research at an accredited United States college or university.) from the United States Embassy, and feel affirmed when they are provided with many sources of information which coach them through the process of getting the visa, such as providing a list of the type of questions to anticipate in their interview and suggestions on how to answer them.

In addition, students wished to see more scholarships and financial aid available. The suggestion was made to provide one or two full tuition, room, and board scholarships. Many international students are in need of financial assistance and, colleges who are interested in increasing their international student population, should take into account this need when considering scholarships and financial aid opportunities available to applicants.

Respondents also recommended sending international alumni, college professionals, or current students to recruit. They indicated that this would provide prospective students with a more realistic view of what Augsburg College can provide. Many international student applicants to your college or university cannot visit your institution; hearing stories from others who have attended makes a significant impact on one's decision to attend.

One suggestion offered by participants was a need for a comprehensive website. Suggestions were made to provide detailed information on international admissions, financial aid for international students, as well as links for ISLP (International Student Loan Programs) loans for international students. The website functions as the colleges face for students who live overseas and cannot visit campus, therefore thorough web development is critical for the recruitment process.

Two students indicated that they had no suggestions for making the admissions process go more smoothly (see Figure 2). They appreciated the self-explanatory forms, good email interaction, and prompt response by the admissions counselor. These results reaffirm the important of all three modes of communication.



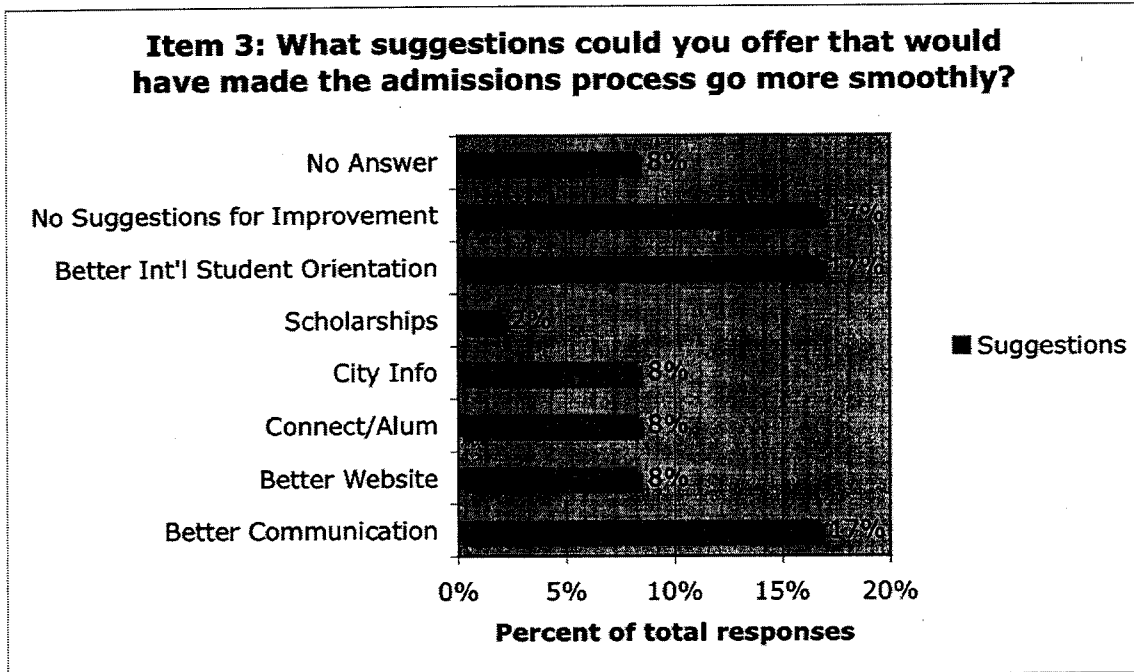


FIGURE 2: Suggestions for making the admissions process go more smoothly.

