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AUTHOR Fidler, Paul; Bucy, Eileen McGinity
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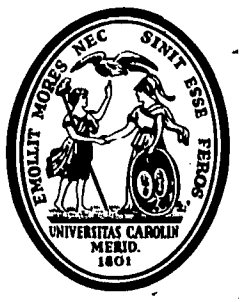
ABSTRACT

The extent of the University of South Carolina's (USC) appeal to academically talented students was examined and potential areas of difficulty in recruiting such students were defined in a questionnaire study. The sample of academically talented students included all of the 1974 semi-finalists from South Carolina in the National Merit Scholarship Competition, as well as the 58 students who competed as semi-finalists for one of USC's Carolina Scholars Awards. It was found that USC's appeal to academically talented students is not strong. Such students who considered USC but elected to go elsewhere cited as the primary reason the academic reputation of the school. Those who chose to attend USC were more likely to cite low cost as the major reason, although the availability of the Carolina Scholars Program was a major influence for some. Based on student recommendations, USC could enhance its appeal to these students by taking steps to strengthen its undergraduate academic reputation, by promoting its newly created medical school, by expanding existing honors and study abroad programs, and by offering additional scholarships awarded on merit. (LBH)



RESEARCH OFFICE
DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA
COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA 29208

A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF U.S.C.'S APPEAL TO ACADEMICALLY TALENTED STUDENTS

RESEARCH NOTES NO. 31-76

April 6, 1976

Principal Researchers:

Dr. Paul Fidler
Academic Planning Officer

Ms. Eileen McGinity Bucy
Graduate Research Assistant

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Introduction:

In the fall of 1974, the Research Office of the Division of Student Affairs administered a questionnaire to a select sample of academically talented South Carolina students during their freshman year at the University of South Carolina (USC) and other colleges throughout the United States. The purpose of this study was to determine the extent of USC's appeal to academically talented students and to define potential areas of difficulty in recruiting such students.

The sample of academically talented students which was used in this study included all of the 1974 Semi-Finalists from South Carolina in the National Merit Scholarship Competition, as well as the 58 students who competed as semi-finalists for one of USC's Carolina Scholars Awards.[1]

Two different questionnaires were employed in the study. One was used for students attending USC, while the other was designed for students who chose to attend other colleges and universities. These questionnaires along with appropriate cover letters explaining the purpose of the study can be found in the Academic Planning Office.

The data collected in this study can be divided into three parts: (1) reasons for attending colleges other than USC, (2) reasons for not attending USC, and (3) reasons for attending USC.

[1]The Carolina Scholars Program is USC's most prestigious scholarship program. Nominations are received from state high school principals and applicants are evaluated through a series of regional interviews. The list of 58 Carolina Scholars semi-finalists was obtained from USC's Office of Student Financial Aid. The list of South Carolina Semi-Finalists in the National Merit Scholarship Competition was obtained from National Merit Publications. Eleven students who co-existed in each group were arbitrarily placed in the Carolina Scholar's group for purposes of this study.

The results are presented in tabular form followed by comments to highlight the major findings.

RESULTS:

The survey received an overall response rate of 41% as reported in Table 1. The academically talented students attending USC had a higher response rate when compared to those students not attending USC (56%: 36%).

TABLE 1

Number and Percentage of Responses to Academically Talented Student Survey

	Questionnaire Response		
	No. Mailed	No. Received	% Received
Students Attending USC	51	29	56%
Students Not Attending USC	191	70	36%
Total	242	99	41%

Table 2 shows that of the 242 academically talented students selected for this study, 51 students or 21% chose to attend USC. The greater percentage of Carolina Scholars attending USC (45%) can be partially accounted for by the lucrative scholarships awarded to eight students in this group.

TABLE 2

Percentage of Academically Talented Students Attending USC and Other Schools by Type

	Carolina Scholars Semi-Finalists N=58	Nat'l Merit Semi-Finalists N=184	Totals N=242
Students Attending USC	45	14	21
Students Not Attending USC	55	86	79
Totals	100	100	100

REASONS FOR ATTENDING COLLEGES OTHER THAN USC:

Several important reasons were given by academically talented students who chose not to attend USC (see Table 3). Academic reputation played an important part in the selection of the students' present college or university. These students seemed to be seeking a college or university with a strong academic reputation. On the other hand, special educational programs and established graduate programs were not important in their decision. Although low cost and financial aid in general were not important, scholarships did play an influential role.[2] The recognition of achievement which scholarships provide may have been a deciding factor in their choice of college.

Location and influence of relatives were generally unimportant in students' decisions to attend their present institution. Overwhelmingly, these students were attending the institution of their first choice (83%) and that institution was not USC.

TABLE 3

Relative Importance of Reasons Given by Academically Talented Students For Attending Colleges Other Than USC (N=70)

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Academic Reasons:			
Academic Reputation (General)	56%	37%	6%
Academic Reputation (Major)	46%	30%	23%
Graduate Program	10%	19%	70%
Special Educ. Programs	17%	14%	64%
Financial Reasons:			
Scholarships	43%	19%	39%
Financial Aid	27%	13%	56%
Low Cost	23%	17%	59%
Other Reasons:			
Relatives	10%	36%	54%
Opportunity to Live Away	20%	30%	50%

NOTE: Not all categories add to 100% due to missing responses.

[2]Carolina Scholars semi-finalists not attending USC cited scholarships as "very important" in their decision to attend their present school when compared to the National Merit Semi-Finalists not attending USC (Carolina Scholar semi-finalists, 63%; National Merit Semi-Finalists, 37%)

REASONS FOR NOT ATTENDING USC:

In addition to learning why academically talented students chose to attend colleges and universities other than USC, an effort was made to find out why such students were not attracted to USC. The reasons given by students for not attending USC are reported in Table 4. The majority of these students reported that USC's academic reputation (lack of) was an important reason. Scholarships, financial aid, and the lack of special educational programs were relatively unimportant.

