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
- Get 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

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References with Abstracts

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)

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)

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)

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*

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)


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*


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)


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)


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*

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)

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)

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)

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)

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)


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)


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)


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)


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)


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)


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*


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)


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)

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)

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)

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)

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*