*Section 4*

***ITEM 4: What did the college recruiter do that influenced your decision to attend Augsburg?***

When entering the recruitment process, a student’s ability to trust that the academic institution is looking out for their best interest needs to be established early on by the admissions counselor. This trust can play a significant role in the student’s decision-making process.

The most influential decision-maker, indicated by four responses, was the amount of scholarship money received (see Figure 3). Two of the students indicated that the counselor provided a glimpse of what the Augsburg experience would be like. Participants appreciated conversations with the counselor about the benefits of Augsburg and how it would help nurture growth as a student and a human being. It was noted that

the counselor reflected the mission statement of the college and that this was influential in making a final decision to attend the college.

Three responses noted that prompt follow-up to emails and phone calls by the counselor played a factor in making their decision to attend Augsburg.

One student indicated that they appreciated the referrals made by the counselor to faculty, staff, and students on campus. They said that contact with a coach, financial aid director, and providing an explanation of employment opportunities through the human resources office showed that the counselor was committed to introducing them to all parts of campus and played a role in the decision-making process.

One student indicated that the counselor's knowledge of the admissions process was beneficial for them. The counselor walked them through the forms required throughout the admissions process, which eased their anxieties around applying to college. It was also noted that it was influential to have the counselor break down the admissions process so that it was easier to understand.

These results indicate that international students appreciate and can potentially be influenced to attend a particular academic institution if the admissions counselor takes personal time to connect with them and respond to their questions. They feel a sense of comfort and confidence in their decision when good communication is established and remains consistent throughout the recruitment process.

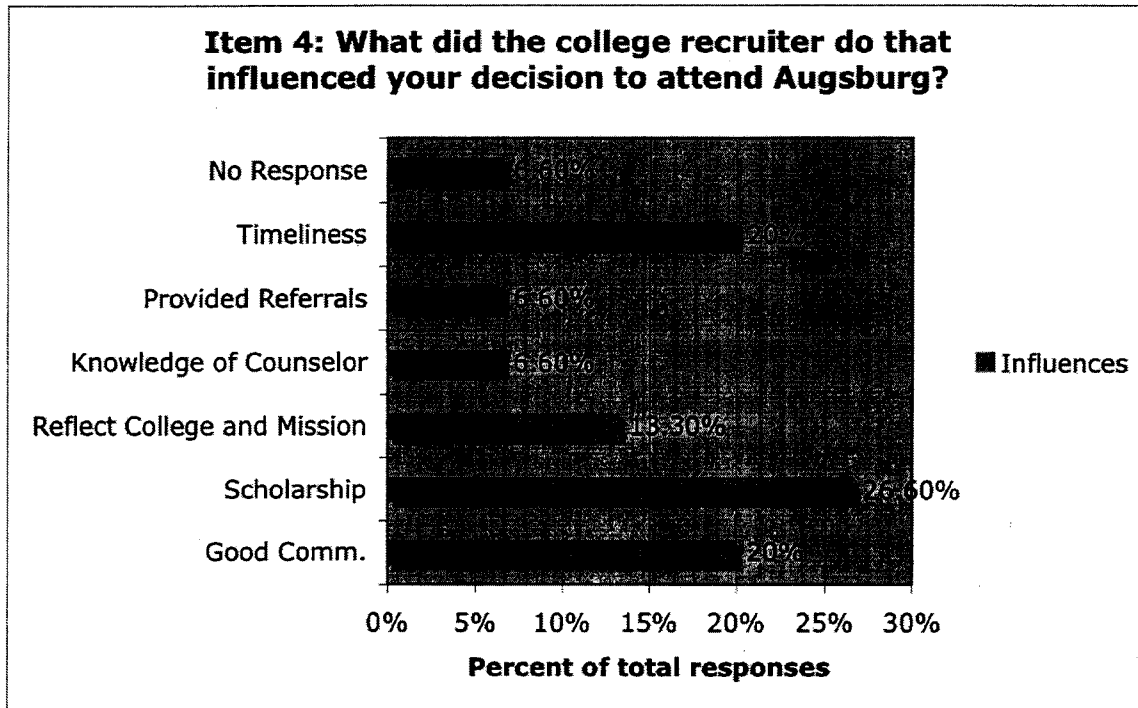


FIGURE 3: College recruiter behaviors that influenced international students to attend Augsburg College.

