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ABSTRACT

This guidebook presents a comprehensive strategy for developing and implementing an information system for prospective students. After first describing the general information needs of students, it explains how each institution can assess the specific information needs of its own students. Then it suggests ways of evaluating existing methods of communication and developing new ones. It also discusses, in detail, methods of complying with the Higher Education Amendments of 1976 (which include a student consumer information section). The appendix contains examples of instruments and other material developed and tested by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, Inc. (Author)

Guidebook for Colleges and Universities: Presenting Information to Prospective Students

National Center for Higher Education Management Systems

National Center for Higher Education Management Systems
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The mission of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) is to carry out research, development, dissemination, and evaluation activities and to serve as a national resource to assist individuals, institutions, agencies and organizations of postsecondary education, and state and federal governments in bringing about improvements in planning and management in postsecondary education.

Guidebook for Colleges and Universities:

Presenting Information to Prospective Students

Oscar T. Lenning
Edward M. Cooper

1978

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR HIGHER EDUCATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS
P.O. Drawer P Boulder, Colorado 80302

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Preface

Information that postsecondary institutions provide to prospective students is often incomplete, insufficiently detailed, not clearly presented, or presented at the wrong time. The failure to provide adequate information can result in an unwise choice of institutions or programs of study and, consequently, low student morale, high attrition rates, and future recruiting problems for the institution. In response to this problem, Congress specified, in the Higher Education Amendments of 1976, minimum standards of information that postsecondary institutions receiving Title IV funds must provide to prospective students. This *Guidebook* was developed at the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) to help institutions improve their presentation of information to prospective students while complying with the new federal requirements.

The *Guidebook* was produced as a part of the NCHEMS Better Information for Student Choice of College project, which was supported by a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). To assess the information needs of prospective students, project staff developed a questionnaire with the help of 3 postsecondary institutions and 4 high schools in Colorado. The questionnaire was then pilot tested at 14 other high schools and 8 other colleges before final revisions were made. The project team next

surveyed nearly 8,000 persons—students and parents associated with 9 post-secondary institutions from different parts of the country (including 2 large state universities, a private university, 2 former teachers' colleges, a church-affiliated liberal-arts college, 2 community colleges, and a private business college), ar. d high-school seniors, their parents, and guidance counselors from over 150 so-called feeder high schools for the participating colleges and from several high schools in Vermont. There were also interviews with approximately 500 students, counselors, faculty, and administrators.

To determine the most effective ways of communicating information to prospective students, the project team then surveyed 369 entering freshmen at five of the institutions participating in the earlier survey. Finally, at a two-week communications institute at Central (Oklahoma) State University cosponsored by NCHEMS, various methods of presenting institutional information to students were explored and discussed.

Drafts of the *Guidebook* were printed in December 1976 at the conclusion of the Better Information for Student Choice of College project and distributed for review to (1) admissions directors of 100 postsecondary institutions selected at random from a federal directory, (2) guidance counselors at 100 similarly selected high schools, (3) 45 college presidents attending a two-day admissions seminar, (4) 26 members of the NCHEMS Board of Directors, and (5) the project mailing list of 96 persons, including the members of the FIPSE National Task Force on Better Information for Student Choice, and the directors of community counseling agencies for adults and others who attended an adult-counseling conference in Washington, D.C., in the spring of 1976. On the basis of comment from these reviewers and from members of the NCHEMS staff, the present version of the *Guidebook* was developed.

The *Guidebook* is a practical manual rather than a policy guide. It is intended specifically for admissions, public relations, publications, and all othe. staff of postsecondary institutions directly concerned with providing better information for prospective students. It should also be useful to high-schoo. guidance and community-agency counselors who work with prospective students and to student groups that want to evaluate information sources at their institutions.

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The members of the National Task Force on Better Information for Student Choice, Russ Edgerton and Ray Lewis of the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, and Elaine El-Khawas of the American Council on Education provided valuable reactions to project materials and supported funding of the communications conference sponsored by NCHEMS and Central State University. Harriet Fleisher, Jack Hamilton, Dennis Johnson, and Layton Olson made many useful suggestions.

Grant Duncan and John Kotzian devised the artwork for the questionnaire on rating ways of presenting information and Rose Venezia keypunched the needs-assessment data. Various members of the NCHEMS and WICHE staffs, including Kevin Bunnell, Dennis Jones, Sid Micek, Nancy Renkiewicz, Clara Roberts, and Tom Shay, shared their knowledge and expertise. Cheryl Pedersen, the project secretary, helped plan and monitor project activities, arranged campus-coordinator meetings, devised graphics for the survey questionnaires, typed drafts of documents and instruments, coordinated keypunching, hand-scored answer sheets, computed and tabulated statistics, and coordinated the distribution of questionnaires and other mass mailings.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Information that colleges and universities provide to prospective students is generally inadequate. More than half of some 5,000 prospective students surveyed by the College Entrance Examination Board (1977) might have changed their minds about the kind of college to attend if they had had more complete information about costs and aid. The Commission on Nontraditional Study (1973) found that lack of information was a primary reason why prospective adult students chose not to enroll in postsecondary institutions. Studies conducted by the Federal Interagency Committee on Education (Arnstein 1975), the National Student Education Fund (Bacon, Olson, and Brunner 1976), the College Scholarship Service Student Committee on Student Financial Aid Problems (1976), and the American Institutes for Research (Helliwell and Jung 1975) all revealed inadequacies in information provided to prospective students. In interviews with over 500 college students, faculty, administrators, and high-school counselors and parents, researchers from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) confirmed these earlier studies, finding *unanimous* agreement that much of the information currently being provided to prospective students by colleges and universities is inadequate or being communicated ineffectively (Lenning and Cooper forthcoming). In surveying 75 Boston-area postsecondary institutions, Sandra Willet (1975) of the National Consumers League discovered that not a single institution would estimate the amount of financial aid available and that only half would provide information about the full cost of attendance.

In response to such findings, as well as to high attrition and loan-default rates and to the numerous complaints received by the U.S. Office of Education, Congress added a student consumer-information section to the Higher Education Amendments of 1976. The Amendments stipulate that all postsecondary institutions receiving federal aid must disseminate, both to enrolled and prospective students, information about:

1. All financial-aid programs based on need that are available to students at the institution, including application procedures and forms, eligibility requirements, and criteria used in selecting recipients and determining award amounts
2. Student rights and responsibilities in each federal financial-aid program, including eligibility criteria, criteria for continuing receipt and reinstatement of aid, manner and frequency of payments, terms of and sample repayment schedules for loans, and conditions and terms of employment provided as part of student aid
3. The institution's academic programs, including descriptions of available programs, faculty, and instructional and other physical facilities
4. Educational costs, including tuition and fees, books and supplies, special costs of programs in which a student is interested, and estimates of typical room, board, and transportation costs of different living arrangements
5. Student retention, including the institutional enrollment pattern and a description of the types of students included in and excluded from the sample
6. Program-completion numbers and percentages, separately by program, where such information is available
7. Institutional refund policy
8. Who to contact for further information, including their titles and how they may be contacted.

The Amendments stipulate that this information "shall be produced and be made readily available, through appropriate publications and mailings, to all current students and to any prospective student upon request." In addition, staff must be available (on a full-time basis, unless the U.S. Commissioner of Education provides an exemption) to help both enrolled and prospective students obtain the information they need. Cost allowances are provided by the Amendments to support dissemination of such information.

While Congress was drafting the Higher Education Amendments of 1976, the National Task Force on Better Information for Student Choice was describing some characteristics that information provided to students should possess. According to the task force, such information must be not only accurate, reliable, relevant, and confirmable, but must also be presented in a form that can be easily understood and used by students. Moreover, the institution must be sure that the information reaches the students at the appropriate time.

As a result of the survey described in the *Guidebook,* NCHEMS researchers found that prospective students want information about:

- Instructional programs, including cla[illegible] faculty experience, teaching techniques, and grading polic[illegible]
- Costs and financial aid
- The impact of the institution on its graduates
- Admission and transfer criteria
- Housing and student services
- Out-of-class activities
- Student accounts of campus life
- The degree of student participation in decisionmaking
- Institutional expenditures
- Evidence of institutional solvency
- Institutional goals

Information about other items was found to be less important to students. These included attrition rates, the social impact of the college, and student-body characteristics (e.g., cultural backgrounds, average age, proportion of transfer students, grade-point average of graduating students, and proportion of students graduating with honors). NCHEMS researchers also found that older students and transfer students need more detailed information than do others. Transfer students want especially to know more about credit given for courses taken at other institutions, instruction and instructors, and the success of graduates in professional schools. Minority students have special information needs; in particular, they want to know the number of minority students, their organizations and activities, and the ethnic composition of the faculty. Moreover, different minorities may have different information needs. Finally, prospective graduate students need as much information as prospective undergraduates.

Prospective students for different types of institutions apparently need similar types of information, although for certain types of institutions there are unique needs. For example, prospective students for an evangelical, church-related college needed detailed information about student religious activity. Furthermore, students need information about particular programs as well as institutions, so that they can compare programs at one college with similar ones at another.

Besides the Higher Education Amendments of 1976, there are several reasons why institutions should provide more accurate and comprehensive information to students. Failure to do so can result in an unwise choice of institution or programs of study and, consequently, low student morale, high attrition rates, and future recruiting problems. Conversely, adequate information can enhance morale and recruiting and retention, with concommitant reductions in counseling and administrative expenses related to withdrawing students. Finally, collecting this information and providing it to students could have heuristic value that cannot be precisely predicted. Though

intended primarily for students, the information could also affect administrators and faculty. For example, disseminating information about attrition rates might help reduce attrition.

Through interviews with about 500 students, counselors, administrators, and others, NCHEMS researchers learned that the way in which colleges attempt to communicate with prospective students is as serious a problem as the inadequacy of the information itself. Chapter 3 of the *Guidebook* offers suggestions to help institutions improve their technique of presenting information.

To meet the information needs of prospective students, an institution must develop and implement a comprehensive information system. It should be closely coordinated by an effective leader, one who is skilled in communication principles and techniques, who has been given adequate released time and who has been delegated authority commensurate with his or her responsibility. Several steps are required to develop such a system: (1) determine the relevant target populations and groups; (2) analyze their information needs; (3) evaluate existing information programs; (4) plan the various components of the system, considering available resources, content needs, and alternative means of presentation, organization, and timing; (5) develop the components, using a logical order and a timetable that will not interfere with the institution and its programs, and carefully pretest each component separately and with those already developed; (6) implement the system; and (7) evaluate it periodically and modify it when necessary.

The final report of the National Task Force on Better Information for Student Choice (El-Khawas 1978) contains various examples of the kinds of information students need and explains how to develop and distribute an educational prospectus. Stark (1978) has written a handbook that offers examples and techniques for institutional staff charged with the responsibility of providing better information for students. This NCHEMS *Guidebook,* in turn, presents a comprehensive strategy for developing and implementing an informational system for prospective students. After first describing the general information needs of students, it explains how each institution can assess the specific information needs of its own students. Then it suggests ways of evaluating existing methods of communication and developing new ones. For example, the study found that tables were usually more effective than prose in conveying information, although they would probably lose their effectiveness if overused. It also discusses in detail methods of complying with the Higher Education Amendments of 1976. The appendixes contain examples of instruments and other materials developed and tested by the NCHEMS research staff. Though some of these may be useful as models, each institution should develop a tailored system that best meets the needs of its students.

CHAPTER 2

Probable Needs of Prospective Students for Institutional and Program Information

The choice of an appropriate postsecondary institution is important for both student and institution. Lenning (1970a,b) found a correlation at a church-affiliated college between changes in student-achievement-test scores over a two-year period and the extent to which the student style of life conformed to that of the institution. Moreover, as Cope and Hannah have shown (1975), enrollment of many students in an inappropriate institution can produce low student morale and high attrition rates, which, in turn, would mean increased administrative and counseling time and expenses devoted to student withdrawal. Furthermore, students disappointed with their institution will tell high-school friends, parents, and relatives, thus adversely affecting future recruiting.

