



College Choice Literature Review

The decision making process is complex and subject to multiple influences that not only interact with each other but also change over time. This is especially true with major life decisions such as choosing a college to attend. In fact, this is actually a nested set of choices where the first choice is whether or not to attend a college or college-like institution. At this information gathering stage, advice of friends, counselors, and parents has great influence. The next level of decision making (assuming the choice is to obtain education or training) is the type of institution to attend. Choices include universities, two-year colleges, technical schools, community education, private tutoring, and so on. Listed below are factors mentioned as influential in a selected set of literature. The number of times a factor was mentioned is noted in parentheses if greater than one. Prevalent factors include parental influence, college reputation, and cost of attendance. The number of times a factor was mentioned indicates it appears in several different studies but does not necessarily imply they are more important as the prevalence of certain factors could result from researcher preferences of factors to examine. A review of this list does give a global sense of factors appear to be relevant and information about specific factors should be gleaned from the literature provided in the reference section. Finally, while it is natural to expect that these factors would relate to Gavilan College, not all of them necessarily will apply and there may be other relevant factors not listed here.

College Attendance Factors

- Getter better jobs
- Gaining general knowledge
- Enhancement of self esteem

College Information Sources

- College students
- Friends
- High school counselor
- Parents/family
- Importance of sources varies at different stages of decision process

College Choice Factors

- General Community College
 - Parental direct influence (x5)
 - Parental education level (x2)
 - Reputation of college, both local and global (x4)
 - Cost, degree of influence varies by socioeconomic class (x3)
 - Availability of desired programs (x2)
 - Faculty reputation (x2)
 - Financial Aid (x2)
 - Location of courses (x2)
 - Quality of programs (x2)
 - Social life (x2)
 - Athletics
 - Campus climate
 - Counselors' recommendations
 - Days/times of needed classes
 - Friends attending same college
 - Friends' advice
 - Friendliness of staff
 - Perceived student/institution fit
 - Residency status
 - Size of college
 - Spousal considerations
 - Work
- Vocational College
 - Friends and relatives
 - Reputation
 - Location
 - Childcare
- Special Groups
 - Safety and academic issues more important to women than men
 - 3 themes for African-American and Hispanic women: familial influences, the American dream, striving to overcome
 - Athletes' most important factor was head coach followed by academic support services, and location. Winning championships is also a positive factor.
 - First generation students
 - Cost (parent)
 - Academic reputation (parent)
 - Personal attention (parent)
 - Social activities (student)
 - Second+ generation students
 - Students and parents agreed more on selection factors
 - BA holder's mostly but not exclusively choose community college to facilitate career change

Prepared by Terrence Willett, October 1, 2004

References with Abstracts

Adebayo, B. (1995). Gender differences in vocational college choice process. *Canadian Vocational Journal*, 30(3) 27-28.

An exploration of the college choice decision-making process of male and female students (n=605) enrolled in a vocational college suggests that friends and relatives are the major sources of information about college choice and that the reputation of programs, location, and child care are important factors that should be promoted when recruiting students. (JOW)

Bers, T. H., & Galowich, P. M. (2003). Parents and the college choice process for community college students. *Journal of Applied Research in the Community College*, 10(1) 24-40.

Examines parents' expectations from a community college and their roles in the college choice process of community college-bound students. Reports that, overall, parents had high academic goals for their children, wanted the college to prepare for bachelor's degrees, and overestimated their children's academic abilities. Discusses implications for improved communications with parents of prospective community college students. (Contains 27 references.) (RC)

Bers, T. H., & Galowich, P. M. (2002). Using survey and focus group research to learn about parents' roles in the community college choice process. *Community College Review*, 29(4) 67-82.

Discusses a survey of community college students' parents, regarding their expectations from the college, their role in their child's college choice, and their observations following their child's first year. Reports that parents had high academic goals for their children but overestimated their academic abilities, and that the parents engaged in a variety of college search and choice activities. (Contains 20 references.) (AUTH/NB)

Bers, T. H., & Smith, K. (1987). College choice and the nontraditional student. *Community College Review*, 15(1) 39-45.

Describes a study of the decision-making processes of nontraditional students at a public, suburban community college regarding the critical life incidents which preceded the decision to return to college, information used in searching for a college, and factors influencing college choice, as well as information about students impressions and attitudes. (DMM)

LU

Bouse, G. A., & Hossler, D. (1991). Studying college choice: A progress report. *Journal of College Admission*, (130) 11-16.