*Section 5*

***ITEM 5: How important was the international admissions counselor in influencing your decision to attend Augsburg?***

The responses to this question emphasize the importance of financial support for international students. Although the role of the admissions counselor is important, affordability is shown to play a stronger role for prospective students when determining attendance at an academic institution.

Nine respondents noted that the admissions counselor influenced their decision to attend Augsburg by providing comfort throughout the application process through prompt follow-up, friendliness, and a knowledge of the recruitment process (see Table 4). Two responses stated that the counselor’s role in the recruitment process influenced their

parents that Augsburg was the best choice for their child. It was also noted that the friendly and helpful attitude of the counselor also was significant.

Subjects also indicated their decision to attend Augsburg College was based on scholarship amounts. One student said that the counselor played no role in the decision to attend. For this student the size of the college was important in the decision-making process, but the majority of this student's information on what college to attend was gathered through *CollegeBoard*, a not-for-profit membership association whose mission is to connect students to college success and opportunity.

This implies that although the admissions counselor plays a significant role in a student's decision to attend a particular academic institution, the amount of scholarship money received can outweigh all other factors. The combination of personal and prompt follow-up by the admissions counselor and a strong financial aid package is imperative to recruitment success and matriculation.

**TABLE 4: Item 5**

**How important was the international admissions counselor in influencing your decision to attend Augsburg?**

<u>Response</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Very	9	90%
Somewhat	0	0%
Not	1	10%

## Section 6

### ***ITEM 6: What about the characteristics (and environment) of the college influenced your decision to attend?***

The campus community and its environment can strongly influence the decision-making process of an international student. A student's ability to capture the campus environment and surrounding area can potentially increase international student inquiries and enrollment.

Eight of the participants had not visited Augsburg College prior to their attendance so campus environment played no role in their decision. This indicates the importance of the campus climate on student's decision-making process. Crisp publications, comprehensive and easy to navigate websites, and email communication are all important reflections of the university or college for students unable to visit prior to admission.

Three students indicated that Augsburg's campus environment was critical in their decision-making process. In general, respondents felt that Augsburg had a friendly and welcoming campus atmosphere. Augsburg's location in the city was also a significant factor for students. One participant noted that size played a key role and that the campus community influenced their decision.

In addition, participants listed wanting to transfer from an all-girls college to a co-ed college. It was also noted that Augsburg seemed like the right "fit" and that the student's goals were aligned with the goals of the college. Opportunities available to the students, the Christian foundation, and the emphasis on transforming education were also noted as important in a student's final decision. One student added that during her visit to

campus the intelligent faces of the students and the feeling that academics were important at Augsburg played a role in her decision to attend.