Adequate information is necessary for good decisionmaking. However, information provided to students by most postsecondary institutions is often incomplete, insufficiently detailed, not clearly presented, or presented at the wrong time. In addition, terminology frequently varies from one institution to another, making it difficult for the prospective student to compare institutions. Thus the NCHEMS project, like 14 other projects sponsored by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, had as its goal the development of better information for prospective students.

"Better information" has a content, form, and availability that facilitates the major decisions prospective students must make. In general, this information is characterized by several factors (Kinnick and Lenning 1976; Lenning 1976). It must be:

1. Valued (if it is valued, it will be used—though being valued does not assure its validity)
2. Valid (it must be applicable to choosing a college)
3. Practical (it must be usable and interpretable by the target population)
4. Understandable (its content, organization, and format must be valid and meaningful, and its presentation must be pertinent but not overly complex)
5. Accurate and reliable (it must be truthful, confirmable, and not misleading)
6. Integrated in both content and form (each item should complement and reinforce the rest)
7. Delivered to the appropriate person (it must be targeted to and actually reach those for whom it is intended)
8. Timely, timed, and sequenced (it must be received when needed; for example, more general information should be received at an early stage of decisionmaking and more detailed information as appropriate at later stages; an information overload can be as bad as no information)
9. Attention-getting and motivating (it must be heeded, or it will never be used)
10. Structured so that it can be easily used and applied

In the past few years, many guidebooks and computerized systems that provide standard institutional information have been developed. These can help the student to narrow the number of institutions to be considered. However, students need more detailed information from the remaining institutions to choose the one best for them.

The results of a survey conducted by the NCHEMS Better Information for Student Choice of College project provide insights into the general information needs of prospective students. The sample selected for this survey was not designed as a representative sample of institutions or students, for students at only a few colleges participated. However, an extremely varied group of institutions was involved. In addition, diverse samples of representative students from each college were randomly selected. Furthermore, the total number of students responding to the questionnaire was large—3,308 out of a sample of 7,815—and 500 other persons were interviewed (additional information about the sample is provided in appendix A). The results of the NCHEMS survey were corroborated by other studies sponsored by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education and by one at the University of Houston. Prospective students everywhere seem to have common information needs, though some needs may differ for specific types of prospective students and for particular institutions or regions.

General Information Needs

The NCHEMS survey found that even within the context of heightened student consumerism, prospective students remain unsure of the appropriate questions to ask when selecting a college. They often choose a college capriciously, relying on hearsay from parents and friends. Yet the students, parents, and counselors to whom we talked agreed that better information presented in an appropriate format could influence students' choice of college.

All groups surveyed indicated that information about certain policies and services, such as transfer credit, graduation requirements, basis of admission or rejection, financial aid, housing, institutional impact on students, instruction and instructors, student services, and out-of-class activities, was needed by prospective students. Other areas were perceived as less important. These included student-body characteristics, attrition, and social impact of the college. The most surprising of these areas was the first, which included items on student backgrounds and ages, the proportion of transfer students, the final grade-point averages of graduates, the proportion of students graduating, and the time required by most to graduate.

Information Items and Respondent Groups

The 64 items on the NCHEMS College-Wide Information survey form are listed in appendix B, as they appeared in the questionnaire, along with a profile of response tabulations for seven major groups of respondents: (1) undergraduates, (2) parents of college sophomores, (3) transfer students—initial choice of college, (4) transfer students—choice of transfer college, (5) high-school seniors, (6) parents of high-school seniors, and (7) high-school counselors. Of the 64 items, 46 were rated "important" or higher by most of the groups; these items have been edited and rearranged by topic in the sections that follow.[1] How college sophomores ranked each item is reported in the column on the right. Their responses are especially important, since they had chosen their institutions only two years earlier and had had time to evaluate their choice. A rank of "1" for an item means that it was rated most important of all the items, a rank of "2" means second in importance, and so forth. An asterisk indicates that item was ranked "very important" by the majority of those in two or more of the groups. Twenty-nine items were so ranked.

1. For additional items found to be especially important by other task-force studies, see the summary by Kinnick and Lenning (1976), which has been submitted for dissemination through the government-sponsored Educational Resources Information Centers (ERIC) and is also available from NCHEMS. The reader may also find it useful to refer to the list of questions in appendix C, which is reprinted from a *Student Consumers Handbook*, part of an audio tape and print package developed by the American Institute for Research (AIR) for widespread dissemination to student consumers. Since AIR will recommend that prospective students ask these questions, postsecondary institutions should be prepared to provide the information necessary to answer them.

Information about Instruction and Instructors	Rank by Sophomores (Out of 64)
*1. How classes are taught (lecture, seminars, independent study, laboratory, field work)	4
*2. Descriptions of instructors (teaching experience, experience outside of teaching, interests, teaching and grading philosophy, and methods)	7
*3. Number of students in different courses (class sizes)	10
*4. Student ratings of instructors (how good is the teaching?)	15
5. Availability of courses at night and on weekends	19
*6. Student ratings of instructional facilities and equipment	21
*7. Information about education outside the classroom (internships, cooperative education, residence-hall programs, field study)	23
*8. Number of freshman courses taught by graduate or undergraduate students	26
9. Percentage of time faculty spends on different activities (teaching, class preparation, advising students, conducting research, committee work)	37

All nine items in the questionnaire pertaining specifically to instruction and instructors were rated "important" or higher by the majority of all seven groups, as shown in appendix B (questionnaire items 33-41). Furthermore, the asterisks above indicate that seven of the nine informational items were rated "very important" by the majority of most groups. Clearly, students, parents, and counselors all found instruction and instructors the most important area about which information is needed. Specifically, they want to know what types of courses are offered; whether courses are taught every semester or quarter; how a department compares to similar ones in other institutions; how innovative departments are in developing new courses; what materials, equipment, and education tools each department has, and whether they are up to date; how much work space is available for each student; and how large various classes are. Many respondents wanted more information on instructors—who they are, how long and where they have taught, what nonteaching experience they possess, and how accessible they are.

College Impact on Last Year's Graduates	Rank by Sophomores (Out of 64)
*10. Of those seeking employment, the percentage who obtained a job in their field	11
*11. Their success on graduate- and professional-school entrance exams	18
*12. Their success in passing certification and licensing examinations	20
*13. Percentage of those applying to graduate or professional school (or, for two-year graduates, those applying to four-year colleges) and the percentage admitted	24
*14. Number of those who formally applied to the college placement office for help in finding a job after graduation, and the percentage helped	25
15. Their reported success and satisfaction with their jobs and the contribution that they feel the college made	27
*16. Their success in graduate or professional school (or, for two-year college graduates, their success in four-year colleges)	29
17. Percentage of those who reported satisfaction with their overall education at the college	30
18. Percentage of those who reported that their college experiences had adequately prepared them to live in the "real world"	39
19. Percentage of those who reported that the college enhanced their intellectual, social, and other personal skills	42

The specific questions students asked about the impact of college attendance reflect the growing concern about what benefits students can expect from their education. These questions focused on the availability of jobs for graduates of a specific major or program, the success of graduates in finding a job, and the need for better forecasting of labor-market trends. A majority of the respondents rated such information "very important" in selecting a college. Many predicted that as more people question the economic value of a college education, such information will become more necessary. However, many also indicated that information about institutional performance for five years would be more useful than for only one.

Information about College Major	Rank by Sophomores (Out of 64)
*20. Minimum number of courses (or credit hours), inside and outside the major, required for graduation	2
*21. Point at which a student must declare a major to graduate on time	3
22. Average number of courses taken by students inside and outside their major	31
*23. Year in school that different students actually declare a major	34

That items 20 and 21 above were top-ranked by most groups of respondents reflects the importance of such information in choosing a college. However, this information is often difficult or impossible to find in college catalogs and varies greatly among schools and departments. Half of the questionnaires focused on college-wide information, the other half on the college-major information. Findings of the college-major forms of the questionnaire are reviewed later in this chapter.

Housing and Student-Services Information	Rank by Sophomores (Out of 64)
*24. Availability and extent of general student services (advising, counseling, handicapped services, health services, placement, library)	8
*25. Availability, cost, and student ratings of different kinds of housing	13
*26. Availability and extent of special academic assistance (tutoring, additional help from instructors, reading and writing skill development)	14
27. User's ratings of different student services	41
28. Percentage of freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors living in different kinds of housing (dormitories, fraternities and sororities, off-campus rooms or apartments)	50

Most students, parents, and counselors asked for more detailed information about housing. Specific information should go beyond availability, cost, and student ratings to include discussion of parietal rules, coed dorms, matching of roommates, and special services. Students also often have difficulty securing current information on off-campus housing.

Services available to students on a campus may influence student choice of institution. Prospective students want to know especially about counseling and academic advising, not only whether services or activities are available, but also whether they are used and well liked. One of the student-services items not listed above, "Frequency of Use of the Different Student Services," was considered "important" or "very important" by a majority of the college sophomores, and their parents, but by less than a majority of high-school seniors, their parents, and high-school counselors. If a service is seldom used, it may not be needed, students may not have discovered it or its benefits, or it may be inadequate. (However, student ratings can be invalid if not enough students rate the service.) Conversely, high frequency of use often results from satisfied students telling others about the service.

Financial-Aid Information	**Rank by Sophomores (Out of 64)**
*29. Typical types and amounts of financial aid given to freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors	6
*30. Amount of financial aid given to students at different income levels	17
31. Percentage of students receiving various proportions of the financial aid for which they are eligible	40
32. Percentage of students who formally applied for financial aid, and percentage who received it	44

At some schools, financial-aid packages depend on the student's class in school. Thus many students wanted to know whether their financial aid would be in the form of a grant during their freshman year but would be converted to loan and work-study aid by their senior year. Item 30 reflects the fact that students and parents are often unaware they might qualify for financial aid. Although as many as 40 factors are sometimes considered in computing the amount of financial aid, most respondents wanted to see examples of financial aid given to students at different income levels. For those who have a computed financial need, items 29-32 could suggest the chances of obtaining aid and probable amounts from each college.

General Information	Rank by Sophomores (Out of 64)
*33. Specific goals and objectives of the college	12
*34. Students' description of the college atmosphere (conservative, liberal, athletic, scholarly, religious, vocationally oriented)	16
35. Student participation in college decisionmaking	22
36. Evidence of the financial soundness of the college	28
37. Percentage of the total budget that goes for different activities (teaching, research, library, student services, social and cultural activities)	32

Many students commented on these items and suggested that better information should also be made available about the community in which the college is located. Generally, students choosing an institution without visiting it need more comprehensive information about its environment. Respondents suggested that such information might consist of comments and tabulations of responses from a sampled cross section of current students. Specific goals and objectives of both the college and its programs were considered to be very important by all groups surveyed and interviewed. The majority of respondents in all seven groups rated student participation in college decisionmaking "important" or higher; college sophomores considered it especially important. Contrary to our expectations, evidence of financial soundness was also considered "important" or higher by the majority in all seven groups. Respondents suggested including information about amount of debt, percentage of the budget composed of student tuition, deficit-spending history, financial resources, and condition of facilities and equipment. The budget-allocation item was considered "important" by those who assumed that expenditures reveal institutional priorities. Many, however, noted the importance of placing such information in proper context.

Admission, Dropout, and Transfer Information	Rank by Sophomores (Out of 64)
*38. Credit given by other colleges for courses taken at this college (transferability of courses)	1
*39. Basis on which students are accepted or rejected for admission	5
*40. Policy and regulation regarding credit for demonstrated skill and previous education, training, and experience	9
41. Percentage of applicants and of qualified applicants admitted to the college	46

Respondents saw this information as crucial to the choice of institution. Both prospective and continuing students want to know exactly what are the criteria for admission or rejection of students, whether they can test out of courses or get credit for previous education or experience, and how credit for their courses might be transferred to other institutions. When transferring, many students discover that although all their courses will be accepted, some in their major will be accepted only as electives.

Three items in this section of the questionnaire dealt with attrition—the percentage of entering students who drop out by the end of the first year, the percentage who drop out and who transfer prior to graduation, and their reasons. Surprisingly, only a bare majority of high-school counselors rated attrition information "important" or higher; in all other groups, the majority rated it less than important. Some respondents expressed the opinion that attrition information could be quite misleading, if not carefully defined and interpreted. Most prospective students were unconcerned with dropout information, because they intended to stay. Thus some students might have been more interested if the questions had been worded positively, in terms of retention rather than attrition and dropout.