TABLE 4

Relative Importance of Reasons Given by Academically Talented Students for Not Attending USC (N=70)

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Academic Reasons:			
Academic Reputation (General)	30%	36%	30%
Academic Reputation (Major)	24%	20%	46%
Lack of Special Education Programs	3%	9%	79%
Financial Reasons:			
Scholarships	16%	20%	54%
Financial Aid	7%	9%	67%

NOTE: Not all categories add to 100% due to missing responses.

The subjective comments of academically talented students not attending USC are reported in Tables 5 and 6. Table 5 revealed at least one more important reason listed by these students for attending their present institution, which might best be characterized as atmosphere or environment. Although academic reputation was most important, these students wanted what they described as a friendly atmosphere, small size and a campus with a well-identified sense of community.

TABLE 5

Other Reasons Cited for Attending Present College by Academically Talented Students Not Enrolled at USC

Frequency		Frequency	
10	Friendly Atmosphere & Nice Campus	2	Scholarship
9	Small Size	1	Live Away from Home
5	Religious Affiliation	1	More Involvement Off Campus
3	Live at Home	1	Wheelchair Campus
3	Geographic Location	1	Historical Atmosphere
3	Faculty Discount	1	Academic Offerings
3	Diverse Student Body	1	Cost Less
2	Academic Reputation	1	Able to Play Football

REASONS FOR ATTENDING COLLEGES OTHER THAN USC:

Several important reasons were given by academically talented students who chose not to attend USC (see Table 3). Academic reputation played an important part in the selection of the students' present college or university. These students seemed to be seeking a college or university with a strong academic reputation. On the other hand, special educational programs and established graduate programs were not important in their decision. Although low cost and financial aid in general were not important, scholarships did play an influential role.[2] The recognition of achievement which scholarships provide may have been a deciding factor in their choice of college.

Location and influence of relatives were generally unimportant in students' decisions to attend their present institution. Overwhelmingly, these students were attending the institution of their first choice (83%) and that institution was not USC.

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TABLE 7

Relative Importance of Reasons Given by
Academically Talented Students for Attending USC (N=28)

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
Academic Reasons:			
Academic Reputation (General)	29%	32%	36%
Academic Reputation (Major)	32%	39%	25%
Graduate Program	18%	18%	57%
Honors Program	18%	43%	36%
Special Education Programs	7%	7%	64%
Financial Reasons:			
Carolina Scholar	39%	18%	39%
Scholarships	32%	14%	39%
Financial Aid	21%	14%	54%
Low Cost	46%	39%	14%
Other Reasons:			
Relatives	21%	7%	68%

NOTE: Not all categories add to 100% due to missing responses.

Table 8 lists other colleges to which academically talented students attending USC submitted applications. One notes that nearly half of these applications were submitted to institutions within South Carolina.

TABLE 8

Other Institutions Applied to for Admission by
Academically Talented Students Attending USC

Frequency		Frequency	
4	Clemson	1	Georgia Tech.
3	College of Charleston	1	Lander
3	Furman	1	M.I.T.
2	Davidson	1	Memphis State
2	Duke	1	Princeton
2	Emory	1	Stanford
2	Presbyterian College	1	U.S. Military Academy
2	Washington University	1	Univ. of Georgia
2	Wofford	1	Univ. of Miami
1	Baptist College of Chas.	1	Univ. of New Jersey
1	Centre College of Ky.	1	Univ. of North Carolina
1	Citadel	1	Univ. of Tennessee
1	Coastal Carolina	1	Vanderbilt
1	East Carolina	1	Wake Forest
1	Georgetown	1	Winthrop
1	George Washington	1	Yale

Subjective comments by academically talented students attending USC are reported in Tables 9 and 10. They point out the need for improvements in the scholarship program and academic standards at USC. Suggestions were made for enlarging USC's scholarship program with more emphasis given to merit. Suggestions for improving the academic atmosphere included raising of standards and implementing an honors college on the Horseshoe.

TABLE 9

Other Reasons Cited by
Academically Talented Students for Attending USC

Frequency	
8	Close to home
4	Carolina Scholars Program
3	Large size
2	Excellent music program
2	Last (financially reasonable) practical choice
1	Cultural events (Columbia)
1	Near large city
1	Liberal rules
1	Law School
1	Radio station with degree in Broadcast Journalism
1	Advanced standing
1	Wide range of classes
1	USC special events and programs
1	Independent study
1	Aid from other schools insufficient
1	Boyfriend at USC
1	Track program

TABLE 10

Additional Comments Offered by
Academically Talented Students Attending USC

Frequency	
5	Need to create more academic scholarships
4	Lack of academic atmosphere on campus
2	"Honors College"
1	Would not advise academically talented students to come to USC
1	"Treatment" given to National Merit Semi-Finalists very good
1	Raise standards to attract students
1	Doubtful as to whether would remain at USC
1	Honors Program needs attention
1	Send material on "Honors College" to high school seniors
1	Arrange a visit to academic departments
1	Assign a faculty member on a permanent basis (advisor)
1	More independent study

In conclusion, USC's appeal to academically talented students is not strong. Such students who considered USC but elected to go elsewhere cited as the primary reason the academic reputation of the college or univeristy. In contrast, academically talented students who chose to attend USC were more likely to cite low cost as the major reason, although the availability of the Carolina Scholars Program was certainly a major influence for some. Based on student recommendations, USC could enhance its appeal to these students by taking steps to strengthen its undergraduate academic reputation, by promoting its newly created medical school, by expanding existing honors and study abroad programs, and by offering additional scholarships awarded on merit.

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