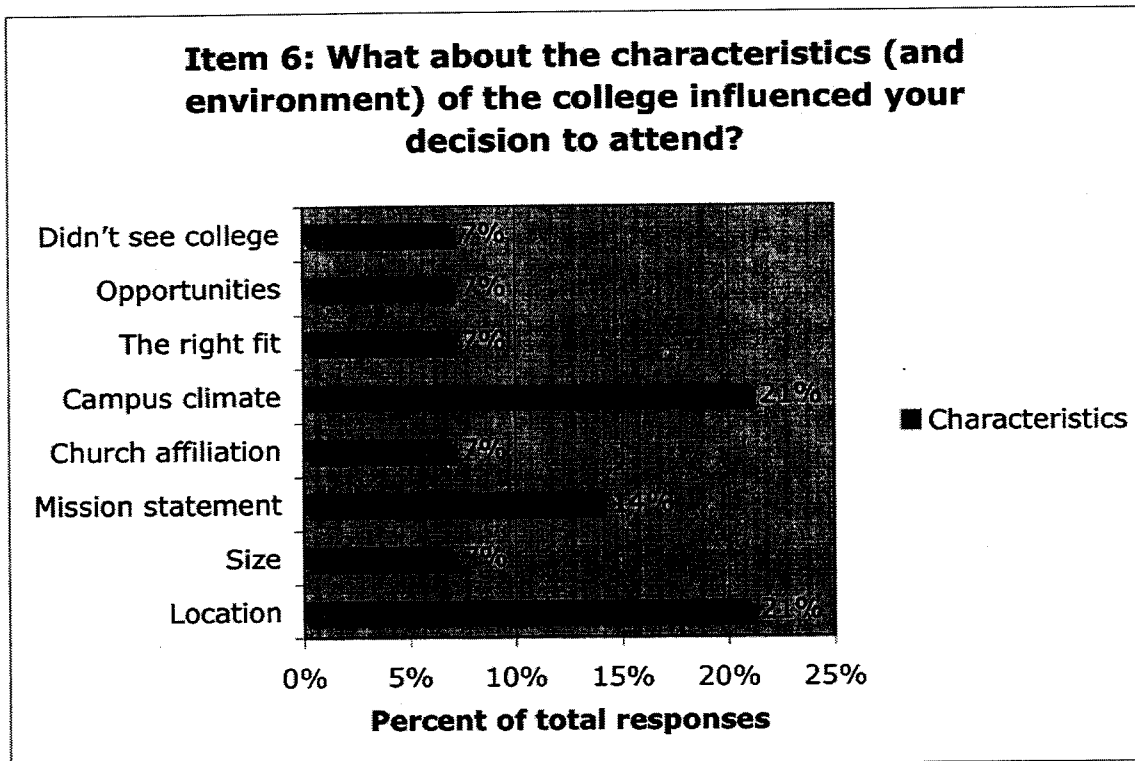


FIGURE 4: Characteristics and environment of Augsburg College that influenced a student's decision to attend.

*Section 7*

***ITEM 7: What factors were most important when making your decision to attend Augsburg?***

In a competitive academic environment, the decision-making process for international students comes down to affordability. Financial commitment equates to student interest.

Unanimously, all participants listed their scholarship amount as the most important factor when deciding to attend Augsburg. Four subjects listed the location as being important in their decision and two indicated the size of the college.

Other significant factors that helped when making the final decision to attend Augsburg College were the relationship created with the admissions counselor and the college location. Students also listed factors such as the size of the college campus, Augsburg's academic reputation, the college's mission, and the fact that Augsburg is a private college. Participants also indicated that completing the steps of the admissions process gave them confidence that the right college decision was made.