Out-of-Class Activities	Rank by Sophomores (Out of 64)
*42. Opportunities for participation in recreational activities	33
*43. Opportunities for participation in cultural activities	35
*44. Opportunities for participation in social activities	36
45. Opportunities for participation in religious activities	45

These items were most popular with prospective students planning to attend residential colleges. Many such students weigh heavily the availability, quality, and popularity of different out-of-class activities when choosing a college. Respondents generally asked for more information about cultural, social, and recreational opportunities. Even at commuter campuses, students still want this information. It was especially important to high-school seniors.

Information about the Students	Rank by Sophomores (Out of 64)
46. Grading practices at this college, as indicated by the academic abilities (entrance-test scores and high-school grades) of last year's freshmen, compared to their college grades	38

No item about the students of the college was considered "very important" by the majority of the seven major groups, and only this item was rated "important." Part of the reason for this unexpected lack of interest may be ignorance about the uses of such information. For example, in tests of an early version of the questionnaire and in early interviews, the student characteristics that compose this item—tested academic abilities, high-school grades, and college grades—were raised separately. In that case, information about these student-body characteristics was considered unimportant. However, those characteristics were considered important when put into a context that implied that they might suggest the strictness of grading policies.

Other items in this section might also have been considered more important had they been so related. For example, some students felt that a concern about student characteristics indicated prejudice, even though the information could just as easily be used to identify a college with students from diverse backgrounds. On the other hand, parents and high-school counselors also tended to minimize the importance of these items. Such responses suggest that they are not crucial. However, many students may use them in choosing a college when the more important factors have been considered, because only a

minority of respondents in each group rated them "not needed." Also supporting the usefulness of such information is a National Task Force project, conducted at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). This project produced a much-commended booklet for prospective students that focused exclusively on student characteristics and environment at UCLA.

Needs of Special Groups of Students

The NCHEMS study also explored special needs of minority, transfer, adult, and graduate students. Almost 10 percent of all respondents were minority persons (43 were American Indian, 69 Asian, 150 black, and 49 Hispanic). They generally rated all items more important in selecting a college than the nonminority sample, especially information about students. Interviews conducted on five campuses indicated that minority students wanted to know the number of minority students on campus, their organizations and the degree of participation in them, and the ethnic composition of the faculty. Some students and Educational Opportunity Program counselors also suggested providing a separate report on minority-students activities, accomplishments, and feelings about the campus, because they felt that information about students in general is not very meaningful for minority students. Moreover, when disaggregated, the minority sample was not uniform. Although small sample sizes for groups other than blacks limit the validity of the findings, the findings of our study suggest that the needs of one minority group may be distinct from those of others. Efforts are needed to ascertain the specific information needs of each group.

Transfer students were asked to indicate the importance of each informational item in making an initial choice of school and in transferring. Responses for initial choice and choice of transfer school varied markedly. Initial-choice responses of transfer students were similar to those of other groups of students. However, transfer students' responses to "information important for choice of a transfer school" differed from both their own ratings of initial choice of institution and those of others. Transfer students from all participating schools generally wanted more information when transferring than when making an initial choice. Specific areas rated as more important for choice of transfer institution were (1) admissions, dropout, and transfer information ("policy and regulation regarding credit for demonstrated skill, previous education, training and experience" and "credit given by other colleges for courses taken at this college"); (2) information about instruction and instructors ("availability of courses at night and on weekends," "student ratings of instructional facilities and equipment," and "information about education taking place primarily outside of the classroom"); and (3) college impact on last year's graduates ("the percentage of those applying to graduate and professional school . . . and the percentage of those admitted").

In interviews, transfer students stated that frequently they could not obtain sufficiently detailed information about a specific institution without visiting it. Colleges should thus consider developing some special informational materials targeted for prospective transfer students.

Another subgroup surveyed, older students, consisted of full- and part-time students over 25. Generally, this group responded more moderately than the others, rating items in the middle range, "important" and "desirable," rather than "very important" and "not useful." As a group, older students did not vary widely in their ratings of different items.

The responses of students 25-35 years old were more similar to those of part-time sophomores than to those of students over 45. All three groups emphasized the importance of career items (full-time sophomores 18-20 years old tended to diminish the importance of information about the college's impact on careers and graduate school). The "percentages of students in different age ranges" was only slightly more important to older students that to others. However, when older students were interviewed about the utility of this information, several facts emerged: (1) they do have an interest in this information and would probably choose a college with an older student body if they could; (2) they are frequently limited to the local institution, since they are not as mobile as younger students; and (3) they often make no formal comparison of schools before they choose but instead rely on hearsay.

The 192 graduate students from five institutions were asked about information important in choosing a graduate school. Seventy-one percent were males and 29 percent females. Approximately 15 percent were from minority backgrounds. They were enrolled in a variety of programs, and more than half expected to acquire a doctorate or the equivalent.

Generally, graduate-student responses did not differ significantly from those of other groups. The most important informational items for them were the specific goals and objectives of the program, the minimum number of courses (or credit hours) within the area required for graduation, the minimum number of courses (or credit hours) required outside of the area, and the percentage of last year's graduates seeking employment who obtained a job in their field.

Graduate students were primarily concerned with basic financial-aid information, such as the types and amounts of aid given to graduate students and the amount given to graduate students at different income levels. Importance was also placed on information about instruction and instructors. Availability of instructors in the program for out-of-class assistance was rated "very important" in deciding where to attend graduate school. Graduate students tended to consider information about students in the program unimportant. They rated out-of-class activities, student-services information, and housing information to be less important than did the other groups. This most likely indicates that many, like the older undergraduates sampled, lived off campus, were employed, and had families. Interviews revealed that students

selecting a graduate school have information needs as important as those selecting an undergraduate one, and that graduate schools are generally not providing adequate information.

Comparison of Needs for College-Wide and Program Information

Two forms of the College Information Needs questionnaire were administered to each group of students and parents surveyed. The first asked about the importance of college-wide information, the second about the importance of program information. It soon became apparent that high-school seniors did not understand the term "curricular program," so the term "college major" was substituted. Separate forms for program and college-wide information were used, since in interviews, students and counselors also expressed the need for better information about programs. For example, for a student planning to major in business, comparisons between the business department of college A and college B may be just as important in choosing a college as comparisons between college A and college B. Analysis of the data did show that more specific information on programs was important to prospective students, parents, and counselors in selecting a college. Furthermore, the areas and items of importance were much the same as for the college-wide information form.[2]

Interviews with older and transfer students suggest that they have a greater need for major and program information than do students entering from high school. Since they are more likely to have chosen their major or program, they can best use specific information. A large majority of responding high-school seniors also had a specific major or program area in mind when selecting a college and would probably be able, with better program information, to choose a college more wisely. In interviews, however, even those who had decided on a major indicated that they considered college-wide information to be more important than program information. Conversely, older students and transfer students stated in interviews that they generally considered program information to be more important than college-wide information. However, all respondents felt that both types of information were important.

Feasibility of Providing Information to Prospective Students

Before an institution can provide better information to prospective students, it must consider the accessibility of that information, the difficulty in obtaining information not presently available, and its own willingness to release it.

2. Those wishing to compare the responses to the program questionnaire to those to the college-wide questionnaire separately by informational item should see the paper by Lenning (1978a).

NCHEMS staff interviewed and surveyed officials at five institutions participating in the project. The interviews were conducted prior to the development of the questionnaires to provide an overview of information availability. The questionnaires focused on the 29 items found to be "most important" in the analysis of the College Information Needs questionnaire. The responses obtained during the interviews and the questionnaire survey confirmed hypotheses that the needed information was generally available as management information within institutions, and that in most instances, institutions were willing to release it to prospective students.

Although most types of the information were available, some were not: (1) information related to college impact on graduates (e.g., "the percentage of last year's graduates seeking employment who obtained a job in their field") and (2) items where student ratings were required (e.g., "student ratings of instructional facilities and equipment"). In almost all cases, the remaining information for the institutions queried was easily obtainable or being collected.

All five institutions were willing to release the data,[3] though a few items were considered too sensitive or misleading to be released, especially "student ratings of instructors." However, those institutions unwilling to release this data for individual instructors would release it in composite form. Several officials also cautioned that attrition percentages could be easily misinterpreted and should not be released out of context. Moreover, most of the necessary information, in its present form or with some modification, could be provided to students without excessive cost to the institution. It should be noted, however, that the five institutions participating in this part of the study did have large data bases. In interviews at one of the other institutions, a small college with no office of institutional research, staff questioned whether much of this information was available on their campus and felt that it would be too time consuming and expensive to collect and prepare information for many of the items without reimbursement by the federal government or some other source. However, much of this information is commonly available in many institutions.

Other Considerations Concerning Needs for Information

Results of the NCHEMS survey answered some basic questions about information needs in selecting a college. But unanswered questions remain: What are the information needs of prospective students planning different programs? Does the region of the country affect the types of information needed?

3. At one of the institutions, however, the president said that he would hesitate to approve the release of such data without seeing first how it was going to be presented.

How do information needs of prospective students vary according to institutional type? Stratified random samples specific to these questions would be necessary to answer them.

One school at which the NCHEMS questionnaire was administered was an evangelical, church-related college. Here, respondents rated items generally less important than at other institutions. However, they rated out-of-class activities, especially the opportunities for participation in religious activities, as more important. Thus institutions with narrowly defined constituencies should conduct their own surveys, either independently or in conjunction with similar institutions.

Another issue concerns changes in information needs. How often should an institution or cooperating group of institutions conduct an assessment? Because of methodological differences, it is difficult to compare the findings of earlier studies (Brogly 1967, Crowley 1965, Hoyt 1968, Kerr 1963, and Siddoway 1967) with those of the NCHEMS project. However, it seems clear that significant changes in prospective student information needs have occurred. The decrease in the importance of information about student characteristics, organizations, and activities is one such change. Conversely, information about instructors and instruction, institutional goals and objectives, and institutional impact on graduates has become more important. Such changes suggest that institutions should periodically reassess information needs of prospective students, perhaps every five years.

CHAPTER 3

Assessing Information Needs of Prospective Students

An institution cannot provide adequate information to prospective students until it knows specifically who needs what information. Preferably, such an assessment should occur in cooperation with other institutions to save money and avoid duplication of effort. Some procedures used in the NCHEMS study, or suggested modifications of them, may serve as useful models for institutions in conducting their own study. Additional insights can be gained by examining the needs-assessment efforts of other Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education projects. This chapter will briefly explore the information needs-assessment process—from determining target populations to developing forms, collecting data, and analyzing and interpreting results.

Determining Target Populations and Groups to Be Surveyed

Persons inside and outside the institution should be surveyed. Prospective students and their parents, current students and their parents, high-school counselors, college admissions counselors, education administrators, and teachers are all appropriate target populations. These populations, in turn, may be broken down into groups and subgroups, each providing new insights into information needs. Each group (or subgroup) requires development of customized procedures.

NCHEMS surveyed seven primary groups: (1) nontransfer undergraduates, (2) their parents, (3) high-school seniors choosing a college, (4) their parents, (5) high-school counselors, (6) college transfer students, and (7) graduate students. College-student subgroups included the following breakdowns: age groups, full-time and part-time groups, racial-ethnic groups, and foreign students. Distinctions with respect to economic and social characteristics, degree aspirations, intended majors, and other factors could also be made.

Groups and subgroups should be carefully defined. Although there are groups that all colleges in a cooperative effort will want to survey, other groups may be of concern to only some colleges. For example, church-related colleges might wish to survey ministers and youth workers. The goals and objectives of the particular assessment should pinpoint the populations to be reached, based upon such criteria as the proportion of a designated group of students in the college-student population or the lack of accurate information about that group. Sampling should be done carefully, as discussed below, to provide reliable and valid data. Before embarking on the needs-assessment process, institutions should first designate a central coordinator and a committee of representatives from concerned on- and off-campus groups. This committee can initiate the needs-assessment survey and then apply the results, as discussed in the last section of this chapter.