Conducted five-year study of the various choices students (n=4,923) must make at each grade level in high school to make solid decisions about which college or university to attend. Findings revealed that parents played important role in formation of students' educational aspirations and in decisions about saving for a postsecondary education. (NB)

Broekemier, G. M. (2002). A comparison of two-year and four-year adult students: Motivations to attend college and the importance of choice criteria. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 12(1) 31-48.

Surveyed adult college students regarding their motivation for attending college and the relative importance of college choice criteria. Getting better jobs, gaining general knowledge, and enhancement of self-esteem were most frequently mentioned. Availability of desired programs, days/times of needed classes, locations of courses, cost, and faculty reputation are the most important choice criteria.(EV) *LU*

Broekemier, G. M., & Seshadri, S. (1999). Differences in college choice criteria between deciding students and their parents. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 9(3) 1-13.

Compared the importance ratings of various college choice criteria by 395 college-bound high school seniors and their parents. Identified significant student/parent and student gender differences. Safety and academic issues were more important to females than males. Students identified social life, friends attending, and athletic programs as more important than did parents. (DB)

Butner, B., Caldera, Y., Herrera, P., Kennedy, F., Frame, M., & Childers, C. (2001). The college choice process of african american and hispanic women: Implications for college transitions. *Journal of College Orientation and Transition*, 9(1) 24-32.

Qualitatively examined the college choice process for African American and Hispanic females at a large southwestern university. Identified, through the voices of these women, three major themes that support their decision to attend college: familial influences, the quintessential American dream, and striving to overcome. (EV)

Cabrera, A. F., & La Nasa, S. M. (2000). Understanding the college-choice process. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 27(3) 5-22.

Summarizes literature on the process that students and their families undergo when making

decisions about college. Also presents a comprehensive model synthesizing this literature.

(Author/EV) *LU*

Erdmann, D. G. (1983). *An examination of factors influencing student choice in the college selection process* October 1, 2004, from ERIC database.

Surveyed high school graduating seniors (N=401) and guidance counselors, (N=536) concerning influences on college choice. Results showed that important factors included availability of specific programs; reputation, location, and size; and counselor and parent recommendations. (WAS)

Flint, T. A. (1993). Early awareness of college financial aid: Does it expand choice? *Review of Higher Education*, 16(3) 309-327.

An Illinois study found that parents' (n=823) college savings and awareness of college financial aid possibilities had significant indirect effects on the tuition levels of colleges under consideration. Effects of a number of other demographic variables and knowledge factors were found. (Author/MSE)

Gabert, T. E., Hale, J. L., & Montalvo, G. P., Jr. (1999). Differences in college choice factors among freshmen student-athletes. *Journal of College Admission*, (164) 20-29.

Reports on a study of college choice factors among freshmen student athletes (N=246). Overall, the student athlete's college choice decision was influenced most by the college head coach variable. Other influential factors included academic support services and location of the school. Discusses implications for future research, departmental programming, and institutional effectiveness. (Author/GCP)

Heath, W. C. (1993). Choosing the right pond: College choice and the quest for status.

Economics of Education Review, 12(1) 81-88.

Although status is important in student's choice of college, students do not always choose most prestigious school they can attend. Student concerns for both local and global status shape college choices. Students with similar abilities but different preferences choose different institutions. Implications for college choice, retention, academic competition, and students' attitudes about academic standards are developed in diagrammatic exposition.

(MLH)

Johnson, R. G., & And Others. (1991). Counselor impact on college choice. *School Counselor*, 39(2) 84-90.

Findings from 3,708 college freshmen revealed that most began college planning before their high school senior year and chose college during their senior year. Academic reputation, quality of available programs, costs, faculty reputation, and friendliness were top factors considered by students. Most frequently cited sources of college information were college students, friends, and high school counselor. (NB)

Kallio, R. E. (1995). Factors influencing the college choice decisions of graduate students. *Research in Higher Education, 36*(1) 109-124.

A study investigated the relative importance of 31 institutional characteristics in 1,068 graduate students' decisions to enroll or not enroll in the institution. Factors having the greatest influence included residency status, quality and other academic environment characteristics, work-related concerns, spouse considerations, financial aid, and campus social environment. (Author/MSE)

Kern, C. W. K. (2000). College choice influences: Urban high school students respond. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 24*(6) 487-494.