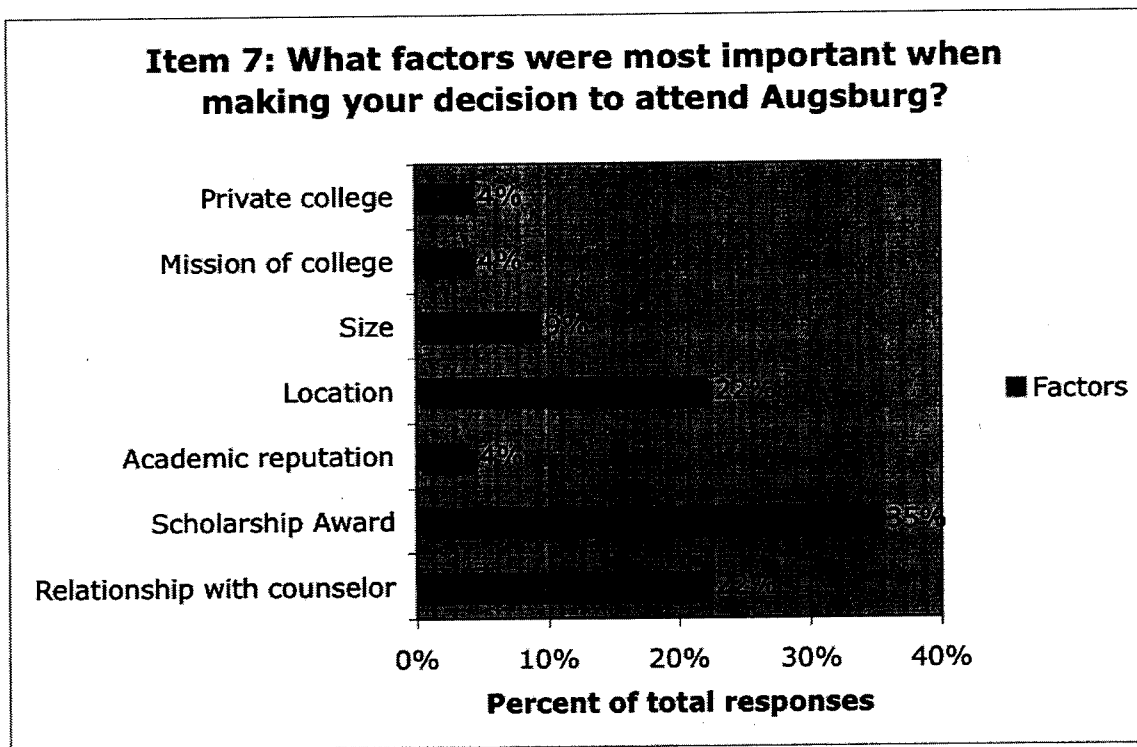


FIGURE 5: Most important factors for international students when making their decision to attend Augsburg College.

*Section 8*

***ITEM 8A: Has your college experience been aligned with the expectations presented to you by the international Admissions Counselor, the college website, and the admission materials?***

The results of this question indicate the importance of developing a clear strategic recruitment plan which encompasses the role of the admissions counselor, the college website, and admissions publications. These factors can create a strong recruitment environment in the institution of higher learning.

Collectively, participants were very satisfied with the role of the admissions counselor at Augsburg College (see Table 5). They were less satisfied by the college's website and admissions materials.

Three students reiterated that the website was difficult to access (see Table 6). Another respondent indicated that they were not able to access Augsburg's website from their home country because they have a dial-up connection which eventually "times out" before the website is located. Other participants suggested putting international admissions on the home page of the website and placing the college's tuition and fees in a clearly labeled location. In addition, respondents indicated a lack of information on campus life, organizations, and residence life. Based on this information, there is an immediate need to redefine the international admissions portion of the website, as it is critical for students to access information on the college and various programs available to incoming first-year students.



In regard to Augsburg's admissions materials, three participants reported disappointment in not receiving any materials throughout the admissions process (see Table 7). One student noted that materials were received upon acceptance and then not again until international student orientation began. Another suggestion was made to consider parents in the recruitment process and provide materials for them to access as well. This information suggests that colleges consider investing in publications and targeted international mailings. An in depth analysis could be done on which countries depend less on the Internet and more on mailings and specifically where it would be cost effective to send international mailings.