Developing the Needs-Assessment Survey Forms

Survey instruments should identify and clarify information needs and suggest ways of meeting them. The items on the survey should describe information that (1) is presently available or that could be collected, (2) would be economically feasible to provide, and (3) can be released to prospective students. Furthermore, consideration should be given to developing a survey form that can be easily understood, tabulated, and integrated into a coordinated information system.

Surveys constructed for the NCHEMS study were developed through a lengthy process that included open-ended interviews with high-school seniors and their counselors and with college students and admissions counselors. Project staff also consulted (1) the literature of choosing a college, (2) data-gathering questionnaires commonly used by colleges, and (3) a review of lists of data-base items available at NCHEMS. From these, an item pool was developed that was reviewed by research staff, high-school students, college students, counselors, and educators.[1] The pool was then reduced to a list of informational items. Next, the survey was designed to include a rating scale

1. The survey was pretested using groups similar to those to be surveyed and was then revised. The importance of the pretest cannot be overemphasized. Items included in the final college-wide information form for students were reviewed in chapter 2. Readers may also wish to examine the model questionnaire for students developed by the Virginia State Council of Higher Education (Carr and Hobson 1978).

of, in this case, the importance of the information for use in selecting a college (see appendix B), and items were rewritten following reviewers' suggestions. Since many of the basic terms used in education information were not understood by many prospective students, the wording of items was simplified and, where desirable, colloquial terms were used. For example, many high-school students interpreted "class size" to refer to the dimensions of different classrooms or to numbers of freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors rather than the number of students enrolled in a course. Similarly, though they did not understand "college program," they did understand "college major."

For the NCHEMS survey, items were eliminated from the final questionnaire to make it reasonably short in all cases where everyone, or almost everyone, interviewed agreed that (1) the information is unimportant for selecting a college and (2) although this information is important for selecting a college, it is generally effectively provided by most colleges. Another common approach to developing needs questionnaires would include items in (2) above, and two separate questions would be asked about each item in the questionnaire: How important is this information for use in selecting a college? Is this information being provided and in an effective manner? While such a survey form can be useful, a preliminary test in the NCHEMS survey suggested that it would be too long and cumbersome for high-school seniors. However, two columns of marking spaces, for responding to two questions about each item, worked well for other groups. Thus this format was used in the questionnaire for counselors and graduate students to determine the importance of this information about (1) the entire college and (2) a program in which one might be interested, and in the questionnaire for transfer students to determine the importance of this information for initial- and transfer-college choice.

Importance of Multiple Data-Collection Methods

Multiple data collection consists of using complementary methods to compile data: personal interviews, questionnaires, telephone interviews, group discussions, and telephone follow-ups. Where one collection method has weaknesses, another has strengths. All these methods can be tailored to the characteristics of the groups to be sampled.

As indicated, strategies and procedures should be pretested before administering. The NCHEMS study found, for example, that although most high-school seniors can be surveyed through distribution of questionnaires by high-school counselors, this was not an effective way to reach high-risk students who are seldom considered to be interested in college and who have limited contact with counselors. It was thus necessary to designate types of students to be selected and to select randomly a sample of students within each group, to obtain a more useful distribution of students. Other problems were the delays and paperwork associated with screening by personnel in a school

district's research office. Procedures for screening proposed research surveys vary with each institution or school district and need to be investigated early. In many cases, a special approval form will need to be completed and sent to a designated office.

Questionnaires should cover not only information needs but also factors useful in interpreting needs, such as socioeconomic level, age, sex, race, student goals and aspirations, intended or actual major in college, and high-school grades. Tabulations of need responses categorized according to such factors can be revealing. Data available from sources other than need questionnaires should also be considered, such as records of current demand for informational materials, special requests for information, frequency of complaints, surveys of current students about their perceptions of the school, and ACE questionnaires. Some potentially useful sources in the community include identification of the issues being discussed, research literature, Bureau of Labor statistics, Census Bureau statistics and forecasts, and community-planning data.

Analyzing the Data

Data analysis should be systematic and should be planned at the outset of the project. The NCHEMS study used basic techniques of analysis (percentages, means, cross tabulations) but included profiles of various groups and subgroups sampled and examined patterns of responses based on demographic items as well as on reduction of data. The analysis should not be more complex and detailed than necessary for the information system, and the results should be able to be easily interpreted and applied. Sophisticated analytical techniques, such as discriminant analysis, correlational analysis, and analysis of variance, can be quite useful in some cases, but will seldom be needed.

Interpreting and Applying the Study Results

The data analysis should answer the basic research questions—What information is needed by prospective students (and by counselors, parents, and others who work with them) for selecting a college? What information is not useful? What differences are there among the groups and subgroups surveyed?—and other specific questions developed by an institution prior to designing the needs survey. (Once the data are collected, it may be too late to answer additional questions for which the survey was not specifically designed.)

The data should be interpreted with care and in cognizance of their validity and reliability. The results of the NCHEMS study were cautiously interpreted at some points because of small sample sizes for some subgroups.

The data should be summarized in reports that will be of value to specific groups within the institution (for example, institutional researchers and interested staff) and that will support the findings of the study. Other forms that should be used more widely are concise executive summaries targeted to directors of admissions, directors of public relations, and others responsible for developing or distributing informational materials aimed at prospective students. These reports should address the specific concerns of the intended reader. Furthermore, the reports should be distributed to all those involved in the institution's system of disseminating information. Some of the reports should receive general distribution, and others should be sent to only one or a few individuals.

The NCHEMS study found that dissemination of information by an institution is often uncoordinated. Catalogs may be prepared piecemeal and assembled just prior to publication, with little editorial supervision. Financial aid, admissions, public relations, and academic departments may independently produce informational materials. Such uncoordinated efforts can preclude a comprehensive, effective needs assessment and can produce inaccurate, misleading, confusing, or nontargeted information. Each campus needs centralized information planning and development, which would be best established prior to planning the information needs assessment. A central information coordinator should be designated and given sufficient authority to make decisions related to the needs-assessment project and, later, in applying its results. Continued involvement of representatives from all concerned groups will facilitate updating information and monitoring changing information needs. Determining how information might best be communicated is discussed in the following chapter.

Evaluation of the needs assessment should be integral to the total process and should determine not only how effectively the assessment is accomplishing its assigned task (summative evaluation) but also how needs-assessment procedures can be improved (formative evaluation). Factors discussed in this chapter can serve as some of the criteria for that evaluation.

CHAPTER 4

Considerations in Upgrading the Communication of Institutional Information to Prospective Students

Of the approximately 500 people interviewed during the NCHEMS project, most agreed that the presentation of institutional information to students is as serious a problem as the inadequacy of the information itself. For years, the college catalog has been the basic means of communicating to students. Yet, our evidence suggests that prospective students tend not to read or study catalogs. Catalogs are often written in such a dry and formal manner that they bore the student. Furthermore, they are filled with terms that we in post-secondary education understand but that prospective students do not. In addition, some are so long and intimidating that prospective students may not even open them. Most institutions also have an array of supporting brochures and booklets with which they indiscriminately bombard prospective students; but these, too, are often inadequate.

This chapter will discuss how to improve the communication of information to prospective students. It is based on the results of four major activities conducted during the NCHEMS project on Better Information for Student Choice of College, as well as on the experience of the project staff:

1. Interviews with students and others across the country
2. Papers written by advertising-design students of Hall Duncan at Central (Oklahoma) State University

3. A two-week summer institute, "Improving Communication of College and Program Information to High School Students," conducted at Central State University by Duncan[1]
4. A questionnaire survey in which students were asked to respond to five alternative formats for presenting information

Relevant experiences of the various projects associated with the National Task Force on Better Information for Student Choice were summarized in a resource paper commissioned by the task force (Lenning 1976). The experiences of these projects will be referred to when necessary.

Understanding Specific Target Populations

Too often, postsecondary institutions have developed their entire informational packages for prospective students assuming that all items should be aimed at all potential clients. However, every institution has specific subpopulations of prospective students who have their own characteristics and information needs. Those subpopulations for which the institution is particularly appropriate, and which it can serve well, should be identified and their information needs clearly defined. As Duncan has stated (1976) in a letter to one of the authors:

> In order to select the proper channels for communicating and to carefully prepare our materials and messages, we must first understand the needs of our prospective students. Frankly, we need to do more listening. . . . My plea . . . is for us in higher education to spend sufficient time and research on prospective student behavior to determine the most effective ways of preparing, channeling, and testing information to meet their needs.

The experience of Mountain Empire Community College, a participant in the National Task Force on Better Information for Student Choice, is instructive. Before developing new informational material for prospective students, the college conducted a household survey of its service area in the coal-mining hills of western Virginia. Through that survey and by examining governmental records and consulting a community-service agency, the college learned that there were many older people in its service area; that many households were physically isolated; that local citizens were independent;

1. NCHEMS staff were directly involved in planning the Institute, which had a three-person faculty from Central State University and included presentations and discussions by professionals and specialists from various disciplines and institutions. Students, who received graduate credit, included guidance counselors, teachers, college-admissions and public-relations personnel, advertising students, and art students. The Institute had a problem-solving format in which interdisciplinary teams of students were assigned programs at the University to research and for which they designed effective communication systems. At the end of the two weeks, each team formally presented its results to a panel of expert judges, after which oral criticisms were offered. The members of the winning team were awarded $500 along with recognition certificates at a closing-night banquet. For more information, see appendix E and Duncan, Ryan, and Lenning (1978).

that there was a strong resistance to leaving the area, in spite of high unemployment; that few adults over 25 had any college education; and that many people (even high-school students) disliked reading. College officials thus became sensitive to local traditions, values, and attitudes. Such sensitivity helped them design more relevant academic programs and also revise their informational program. Their research, as reported by Lenning (1976), indicated that institutional information could most effectively be provided through television or through employers, not through high schools.

> Mountain Empire personnel decided on a short brochure with a question and answer format. There needed to be a lot of "white space," answers were kept short, and amount of copy was kept down so that it would not seem like a lot of reading. Vocabulary was kept simple without talking down to them [prospective students], and pictures were used. The college staff also discovered that if they wanted to communicate with these people, it had to be done on a personal basis. So they show movies (such as *Macbeth*) for high-school students and have activities such as the autumn home-crafts day to get the adult community onto the campus. They have also been moving toward visits by high-school instructional staff and visits to the college by classes of high-school students. This provides college staff with an opportunity to distribute handouts . . . plus make it very personal. Their experience is that if they have met the prospective student in person, he or she tends to examine the printed handouts. [pp. 6-7]

Mountain Empire also found that, even with natives of the area on its staff, a formal assessment of target-group characteristics and needs is still important. Natives may know only the subpopulation from which they come and may not be objective (Gottschalk 1976).

Techniques for assessing target populations are similar to those for assessing information needs described in chapter 2. Before beginning an assessment to determine the important groups of prospective students for an institution, one should study students currently enrolled. As James Conrady of Adsociates, Inc., a firm that helps colleges and universities improve communication with prospective students, stated at the Central State University Institute (1976):

> There is a tendency for many institutions to try to be everything to everyone, and there is simply not enough money and resources to do that. You can't be everybody, and no one else can either . . . identify your strong points and strong areas and build on them. Narrow the role and scope of the institution to that which you can identify with the market. . . . The best place to start is to analyze the students you have right now. Where do they come from? What are their characteristics? Why did they come here?

The experience of NCHEMS suggests that where special groups constitute significant portions of prospective student populations, special brochures or other items should be considered. Groups that may warrant such special materials include students interested in particular programs or considering particular careers, minority students, foreign students, veterans, homemakers, retrainees, retired persons, transfer students, and graduate students. Undoubtedly, there will be other such groups. That special materials should

be targeted to particular groups does not mean, however, that an institution should ignore general informational materials. Many of the above groups have common interests and needs. For them, general materials, such as brochures or booklets on housing, financial aid, jobs, and campus life, could be prepared. Also needed are an institutional overview and, of course, a college catalog, although, as will be discussed later, most catalogs can be improved. Targeted-audience materials can then be kept to a desirable length by referencing the more general materials, including mention of specific pages and sections.