Describes the results of a study about the college choice process for minority high school students considering postsecondary education. Finds that the biggest influence on college choice appears to be parents, college reputation, friends, and the student's own initiative. Financial aid was an important consideration for many students. (Contains 15 references.) (VWC)

Litten, L. H. (1982). Different strokes in the applicant pool: Some refinements in a model of student college choice. *Journal of Higher Education, 53*(4) 383-402.

Research on college choice as it relates to students' characteristics is reviewed, and the choice process is shown to be a complex series of activities, with individuals participating in it differently. Parent education is a stronger influence than race or gender. Groups are likely to respond to different marketing strategies. (MSE)

MacDermott, K. G., & And Others. (1987). The influence of parental education level on college choice. *Journal of College Admissions, (115)* 3-10.

Examined first and second generation college attenders and their parents, approaching the college selection process. Students and parents completed questionnaires on attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and attributes. Parents who did not attend college emphasized cost, academic

reputation, and personal attention; their offspring, social activities. Second generation parents and their children agreed more and chose schools of greater stature. (KS)

Paulsen, M. B., & St John, E. P. (2002). Social class and college costs: Examining the financial nexus between college choice and persistence. *Journal of Higher Education*, 73(2) 189-236. Examined how students' enrollment responses to college costs--both in college choice and persistence decisions--vary by social class. Found substantial class-based patterns of enrollment behavior in response to prematriculation perceptions of college costs and actual postmatriculation costs, consistently restricting postsecondary opportunities for lower-income relative to higher-income students. (EV)

Rosen, D. E., Curran, J. M., & Greenlee, T. B. (1998). College choice in a brand elimination framework: The high school student's perspective. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 8(3) 73-92.

Examines two studies (n=18, n=103) of high school students' approaches to college choice, using a "brand elimination" approach to consumer decision making and analyzing each stage of the student decision process. A salient finding was that different sources of information are important to the student at different stages of college selection. (MSE) *LU*

Smith, K., & Bers, T. H. (1989). Parents and the college choice decisions of community college students. *College and University*, 64(4) 335-348.

A study investigated the extent of parental involvement in the decisions of two-year students, the kinds of information about colleges they use, and the activities in which they engage. Results show parents were involved in information-gathering but were not necessarily decision-initiators or decision-makers. Marketing implications are discussed. (MSE)

Toma, J. D., & Cross, M. E. (1998). Intercollegiate athletics and student college choice: Exploring the impact of championship seasons on undergraduate applications. *Research in Higher Education*, 39(6) 633-661.

A national study found that since 1979, winning a national championship in football or men's basketball results in increases in applications for undergraduate admission in years following the championship. This was found both in absolute numbers and in comparison with schools not winning championships. Institutional data are charted. (Author/MSE)

Townsend, B. K. (2003). The two-year college as a first choice, second choice institution for baccalaureate-degree holders. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 27(4)

273-288.

Examines the factors influencing the choice process and institutional/educational satisfaction of baccalaureate degree holders in two-year college degree programs. Constructs demographic profile of these students, ascertains reasons for attending two-year college, and determines factors contributing to satisfaction. States that 62% of students surveyed were preparing for a career change. (Contains 19 references.) (AUTH/NB)

Villella, E. F., & Hu, M. (1990). College choice as a linking variable between recruitment and retention. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 3(1) 79-88.

A study of 740 first-year university students found a strong positive correlation between students' college choice, subsequent expectations of the institution, and intent to stay at or leave the university. It is suggested that processes occurring before matriculation are as significant as the college social and academic environment or external forces in student retention. (MSE)

Walford, G. (1991). Choice of school at the first city technology college. *Educational Studies*, 17(1) 65-75.

Examines the school choice process from both pupils' and parents' points of view. Reveals that students' choice of a school designed for technical instruction was not necessarily based on the greater technological emphasis offered. Found little connection between school quality and parental school choice and no connection between school quality and student choice.

(DK)

Wiese, M. D. (1994). College choice cognitive dissonance: Managing Student/Institution fit. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 5(1) 35-47.

A study investigated key factors used by 344 first-year college students to assess their fit to their university. Applying concepts of cognitive dissonance, the study showed perceptions of student/institution fit to be related to key attribute and aspirational variables. Implications for enrollment management, especially retention, are discussed. (Author/MSE) *LU*