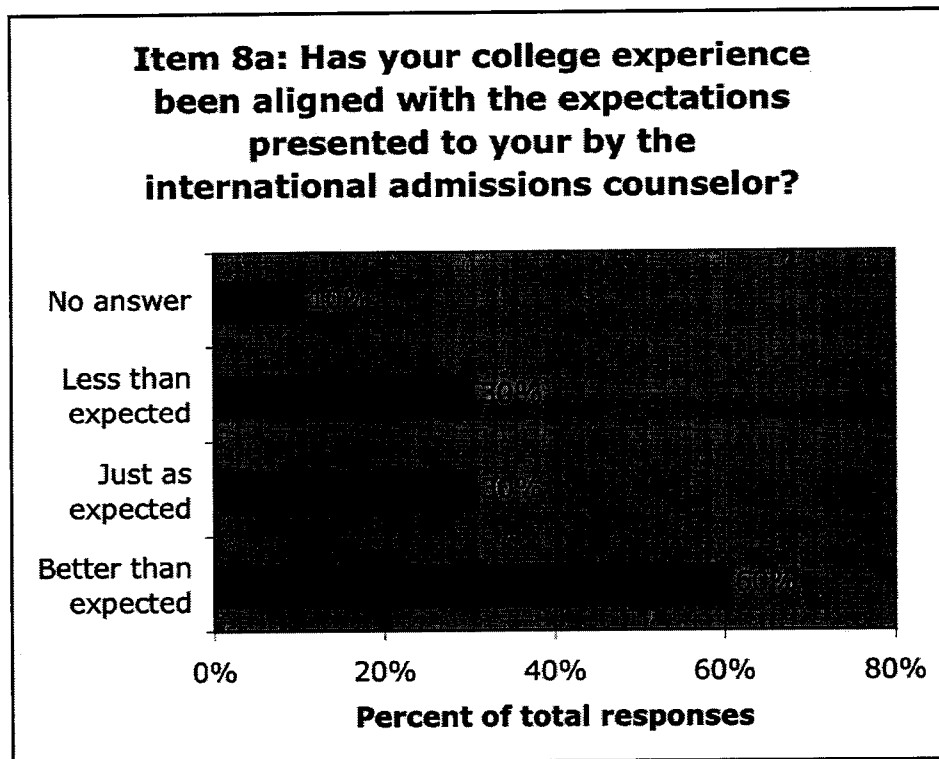


FIGURE 6: Alignment of college experience with expectations presented to student by international admissions counselor.

**Has your college experience been aligned with the expectations presented to you by the Augsburg College website?**

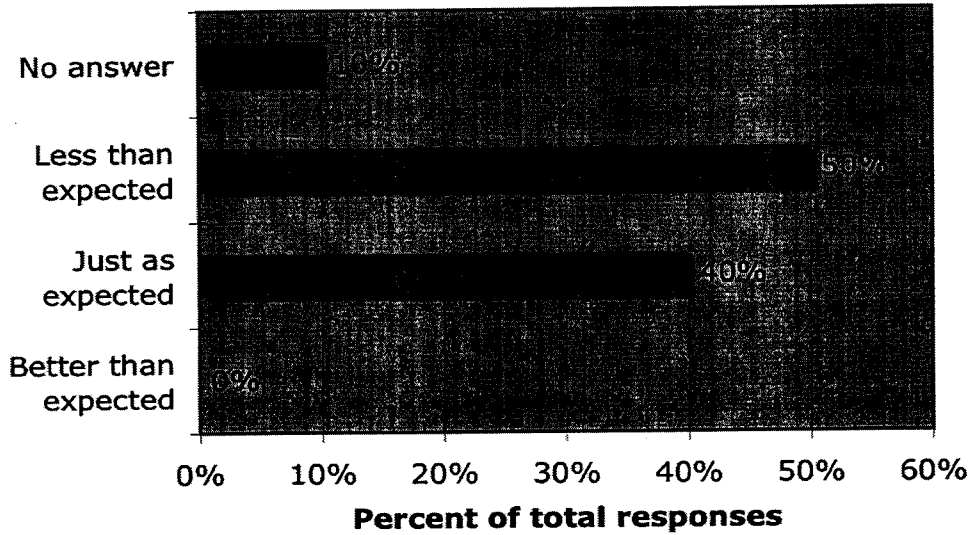


FIGURE 7: Alignment of college experience with expectations presented by the Augsburg College website.