Evaluating Current Information Efforts

Once the institution has identified its important target populations and has understood them and their needs, it should evaluate its communication with prospective students. A needs assessment like the one outlined in chapter 3 can indicate communication inadequacies. In addition, an analysis of the entire information system for prospective students can be useful. Together with a needs-assessment study, this analysis can provide practical ideas for improving the system.

Perhaps the best way to stimulate thinking about the adequacy of the present system is to list basic questions. Considerations relevant to these questions will be discussed subsequently in detail in "Considerations in Upgrading the Communication of Institutional Information to Prospective Students." Below are some of these questions.

1. Is the information needed by our important groups of prospective students available (or can it be made available); is it up-to-date; and can it convey the unique character of this institution?
2. Does the information we provide prospective students give them an accurate, reliable, and understandable picture of what it is like to be a student here?
3. Do our modes of communication convey the needed information to important groups of prospective students at the proper time?
4. Once the needed information is received, is it examined and used in decisionmaking?
5. Is the information received in a meaningful and understandable form?
6. Is the information accurately perceived? Can it be misinterpreted?
7. Are prospective students in particular groups overwhelmed by the amount of information they are receiving at any one time?
8. Is the information within each item organized effectively, so that prospective students in a group can quickly and easily refer to the specific information they want?
9. Can the student easily assimilate and use the information to compare this institution and its programs with others?

10. Do all of our communication efforts constitute an integrated information system in which the various components support, reinforce, and complement one another?
11. Is there one person with sufficient authority to coordinate communication efforts for prospective students (even those conducted separately by offices and departments)?
12. Have informational materials been tested before implementation?

Considerations in Upgrading the Communication of Institutional Information to Prospective Students

Such things as presentation format and communication mode can vary for the same audience and still be equally effective. Format and mode are not as crucial as detailed knowledge of the communication targets, their information needs, and communication content. However, many colleges have failed to communicate effectively because of insufficient attention to format and mode. Though, as mentioned earlier, prospective students can be intimidated by dull and formal items, they can also be repelled by the use of student slang.

Presentation Considerations

Since publications are used more often than all other modes combined, discussion in this subsection is limited to them. Format considerations for other modes will be discussed in the next subsection. Publications include catalogs, brochures, booklets, fact sheets, flyers, view books, flip charts, direct-mail announcements, articles for hometown newspapers, news stories or advertisements in newspapers and magazines, college yearbooks, campus newspapers, and alumni newsletters.

There are many potentially useful formats that can be used by themselves or in combination. They include analogies, animation, cartoons and caricatures, case examples, charts and graphs, dramatizations, drawings, lists, paintings, photographs, questions and answers, script, tables, tabulations of statistics, and testimonials. For each of these, a number of variations is possible. Some are generally more effective than others, and some are effective only for particular audiences or informational items. For an example of how one type of format can have many variations, see the charts and graphs in the U.S. Census Bureau's *Pocket Data Book* (1976), which includes line charts, column graphs, bar graphs, pie charts, and Venn diagrams, each of which can have different shapes, sizes, shadings, colors, line thicknesses, and overlays.

As a part of the NCHEMS project, data for 12 of the 29 informational items found to be most important in the large needs-assessment survey of chapter 2 were presented separately for two fictitious colleges in five different formats. Several hundred new freshmen (who had arrived on campus within two

months) at five colleges in different parts of the country responded to two questions about the alternative presentations of a single item: "Which way of presenting this type of information is most understandable and meaningful to you?" and "In which way of presenting this type of information is it easier to compare college A and college B?" These questionnaire items were pretested with small groups of different types of students. Two seven-item forms of the questionnaire were administered to separate samples at each institution, with two identical items on both forms. Figure 1 presents an item from one of the questionnaires.

The five alternative formats and their rationales were:

1. Tables of tabulated statistics—This is probably closest to the way information is stored in institutional records and therefore would be expected to be the easiest to prepare
2. Tabulation (as in 1.) with the addition of a relevant cartoon or caricature—Hoyt (1968, 1974) found such a format to be effective in presenting institutional and program information to specialty-oriented prospective students (students more interested in vocational-technical courses than general education)
3. Script paragraphs—The format in which most institutional information is usually presented
4. Question and answer—Especially favored by some communication experts for presentation to poor readers and found effective in the informational materials developed by National Task Force projects at Mountain Empire Community College, Syracuse University, and UCLA
5. Charts and graphs—Favored by many communications experts for aiding comparisons of certain types of data

The percentages of students choosing each alternative as most meaningful and as most useful for comparison purposes were determined. For every informational item, all five alternatives were chosen by some as most useful, for both their aid to understanding and their facilitation of institutional comparison. However, results did vary for different types of information. In addition, the two groups responded differently to the two identical items on each questionnaire form. These results suggest the importance of pretesting formats separately for different items on small samples of each important group of prospective students. Additional findings are presented below. The two questionnaires and data tabulations are contained in Lenning (1978b).

Surprisingly, tables of tabulations were chosen most often (for 9 of 12 items) as most meaningful. Question and answer was chosen most often for 2 items, and tabulations plus cartoon for 1. Hoyt's finding (1968,1974) of the usefulness of adding cartoons and caricatures to tabulations was not corroborated. Hoyt was dealing with specialty-oriented students, and his informational items were different and relied entirely on student response. In addition, his cartoons were in color, while in this study they were black and white. Also, it is possible that had we been able to obtain results for students

Figure 1

One of the "Rating Ways of Presenting Institutional Information" Questionnaire Items

Informational Item 2: Availability and Extent of Special Academic Assistance.

Which Way of Presenting This Type of Information Is Most Understandable and Meaningful to You?

Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5	None are Meaningful
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

In Which Way of Presenting this Type of Information Is It Easier to Compare College A and College B?

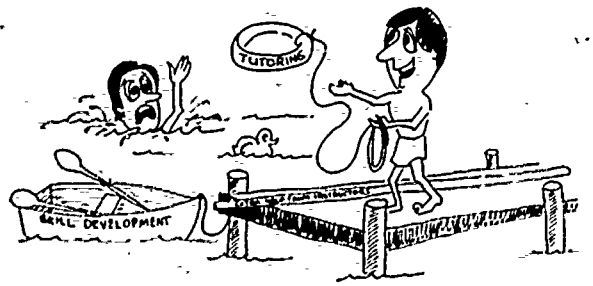
Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

ALTERNATIVE 1

COLLEGE A			COLLEGE B		
Study Skills Services Available	Number of Students Using the Service	Student Rating (1.0 = Completely Dissatisfied; 5.0 = Completely Satisfied)	Study Skills Services Available	Number of Students Using the Service	Student Rating (1.0 = Completely Dissatisfied; 5.0 = Completely Satisfied)
General Study Skills	500	4.7	General Study Skills	25	1.9
Math Skills	475	2.1	Math Skills	100	1.5
Reading Skills	650	4.2	Reading Skills	50	2.5
Writing Skills	375	3.5	Writing Skills	0	—

ALTERNATIVE 2

COLLEGE A — COLLEGE B



Study Skills Services Available	Number of Students Using the Service	Student Rating (1.0 = Completely Dissatisfied; 5.0 = Completely Satisfied)	Study Skills Services Available	Number of Students Using the Service	Student Rating (1.0 = Completely Dissatisfied; 5.0 = Completely Satisfied)
General Study Skills	500	4.7	General Study Skills	25	1.9
Math Skills	475	2.1	Math Skills	100	1.5
Reading Skills	650	4.2	Reading Skills	50	2.5
Writing Skills	375	3.5	Writing Skills	0	—

ALTERNATIVE 3

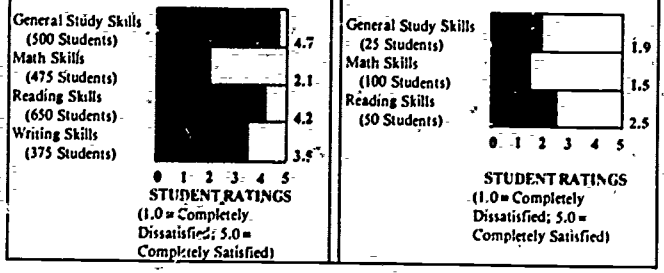
COLLEGE A	COLLEGE B
One type of special academic assistance offered is concerned with study skills. Four different services are offered in this area. The specific services, how many students used each service last year, and how the users rated each service on the average (where a score of 1.0 means "completely dissatisfied" and 5.0 means "completely satisfied"): general study skills—500 students, average rating of 4.7; math skills—475 students, average rating of 2.1; reading skills—650 students, average rating of 4.2; and writing skills—375 students, average rating of 3.5.	One type of special academic assistance offered is concerned with study skills. Three different services are offered in this area. The specific services, how many students used each service last year, and how the users rated each service on the average (where a score of 1.0 means "completely dissatisfied" and 5.0 means "completely satisfied"): general study skills—25 students, average rating of 1.9; math skills—100 students, average rating of 1.5; and reading skills—50 students, average rating of 2.5.

ALTERNATIVE 4

COLLEGE A	COLLEGE B
What special study skills services are offered? General study skills assistance, math skills assistance, reading skills assistance, and writing skills assistance. *How many students used each of these four services last year and how did they rate them (where a score of 1.0 means "completely dissatisfied" and a score of 5.0 means "completely satisfied")?* 500 students—4.7, 475 students—2.1, 650 students—4.2, and 375 students—3.5, respectively.	*What special study skills services are offered?* General study skills assistance, math skills assistance, and reading skills assistance. *How many students used each of these three services last year and how did they rate them (where a score of 1.0 means "completely dissatisfied" and a score of 5.0 means "completely satisfied")?* 25 students—1.9, 100 students—1.5, and 50 students—2.5, respectively.

ALTERNATIVE 5

COLLEGE A — COLLEGE B



still in high school (rather than enrolled freshmen), the discrepancy might have been less. Rocky Hails, one of the communications-design students at Central State University, cited (1976) another possible reason for the discrepancy:

> The use of cartoons, although entertaining and attention getting, must be cautious. To prospective students, especially younger ones, you are dealing with persons anxious to be accepted as adults, and, consequently, they may look on cartoons as childish and be insulted by the technique you have approached them with. [p.2]

Conversations with educators indicated that cartoons and caricatures might seem childish to some young people.

Our study was only a preliminary exploration using a small, unrepresentative sample of students. Furthermore, even though a majority of the respondents felt that the addition of cartoons did not improve the tabulations, it is possible that their addition, or the addition of photographs, could have improved ratings of other formats, such as question and answer or script. No attempt was made in this preliminary exploration to examine such issues. Anyone who would like to test cartoons, possibly with other formats, on different informational items, should see Lenning (1978b), which includes cartoons prepared during the project for all 29 items rated most important. Some may wish to try developing their own cartoons.

Tables were perceived to be most useful for comparison purposes for 8 of the 12 items. Charts and graphs were found to be most useful for 3, and tables and charts and graphs were tied for 1. For each information item, whichever seemed more relevant, either bar graphs or line charts, was used. Bar graphs fared better than line charts across the board for both meaningfulness and comparison purposes.

Another provocative finding was that the script format ranked the lowest for all items for comparison purposes. It also was rated poorly for facilitating meaningfulness and understanding (only charts and graphs ranked lower on this criterion, and even here script format ranked the lowest for several items). Yet, as mentioned before, most institutional communication with prospective students uses primarily this format. Perhaps we should reconsider such heavy reliance on script.

Based on other experiences before and during the project, several suggestions can be made regardless of format. These are, in fact, more important than the type of format.

1. Materials should show sincerity and concern and should focus more on people than things
2. Messages should be short and to the point
3. Materials should be neat, attractive, appealing, and printed on high-quality paper (attractiveness can be enhanced by color, even one color of ink over colored paper, which is only slightly more costly than black on white)

4. Complexity should be avoided, and simple language used; however, one must be careful never to talk down to students
5. A mix of formats can be useful but can be overdone; the proper mix is stimulating, while too many may confuse the student
6. Large amounts of white space on a page are desirable
7. The image projected throughout the material should be one of quality
8. Slang will alienate young people, if it comes from those from whom they expect formal language
9. Prose should be fluent
10. Type should be large and readable
11. Good use should be made of contrast, and bold face should be used for titles
12. Material should be organized so that its logic is apparent and so that one can easily locate items of interest; a succinct table of contents, prominent descriptive heads at the top of each page, and special inserts are especially helpful
13. The front cover should be uncluttered but attention-getting and should project the image of the institution
14. The most important information should be presented, or at least summarized, first
15. Materials should be informative rather than rhetorical[2]
16. Since generalizations cannot adequately convey excellence, they should be complemented with concrete information, such as case studies, statistics, photographs of students, and interviews

These suggestions apply especially to college catalogs, which need improved formats and organization. For example, at Seattle Pacific University, the section in the catalog for each department had a pertinent front-page painting by an old master that projected a positive image for the department; the catalog was organized so that needed information could be found easily; specific departmental goals were outlined; and each departmental section was published separately as well.