**Item 8c: Has your college experience been aligned with the expectations presented to you by the Augsburg College admissions materials?**

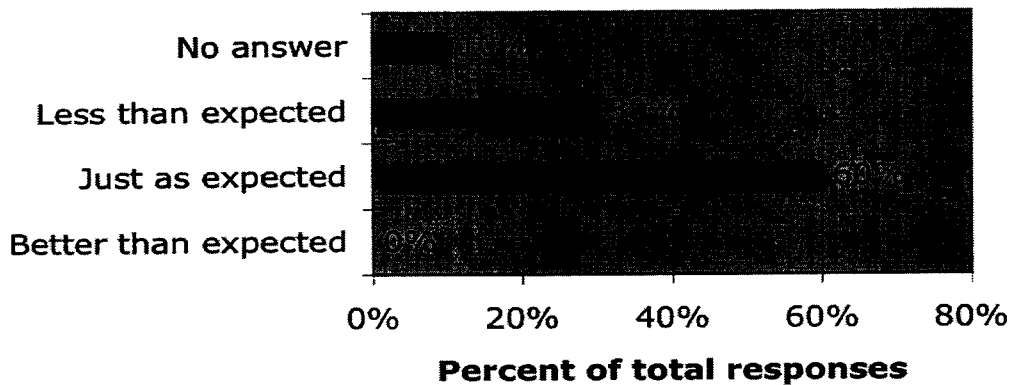


FIGURE 8: Alignment of college experience with expectations presented in Augsburg College admissions materials.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### *Overview*

The findings of this research point to the impact an international admissions recruiter can have on enrollment numbers. The counselor can play a pivotal role in an international student's decision to attend a particular academic institution, which the researcher suggests can lead to long term benefits such as increased enrollment, a stronger alumni base, and a stronger reputation as a place of higher learning in the international education market. That said, even with all of these things in place, this research shows that the decision for many international students to attend is also influenced by the amount of scholarship money awarded.

### *Conclusions and Recommendations*

The most suggestible results from the research, supporting the thesis of the study, indicated that the role of the admissions counselor is significant in the decision-making process. Ninety percent of the students who worked with an international counselor prior to attendance stated that the positive relationship with the counselor was influential in their decision to attend Augsburg College. These noteworthy results indicate the importance the international admissions counselor and the impact personal contact has in the recruitment process. Colleges and universities recruiting international students should consider this an advantage in the recruitment process. Students living abroad have limited experiences with United States education and culture, and are reassured by a person who will be there to respond to their questions along the way. This point should be considered when creating an international recruitment strategic plan.

The amount of scholarship money students receive is also pertinent to student's decision to attend a particular college or university. Although the counselor plays a significant role in recruitment, this and prior research suggests that students will commit to the institution providing the best financial offer. Addressing the financial investment expected by families is critical in maintaining a recruitment edge in this highly competitive market.

Based on the research results, additional implications for improved recruitment techniques can be made. Although the sample was limited, this research unmistakably indicated that international students are unclear of the role an international admissions counselor plays in United States higher education. For colleges and universities who want to continue having a specific recruiter for their international students, a recommendation would be to give an explicit description of the role of the admissions counselor in all written materials and on the college website. This will provide the initial step in students' awareness of the assistance freely provided to them through their college search. Further research could address the interpretation internationally of the word "counselor" and the perception that many international students have when hearing the word.

Because most students are extremely motivated to do their university studies in the United States, it can be assumed that colleges and universities who do the best job translating the system have a recruiting advantage. When working with the international student applicants who have had no prior educational experience in the United States, the recruiter should do whatever they can to help introduce the student to what their college experience would be like if they were to choose a particular academic institution. Since the students have little to no understanding of the United States higher education system,

they can easily become frustrated to the point of abandoning their search. It is possible that international students choose to abandon their college search due to a lack of systemic understanding. Therefore, when not translating well Augsburg's place in the system (liberal arts college, etc.), students might easily get pushed to academic places of higher learning that are doing a better job of simplifying the system. Ideas that intentionally promote a college or universities place in the market might include providing links to college preparation materials on the international admissions page of the website, sending an email or letter to prospective international student from a current international student sharing their personal experience at Augsburg, connecting recruits to various faculty and staff across campus to promote an in depth look at the college, or connecting prospective students to current students at the institution.