Communication-Mode Considerations

It is important that institutions consider supplementing publications with other communication modes such as: billboards; posters; signs on buses; calendars; radio or television news stories. advertisements, community-service spots, talk shows; public-address announcements at events or from sound trucks; personal letters, visits with, or presentations by, current students, alumni, faculty or staff; information booths at fairs, exhibitions, and other public events; high-school counselors and teachers; community counseling and information agencies; film strips; slides; audio and video-

2. A panel of communication-design consultants from Adsociates, Inc., explained at the Central State University Institute that their most difficult task is to convince college and university personnel that they should not boast in their materials about their institution, but should instead focus on the students, their needs, and ways in which the institution can meet them.

cassette tapes; phonograph records; movies; campus visits; special campus days; on-campus seminars; information centers and college and career days in high schools, public libraries, shopping centers; computers; speeches at local civic clubs; meetings with employers and employees; college receptionists and secretaries; campus information centers; displays; traveling exhibits or programs; and illustrative notebooks in which specific printed materials desired by the student can be inserted in the most useful order.

Each communication mode has its advantages and disadvantages, as Hails (1976) has explained:

> Films would seem to me to be the best alternative, since the prospective student has grown up, in most instances, in a television-oriented society and would most likely be comfortable with and attentive to this approach. The most apparent drawback . . . is the use of outdated films. These present outmoded times and fashions to the student, and he may not be able to distinguish the outmoded fashions from the ageless concepts the film attempts to teach. The student, therefore, may dismiss the film as merely an entertaining look at nostalgic ideas. . . . Graphs are helpful in immediately communicating a visual comparison of certain variables. The disadvantages of using these are that they can be structured in such a manner that they can mislead, and the use of too many graphs may become a barrage of statistical information, which will confuse the student. . . . Slides and tapes can show very selective information quickly and interestingly. They do not, however, have the advantage of printed materials, which can be referred to. . . . [pp. 2-4]

Because all modes of communication have disadvantages as well as advantages, and because they can supplement and facilitate one another, carefully chosen multiple modes of communication should be desirable and cost effective. Moreover, the commonly used mode of printed materials may never even be read by important groups of prospective students who need information, or these groups may be reached in only a superficial way that does not promote use, unless another mode is also used. For example, the University of Evansville, an Adsociates client, found that television was one of the best ways to reach prospective students and bring appropriate publications to their attention. Adsociates knew how to use television effectively and efficiently so that the college was able to reach the most people in its specific prospective student groups at the lowest cost. Adsociates' knowledge of local viewing habits allowed them to design advertisements for specific populations. Since television viewers can absorb only a few ideas at one time, advertisements must be restricted to a single message. In addition, the same message should be repeated in different ways. Though public-service spots can supplement advertisements, one cannot control when they will be shown. Adsociates also emphasized never to use gimmicks unrelated to the message to gain attention.

Though much less expensive than television, radio can be more effective for certain groups. For example, AM rock stations usually have the largest adolescent audience, while most FM stations have an older audience. Billboards constitute another potentially effective medium often overlooked. Studies have shown that in metropolitan areas, strategically located billboards

can reach the adult population effectively and cheaply. Direct mail, employers, and special on-campus events are other media appropriate for students over 25.

An institution should use more sophisticated media if they are necessary to gain attention and provide specific prospective student groups with the information and if they are cost effective. In addition, they should be supplemented by less expensive media (for example, public-service spots, information booths, slide tapes, visits, and publications). Also, the use of sophisticated media must be based on a well-conceived plan that involves thorough study of prospective student groups and their needs and must be carried out by knowledgeable and skilled people so that money will not be wasted. Such media are expensive, in not only direct costs but also preparation time. Moreover, because a medium is expensive does not necessarily mean it will be effective. Conversely, the most inexpensive media can be the most effective.

Personal contact and interaction are especially effective if they reach intended audiences, although one should supplement them with other modes. Getting students, alumni, and staff to visit prospective students is crucial. Furthermore, informal contact with prospective students can usually convey a message more effectively than formal contact. Some high-school seniors told us they would put more credence in students and alumni than a college admissions advisor or publication. They wanted colleges to make alumni and students who are not recruiters available. Communication should focus on not only prospective students but also enrolled college students, faculty, staff, and alumni. All should be briefed on institutional changes so that they can inform prospective students.

Besides the informal contacts made by students, former students, and faculty and staff, other communication networks may be important. For example, researchers at Portland State University (a National Task Force institution) discovered that one of the most frequently used networks consisted of the secretaries who received student calls and questions. Yet, until then, no effort had been made to prepare secretaries to answer such questions effectively. No one had kept them informed about institutional life or emphasized the importance of being personable, courteous, and helpful.

Coordination and Control Considerations

The prospective student should receive information at the proper time, just before it is needed in the decision process. As the student moves closer to a decision, more detailed information is required. However, if too much information arrives at once, the student may have more than he or she can absorb and little, if any, will be used. If it arrives at the wrong time, it may never be used. For example, if financial-aid applications are due February 1, and if detailed information about financial aid does not reach the students until late January, the information will be useless. An institution should

determine when particular subgroups of prospective students need particular informational items and then schedule the delivery accordingly. As Conrady (1976) has explained:

> We believe that there has to be a system whereby you "spoon feed" your student consumer all the way through his decisionmaking process, identifying what he is interested in and targeting the correct and accurate information to him about that in which he is interested. . . . Do it in a logical, spaced-out sequence. Build it around the usual applying mechanisms.

Such a system will also save money, because it will have inherent reply procedures through which the prospective students indicate whether to send them the next informational item in the sequence. Sending the next item to students who were earlier but are no longer interested in the institution would waste resources.

Dissemination of information should continue when students enroll. Since they need additional information about applying for housing or about orientation sessions, it is important to identify what information is needed and when.

Communications with prospective students should complement and reinforce one another. They thus must be coordinated by a person skilled in communication principles and techniques, who has been given adequate released time or who performs the task full-time, who is an effective leader and mediator, and who has been delegated authority commensurate with his responsibility. As Lenning (1976) stresses:

> For maximum effectiveness, there should be a unity of image that pervades the campus informational materials and other communications to prospective students. There needs to be an overall communication plan that ties all the multidimensional communication pieces of the institution into a coordinated program where they will work in concert and reinforce one another. It takes more than a school logo on all materials to tie them together and remind the receiver of one piece about the other materials received earlier from the school or one of its departments.
>
> The primary reason many postsecondary institutions are not communicating effectively to students is that they do not have a multidimensional, integrated communication system. This became especially clear to the NCHEMS project staff, as it visited participating campuses. On a majority of the campuses, there was no central coordinator willing or with authority to accept responsibility for campus-wide communication concerns and to ensure that the informational materials put out by different offices were complementary. This was especially a problem at one institution where there was no coordination, and where the only overall editing for the catalog—according to one report—was done by secretaries. [pp. 32-33]

Some additional examples of coordination problems, especially with college catalogs, are provided in the selected quotations from the Central State University Institute in appendix D. A major obstacle cited there, in an entertaining quotation, is that catalogs are usually developed by committees. These coordinating committees are usually quite large and diverse, so that development of the catalog is cumbersome. Such a process can last so long

that the information may become outdated. One institution in the NCHEMS project took over a year to finish its catalog, largely because no one person effectively coordinated the effort. The quotations in appendix D also describe ineffective organization, format, and content and suggest ways to improve them.

The Importance of Pretesting

Before publishing an informational item for prospective students, one should test it on a small sample of students from the group or groups to whom it is targeted. Ratings by current students who have recently chosen a college would also be desirable. In addition, reactions should be obtained from counselors at feeder high schools, community agencies, and counseling agencies; alumni; local citizens; and professional consultants. They can either be interviewed or surveyed by mail. It might be most useful if they individually completed a rating scale and then participated in group discussion. Several different types of rating forms could be effective. One, developed by the NCHEMS project staff for the Central State University Institute, is shown in appendix E. Institute participants generally agreed that all of the items were important, but one outside reviewer felt that the 11 items indicated by an asterisk in appendix E were most important.

An advisory committee of different persons, including students, can also provide good evaluation. It must be chosen carefully to avoid argument and political complications. The review and evaluation procedures used to pretest new materials should be incorporated into developmental plans from the start.

A periodic, systematic review of the entire prospective-student communication system is crucial. Once again, several methods can complement one another. One is a logical analysis based on needs-assessment results and other considerations, such as those discussed earlier in this chapter. A second is a set of interviews of prospective and current students, counselors, and others about the institutional image they have formed from communications, campus visits, and from conversations. A third is the assignment of persons, unknown to the staff, to apply to the institution to evaluate the validity, reliability, and effectiveness of institutional communications. Other ways of gathering evidence about the system may also be useful, such as listening to campus and community comments. It is essential that the communication system be tested through a well-conceived plan specifically designed for the institution. Effective evaluation of the system can, more than anything else, ensure effective communications.

CHAPTER 5

Implementation

The techniques discussed in this guidebook can enhance communication of information to prospective students. However, several related concerns remain. One is the need to introduce concepts, such as those outlined here, to the campus community in an effective manner. A second is the relationship of this guidebook to the Higher Education Amendments of 1976. A third pertains to sources of additional information. All are discussed in this chapter.

Implementing Procedures

How can an administrator convince colleagues to support or implement the procedures outlined here? Many factors, including campus politics, need to be considered, and one should remember that even when the atmosphere seems receptive, implementation may take several years. And where traditions are strong, change will usually be resisted.

Before attempting to introduce the concepts described here, a comprehensive analysis of the situation should be made. Who is likely to be receptive? Who is not likely to be, and why? What arguments can be made to support change? What objections are likely to be raised, and how can one effectively respond to them?

Before introducing these concepts, one must thoroughly understand and be able to discuss them with others. Preparing a brochure that provides concrete information for discussion might help, as might rehearsing a presentation before a spouse or friend. If top-level management has requested an investigation of these concepts, it would now be appropriate to share one's findings with them. If the investigation were one's own, it is important to introduce the subject to top-level management and obtain permission for further investigation (for example, if one wanted to form a planning team to evaluate the concepts). Keeping the presentations short, relevant, and not too detailed would help, as would providing information about experiences of other institutions. Above all, one should remember to modify techniques to meet local needs.

There will likely be many opportunities to promote consideration of the ideas in this guidebook, but such opportunities will depend so much on particular circumstances that further generalization would be of little value. However, the experience of the Central State University Institute suggests that an institute or a series of half-day workshops can generate enthusiasm among students and personnel. At the end of the Institute, many students stated that they intended to lobby for communication reforms at Central State University because of what they had learned during the two weeks. In fact, Central State University did effect several reforms as a result of the Institute and has been asked by community colleges throughout the state to conduct a workshop on the subject. In addition, a graduate student at the Institute, who is also the public-relations director for an Oklahoma state community college, was already planning to implement changes at his institution. Thus even communication professionals may profit by participation in such an institute, which can increase awareness, promote learning, and encourage improvement of institutional communication.[1]

How This *Guidebook* Relates to The Higher Education Amendments of 1976

Final regulations were published in the *Federal Register* on 1 December 1977 for the "Student Consumer Information" section (Section 131) of the Higher Education Amendments of 1976 (Public Law 94-482). They stipulate that all postsecondary institutions participating in federal financial-aid programs *must* disseminate to enrolled and prospective students the following student consumer information:

1. For more information about the Central State University Institute, see Duncan, Ryan, and Lenning (1978). This paper provides practical suggestions for those interested in conducting such an institute and discusses ways the arrangements and content could be modified to meet different contexts and needs. Interested persons can obtain the paper at cost by writing to the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, P.O. Drawer P, Boulder, Colorado 80302.

1. Information describing all financial-aid programs based on need available to students at the institution, including application procedures and forms, eligibility requirements, and criteria used in selecting recipients and determining award amounts
2. Information about student rights and responsibilities in each federal financial-aid program, including eligibility criteria, criteria for continuing receipt and reinstatement of aid, manner and frequency of payments, terms of and sample repayment schedules for loans, and conditions and terms of employment provided as part of student aid
3. Information describing the institution's academic programs, including descriptions of available programs, faculty, and instructional and other physical facilities
4. Information describing educational costs, including tuition and fees, books and supplies, special costs of programs in which a student is interested, and estimates of typical room, board, and transportation costs of different living arrangements
5. Information describing student retention, including the institutional enrollment pattern and a description of the types of students included in and excluded from the sample
6. Program completion numbers and percentages, separately by program, where such information is available
7. Information describing institutional refund policy
8. Information about who to contact for further information, including their titles and how they may be contacted

The Amendments stipulate that this information "shall be produced and be made readily available, through appropriate publications and mailings, to all current students and to any prospective student upon request." In addition, staff must be available (on a full-time basis, unless the U.S. Commissioner of Education provides an exemption) to help enrolled and prospective students obtain the information they need. Cost allowances are provided by the Amendments to support dissemination of such information.

Congress clearly intended that institutions should exceed the minimum legal requirements. One staff member of the House Education Committee informed us that committee members hoped their bill would encourage colleges and universities to upgrade their information-dissemination system beyond the specified minimum requirements.

One should note one informational item specifically required by the Amendments: institutional retention and completion rates. In the NCHEMS needs study, as in others, respondents in all groups tended to discount the importance of this item, probably because there are different definitions of retention. (Furthermore, prospective students tend to associate themselves with the persisting group—no matter what its size—and to negate the possibility of their becoming a member of the dropout group.) Moreover, attrition or retention figures can be ambiguous. Valid interpretations can be made

only in context; the same completion figure would mean one thing for a community college and another for a university. Vocational-technical students often receive, in the middle of their program of study, job offers that they cannot turn down. Moreover, many community-college students enroll to take one or a few courses and never intend to complete a program. If students have not graduated but have reached their educational goals, or if they drop out and then re-enroll, they should not be considered dropouts.

Nevertheless, when students interviewed were given a fictitious case example involving attrition rates (business departments at two colleges differing only in attrition rates), they indicated that it would perhaps affect their choice of college.

Loeb (1976) has observed that

> to make the participating institutions' attrition reports potentially comparable would require subgrouping all of them by full- versus part-time, ability level, academic program, and readmitted versus continuous. Such subgrouping would be tremendously confusing to any reader, in addition to suffering from resulting small sample sizes. [p. 11]

Such subgrouping would especially confuse the reader if the information was ineffectively reported. To avoid ambiguity, institutions must be careful to place retention rates in proper context. In context, attrition rates can be quite useful to prospective students.

Additional Sources of Information

Documents Developed during National Project I

The Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education funded 11 demonstration projects by local institutions and 4 multi-institution projects coordinated by selected agencies. Every few months, the directors of the 15 projects met as a National Task Force on Better Information for Student Choice, under the direction of the Education Commission of the States. The task force sponsored many useful documents that synthesized its work and the related projects.

First is the task force's official report, which presents the case for and provides examples of "better information" and suggests strategies for implementing it:

- El-Khawas, Elaine. *Better Information for Student Choice: Report of a National Task Force.* Washington, D.C.: American Association for Higher Education, 1978.

One task-force member, Joan Stark, was commissioned to develop a handbook to provide in-depth National Project I examples of "better information" and implementation strategies. While the task-force report was aimed at policymakers, the handbook was developed as a well organized resource book for use by practitioners.

- Stark, Joan S. *Inside Information: A Handbook for Institutions Interested in Better Information for Student Choice.* Washington, D.C.: American Association for Higher Education, 1978.

The task force also commissioned a number of analytical reports to synthesize task-force results and relevant literature on selected issues. These working papers provide more detailed, comprehensive, and theoretical discussions than do El-Khawas or Stark. Several of these papers are especially relevant to this guidebook and can be obtained at cost. These papers, as well as process-evaluation summaries from several task-force-associated projects, are listed below, along with information on availability:

- College Entrance Examination Board. *Making It Count: A Report on a Project to Provide Better Financial Aid Information to Students.* New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1977.
- Hoy, John C. *The UCI Prospectus—A Report on the Process of Developing Better Information for Prospective Students.* Irvine, Calif.: University of California, 1977. Available at cost from the Office of the Vice-Chancellor for University and Student Affairs, University of California at Irvine.
- Hoy, John C. "The Process of Developing Better Information for Student Choice." University of California at Irvine, 1977. (Mimeographed.) Available at cost from the Office of the Vice-Chancellor for University and Student Affairs, University of California at Irvine.
- Kinnick, Mary K., and Lenning, Oscar T. "The Information Needs of Prospective Students." National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, Boulder, Colo., 1977. (Mimeographed.) Has been submitted to the ERIC system for dissemination. Also available at cost from NCHEMS.
- Lenning, Oscar T. "Does Form of Communication to Prospective Students Make a Difference in 'Better Information'?" National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, Boulder, Colo., 1977. Has been submitted to the ERIC system for dissemination. Also available at cost from NCHEMS.
- Lenning, Oscar T., Stark, J.S., and Wishart, P. "Providing *Comparable* Information to Prospective Students: Issues, Problems and Possible Solutions." National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, Boulder, Colo., 1977. (Mimeographed.) Has been submitted to the ERIC system for dissemination. Also available at cost from NCHEMS.
- Loeb, Jane W. "Issues in Responsible Reporting of Information to Students." University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1977. (Mimeographed.) Available from Office of Admissions and Records, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- Pace, C. Robert. *Better Information for Student Choice: UCLA: Who Goes? What's It Like?* Final report to the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education. Los Angeles: University of California at

Los Angeles, 1977. Available from the Laboratory for Research on Higher Education, Graduate School of Education, UCLA.

- Stark, Joan S., and Marchese, T.J. "Verification of Educational Information." Published versions are available as follows: "Auditing College Publications for Prospective Students." *Journal of Higher Education* 48 (January/February 1978): 82-92. "Verifying Consumer Information." In *The Many Faces of Educational Consumerism,* pp. 179-185. Edited by Joan S. Stark. Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books—D.C. Heath, 1977.

Communication Documents

Some communication literature is theoretical, some practical. The first source focuses on speech communication but also discusses principles and theories of communication in general and illustrates their relationships to particular types of communication:

- Applbaum, Ronald L.; Anatol, K.W.E.; Hays, E.R.; Jensen, O.O.; Porter, R.E.; and Mandel, J.F. *Fundamental Concepts in Human Communication.* San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1973.
- Berlo, David K. *Process of Communication: An Introduction to Theory and Practice.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960.
- Lazarus, Sy. *Loud and Clear: A Guide to Effective Communication.* New York: AMACOM, American Management Associations, 1975.

Relevant sources from public relations are:

- The Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) has produced two special issues of its monthly magazine (*CASE Currents*) oriented toward consumerism and students: "Student Recruitment" (February 1976) and "Students: How to Attract, Assist, and Involve Them" (March 1977). In addition, the magazine serves as a clearinghouse for practical ideas about communicating and other pertinent topics. CASE also makes available the "Creative Communications" camera-ready art packages that provide model illustrations for use in educational publications. Other relevant CASE publications are *Making Your News Service More Effective* and *Interviewing: A Guide to Techniques.* For any of the above, or a list of CASE publications, write to CASE, Suites 530/600, One Dupont Circle, Washington, D.C. 20036.
- Robinson, Edward J. *Communications and Public Relations.* Columbus, Ohio: Merrill, 1966.
- Rowland, A. Wesley, ed. *Handbook of Institutional Advancement.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977.

Needs Assessment Documents

The procedures outlined in chapter 3 constitute one kind of needs assessment, the information needs of prospective students. More general but extensive treatments are:

- Baumheier, Edward C., and Geller, G.A. *Analysis and Synthesis of Needs Assessment Research in the Field of Human Services.* Denver: Center for Social Research and Development, University of Denver, July 1974.
- Lenning, Oscar T.; Cooper, E.M.; and Passmore, J.R. *Identifying and Assessing Needs in Postsecondary Education: A Review and Synthesis of the Literature.* Boulder, Colo.: National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, forthcoming.
- Witkin, Belle R. *An Analysis of Needs Assessment Techniques for Educational Planning at State, Intermediate, and District Levels.* Hayward, Calif.: Office of the Alameda County Superintendent of Schools, 1975. ED 108 370.

Marketing Documents

Two documents that examine both assessment and communication:

- Gilmour, Joseph E. Jr.; Dolich, I.J.; Markle, W.E.; Newton, R.D.; and Spiro, L.M. "Applying Market Planning and Research to Penn State's Admissions and Recruitment Processes." Paper prepared for the Office of Budget and Planning, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pa., April 1977.
- Kotler, Philip. *Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations.* Engelwood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975.

Student Consumerism Documents

Although most of the student consumer-protection literature has, until now, focused primarily on documenting problem areas, some have suggested ways of enhancing communication:

- Carlson, Mary S., and Bertlet, C. *The Options Handbook—Handbook Two: Information Dissemination Concerning Costs and Financial Aid.* Washington, D.C.: National Student Educational Fund, 1976.
- Green, William D. "After High School, What?" *American Education* (October, 1977): 19-22.
- Helliwell, Carolyn B., and Jung, S.M. *Consumer Protection Strategies: A Literature Review and Synthesis.* Palo Alto, Calif.: American Institutes for Research, 1975.

- Stark, Joan S., ed. *Promoting Consumer Protection for Students: New Directions in Higher Education.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1976.
- Stark, Joan S., ed. *The Many Faces of Educational Consumerism.* Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books—D.C. Heath, 1977.

The *Chronicle of Higher Education* "Ideas" Section

In May of 1976, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* inaugurated a regular feature titled "Ideas." This section serves as a clearinghouse for new ideas for improving postsecondary education. Each idea or product is briefly described, and sources of further information are given. Many of the ideas presented in the *Chronicle* through November 1977 may be relevant to this guidebook: informational placemats for use by local restaurants; telephone question-and-answer television shows; special information phones on campus; enclosing informational flyers in public-utility bill mailings; campus tour-guide business cards; discussion clubs for community members; informational picture puzzles; on-campus family festivals; cooperative traveling booths; outdoor electronic message centers sponsored by local businesses; nominal fees for nonstudents to sample courses; special sessions for nonstudents to try out college; telephone calls from parents of current students to parents of incoming students; informational bumper stickers; toll-free courses; self-guided walking tours using cassette and cartoon maps; informational programs on state-wide radio networks set up by colleges; college-course gift certificates; and a Welcome Wagon to distribute information. "Scanner-ready" type and bright orange press releases, set in capital letters, gained attention and provided better information coverage for two colleges in newspapers and on radio. Special brochures, booklets, and other publications have been prepared at some colleges for women, bilingual students, transfer students, blacks, parents, part-time students, accepted freshmen, and those interested in nontraditional learning experiences, obtaining a college speaker, or student involvement in the community. In addition, special types of publications, such as pocket catalogs, newspaper supplement catalogs, newspaper format catalogs, paperback editions of student essays on campus life, and "fiscal responsibility comics" were described in the "Ideas" section.

The "Ideas" section of the *Chronicle* also provides many ideas for communicating with currently enrolled students. Examples include Western Michigan University's "People Who Care" informational poster (Dec. 6, 1976); the University of Massachusetts resource book for nontraditional students (July 10, 1977); Bowling Green State University's Center for Commuting Students (Jan. 31, 1977) and university dining-hall informational placemats (Feb. 14, 1977); SUNY at Binghamton's booklet on small-claims-court procedures and ways of collecting monetary awards (Aug. 8, 1977); and Drake University's Student Volunteer Bureau placement of notices—wrapped around the candy bars in campus vending machines (Aug. 8, 1977).