Although all of the students who took part in this study were pleased with the role of the counselor in the recruitment process, there were several suggestions made by participants in the study for creating a smoother recruitment process. Based on the findings, colleges and universities may want to consider the following suggestions:

Creating a comprehensive and easily maneuverable website is critical for international students to effectively research an institution. Institutions should have a clearly marked section with hyperlinks that provide information on the admissions process, financial aid, the I-20, and visa process. In addition, international students do not always understand "undergraduate programs," therefore a suggestion is to provide a link from the main website that specifically says "international admissions."

In addition, participants in the study indicated the importance of empowering students, faculty, or staff who travel abroad with simple recruitment pieces; the objective

is to direct prospective students and their families online, to a destination featuring easy navigation and relevant information on the college. This will allow students to have personal contact with the ambassador to ask questions about the college or university as well as have a publication in their hand with access to the college's Internet site.

International students also desire more focus to be placed on the international student orientation program. Colleges should focus on creating a seamless transition for incoming international students to the campus, keeping in mind that these students' college experience at their academic institution of choice began as early as the start of the recruitment process. Providing incoming international students with current international student mentors on campus should also be considered to help with the transition. The effort displayed by the recruiting college or university toward the international student is revered and, if well executed, will produce a strong alumni base to partner with recruitment.

This research indicates that benefits of investing in this preparation include international students feeling more integrated with the college, higher graduation rates, more student referrals, a stronger alumni base, financial gain, and a strong reputation for the academic institution in the international education market. Further research could examine the specific necessities of international students and how to successfully implement an orientation program that bridges the gap between students' cultural and academic backgrounds. The results of a smooth transition could lead to higher matriculation rate and a stronger international alumni base.

If colleges and universities want to attract and retain international students, a clearly defined recruitment and marketing strategy is required that includes participation

and support of the entire campus community. This research suggests that the admissions counselor cannot be successful alone and that financial support influence a student's decision to attend a particular college. An integrated team effort is important so that the institution can strategize and support in the recruitment process in order to attract international students to an academic institution and provide the most strategic financial aid plan for matriculating this population.

## References

- Byrd, P. (1991) "Issues in the Recruitment and Retention of International Students by Academic Programs in the United States." Georgia State University.
- CollegeBoard Recruitment and Admission. (n.d.). Retrieved December 5, 2005, from <http://www.collegeboard.com/highered/ra/rp/rp.html>
- Darrup-Boychuck, C. (2004). e-Recruitment Trends and Techniques. Retrieved March 2006 from [usjournal.com/muniqu](http://usjournal.com/muniqu).
- Definitions From the Literature. In *American Council on Education* (p. 3).
- Green, M. & Olson, K. (2003). Internationalizing the Campus: User's Guide. American Council on Education.
- Highlights from Open Doors 2005: *UNITED STATES Sees slowing decline in International Student Enrollment In 2004/05*. <http://opendoors.iienetwork.org/?p=69736> (14 Nov. 2005).
- Johnson, K. (1993) "Q-Methodology: Perceptions of International Student Services in Higher Education." University of Southern Mississippi.
- Joseph, M. & Joseph, B. (2000). Indonesian Students' Perceptions of Choice Criteria In the Selection of a Tertiary Institution: Strategic Implications. *The International Journal of Educational Management*. 40-44.
- Mazzarol, T. & Soutar N., G. (2002). Push-Pull Factors Influencing International Students Destination Choice. *The International Journal of Educational Management*. 82-90.
- Office of the Press Secretary. *President Discusses American Competitiveness Agenda in Minnesota*. The White House. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/02/20060202-1.html> (2 Feb. 2006).
- Tanner, J. M. & Shute, R W. (1999). A Study of Canadian and American Admissions Equity at Brigham Young. *College and University*. Washington: Vol. 74, Iss. 3; 25-30.
- Zikopoulos, M. & Barber, E. G. (1986). Choosing Schools From Afar. The Selection of Colleges and Universities in the United States by Foreign Students. *Institute of International Education*. New York, N.Y.