The Center for Helping Organizations Improve Choice in Education

Project CHOICE, a center for helping postsecondary institutions improve student educational choice, has been established in the Department of Higher/Postsecondary Education at Syracuse University through a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education. This center will provide many services to postsecondary institutions around the country. Its informational brochure describes it as "a clearinghouse for literature pertinent to student choice and various institutional information dissemination models." It has:

1. A newsletter to keep institutions informed of recent efforts in presenting information to students and federal trends in the regulation of information distributed to applicants
2. Resource materials, including a slide-tape presentation for staff wishing to learn more about the rationale and process for examining their college's information program, and other materials, such as handbooks and technical manuals, dealing with institutional experiences in improving information for prospective students
3. Research and progress reports covering in greater depth material reported in the newsletter
4. Advisory services to all institutions
5. Extensive consulting services for staff at selected cooperating institutions willing to undertake a full-scale information improvement function; such staff could then consult with those at other institutions

For additional information or assistance, write: Center for Helping Organizations Improve Choice in Education, Department of Higher/Postsecondary Education, 227 Huntington Hall, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York 13210.

The National Center for Educational Brokering

An educational brokering agency is a community office or organization that provides educational information, counseling and referral, assessment, and advocacy services for adults interested in entering postsecondary education. The Center acts as a clearinghouse and referral center for brokering agencies and for those interested in learning about brokering functions. In addition to sponsoring conferences, it publishes a newsletter, directories, monographs, and articles. A publication list is available from its Office for Research and Publications, 405 Oak Street, Syracuse, New York 13203. The Center also operates a national network to arrange inexpensive consultation services for individuals, agencies, or institutions. Interested persons should write: Consulting Network, National Center for Educational Brokering, 65 Jefferson Avenue, Columbus, Ohio 43215.

APPENDIX A

A Description of the Needs Assessment and Communication of Information Surveys

The NCHEMS Better Information for Student Choice of College project had two objectives: (1) to identify and assess information items that are of value to prospective students and available at various postsecondary institutions but that are seldom made available to prospective students, are incomplete, or are ineffectively presented; and (2) to explore effective ways to communicate this information to prospective students.

To meet the first objective, the project staff—with the help of a number of colleges and high schools—carried out a large needs assessment. This needs assessment attempted to ascertain the need for information about colleges that is often unavailable to prospective students, their parents, and high-school counselors. Students and parents associated with 9 postsecondary-education institutions from different parts of the country—2 large state universities, a private university, 2 former teachers' colleges, a church-related liberal-arts college, 2 community colleges, and a private business college—constituted the college sample of the study. The high-school sample included high-school seniors, their parents, and counselors from over 150 so-called feeder high schools for the participating colleges and from 5 Vermont high schools.

The initial versions of the questionnaire were developed from in-depth interviews with students, counselors, administrators, faculty, and parents associated with 3 colleges and 4 high schools in the Denver area not part of the survey sample. They then were pilot-tested at 14 other high schools and 8

other colleges (some of which had been selected for the survey sample and some of which had not), and final revisions were made. The base questionnaire was revised 12 times before it was printed in final form. The questionnaire was shortened by eliminating items when everyone, or almost everyone, agreed that (1) the information was unimportant for selecting a college, or (2) the information was important but was already effectively provided by colleges.

For the survey, questionnaires were sent to 7,815 persons—4,725 from the college sample and 3,090 from the high-school sample. Forty percent of the questionnaires were completed and returned (the college sample produced a 35 percent return rate, the high-school sample a 54 percent rate). About 500 high-school and college students, counselors, administrators, and others were interviewed during the course of the study.

At five participating colleges, separate samples of 50 students each were selected, according to stratified random procedures, for the following groups: sophomore students entering out of high school; students 25-35 years old; students 45 years and older; and special groups (minority, transfer, foreign, graduate, and part-time students). Whenever a group was too small, a college could eliminate it from its study. Responses of groups studied by all colleges were analyzed by group.

Several forms of the NCHEMS College Information Needs questionnaire were used in the information needs assessment.[1] Of the two forms for students, one referred to information about the entire college, the other to information about particular programs. Two forms for parents, which excluded demographic items, were otherwise identical to these. Others were a form for high-school counselors, which referred to the utility of selected items for program and college-wide information; college-wide and program transfer-student forms, which referred to information about initial and transfer institutions; and a form for graduate students, which referred to information needed in choosing a graduate school.

After preliminary analyses of the survey data were completed, telephone interviews were conducted with selected respondents who had given permission on the questionnaire for such interviews. After about two dozen calls, researchers concluded that the initial interviews connected with the development and pilot test of the questionnaire provided sufficient information.

To explore effective ways of communicating information to prospective students, researchers developed two forms of a "Rating Ways of Presenting College Information" questionnaire, using 12 of the 29 items of information found to be especially important in the needs-assessment study discussed

1. For a discussion of the development of the questionnaire, see chapter 2. Lenning and Cooper (forthcoming) provide additional information about developing and administering the questionnaire and analyzing its results.

above. For each item, information was presented separately for two hypothetical schools in five alternative formats: (1) tables of tabulations—probably the format most often used for institutional records; (2) tables of tabulations along with relevant cartoons or caricatures—an addition that Hoyt (1968) found to be effective for his SOS (Specialty Oriented Students) program; (3) short paragraph script—probably the most commonly used format to present information to prospective students; (4) question and answer—found to be effective by several of the other projects sponsored by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education; and (5) bar and line graphs useful for showing patterns and comparisons.

The survey was administered to diverse, but not necessarily representative, samples composed primarily of entering freshmen at the five participating colleges. Each represented an institutional type: community college, church-related liberal-arts college, emerging public university (former teachers' college), public research university, and private research university. In addition, one form was mailed to 50 persons who had responded to the earlier questionnaire and expressed special interest in the project. A total of 369 students at the five campuses responded to one of the questionnaires (each college was asked to obtain responses from at least 30 diverse freshmen for each questionnaire). A total of 15 people in the mail sample (30 percent) responded without any follow-up mailing.

APPENDIX B

A Profile of Ratings by Different Groups of The Importance of College-Wide Information

Those being surveyed were to respond to each item as follows:

Very Important (information a student *must* have to be effective in selecting a college) 1
Important (information a student *should* have for selecting a college) 2
Desirable (information that *may* be useful for selecting a college but less important than 1 or 2) 3
Not Needed (information *not useful* in selecting a college) 4

On the following pages, the arithmetic average (mean) for college undergraduates other than transfer students is reported—the lower the score average, the greater the importance—along with the tabulated responses for that group. Then, for that group and six others, the range containing the mean for each group is indicated by the following code:

Mean Range	Code
1.00 - 1.50	X
1.51 - 2.00	Y
2.01 - 2.50	Z
Over 2.50	blank

"First-choice-college transfer students" refers to the ratings by the transfer group of information needed for choosing an initial college. "Second-choice-college transfer students" refers to their ratings of information needed for choosing a college to which to transfer.

QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS	RATINGS GIVEN BY COLLEGE UNDERGRADUATES		PROFILE OF GROUP DIFFERENCES							
	Very Important 1 Important 2 Desirable 3 Not Needed 4		College Sophomores and Others	Parents of College Sophomores	1st Choice College Transfer Students	2nd Choice College Transfer Students	High School Seniors	Parents of High School Seniors	High School Counselor
	Arith. Avg.	% of Total Group Selecting Each Response							
ADMISSIONS/DROPOUT/TRANSFER INFORMATION									
In selecting a college, how important is it to have information about:									
1. The basis on which students are accepted or rejected for admission to this college	1.6	1 56 2 30 3 12 4 2	X	X	Y	Y	Y	X	X
2. Policy and regulation regarding credit for demonstrated skill, previous education, training, and experience	1.7	1 49 2 34 3 13 4 3	Y	Y	Z	Y	Y	Y	Y
3. The percentage of applicants to the college who are admitted, and the percentage of *qualified* applicants who are admitted	2.5	1 17 2 34 3 34 4 15	Z	Z			Z	Z	Z
4. The percentage of entering students who drop out of this college by the end of the first year	2.7	1 15 2 26 3 36 4 23							Z
5. The percentage of entering students who are not permitted to continue at this college, who voluntarily drop out, and who transfer to another college prior to graduation from this college	2.7	1 14 2 23 3 39 4 24							Z
6. Reasons given, and how frequently each is given, for dropping out of this college	2.5	1 17 2 31 3 33 4 19							
7. Credit given by other colleges for courses taken at this college (transferability of courses)	1.4	1 73 2 21 3 5 4 2	X	X	Y	X	Y	X	Y
FINANCIAL-AID INFORMATION									
In selecting a college, how important is it to have information about:									
8. The typical kinds and amounts of financial aid given to freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors	1.6	1 58 2 26 3 11 4 4	Y	Y	Y	Y	X	Y	X
9. The amount of financial aid given to students at different family-income levels	1.8	1 47 2 31 3 16 4 7	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	X
10. The percentage of students receiving various proportions of the financial aid for which they are eligible (all the aid for which they are eligible, 80 percent of it, 50 percent of it, etc.)	2.3	1 25 2 34 3 28 4 14	Z	Z	Z	Z	Z	Z	Y
11. The percentage of students who formally applied for financial aid, and the percentage of these who received financial aid of some type	2.5	1 18 2 34 3 32 4 16	Z	Z		Z	Z	Z	Y
12. The percentage of students working at part-time jobs during the school year, the types of jobs, the hours worked per week, and the wages received	2.6	1 20 2 26 3 31 4 23					Z	Z	Z
INFORMATION ABOUT STUDENTS									
In selecting a college, how important is it to have information about:									
13. The percentage of last year's freshmen from different cultural backgrounds	2.9	1 11 2 19 3 38 4 32			Z				
14. The ages of last year's freshmen (the percentage who were 18-20, 21-25, 26-40, over 40 years of age)	3.2	1 5 2 14 3 35 4 47							
15. Where the students are from (instate, out-of-state, foreign country, rural, urban)	2.9	1 9 2 21 3 42 4 28				Z			
16. The percentage of students graduating last year who had transferred to this college from a two-year college and who transferred to this college from a four-year college	3.0	1 6 2 22 3 42 4 30							
17. Final grade-point averages earned by those who graduated last year and the percentage graduating with honors	2.7	1 13 2 28 3 40 4 20							
18. The amount of time it took different students to graduate	2.8	1 11 2 26 3 35 4 28							
19. The grading practices at this college as indicated by the academic abilities (entrance-test scores and high-school grades) of last year's freshmen compared to the college grades they received	2.3	1 25 2 34 3 29 4 13	Z	Z	Z		Z	Z	Z

Key

X = average group rating of 1.5 or less

Y = average group rating of 1.51-2.00

Z = average group rating of 2.01-2.50

blanks = average group rating of over 2.50

The lower the score, the greater the perceived importance

GENERAL INFORMATION													
In selecting a college, how important is it to have information about:													
20. Students' descriptions of the general atmosphere at this college (conservative? sports-oriented? academically-oriented? religiously-oriented? vocationally-oriented? student-centered? etc.)	1.8	1 43	2 38	3 15	4 5	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
21. The *specific* goals and objectives of the college	1.7	1 48	2 37	3 12	4 3	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
22. Percentage of the total budget that goes for different activities (teaching, research, library, student services, social and cultural activities, etc.)	2.1	1 30	2 36	3 28	4 7	Z	Z	Z	Z	Z	Z	
23. Percentage of teaching cost that is paid by the students' tuition	2.5	1 19	2 32	3 30	4 18	Z						
24. Evidence of the financial soundness of the college	2.0	1 34	2 33	3 26	4 7	Z	Y	Z	Z	Z	Z	Z
25. Student input to college decisionmaking	1.9	1 38	2 48	3 7	4 5	Y	Z	Z	Z	Z	Z	Z
26. The total number of part-time and full-time students at this college and the course loads they take	2.7	1 11	2 27	3 42	4 19				Z			
HOUSING INFORMATION												
In selecting a college, how important is it to have information about:												
27. The percentage of freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors living in different kinds of housing (dormitories, fraternities and sororities, off-campus rooms or apartments, at home, etc.)	2.6	1 17	2 29	3 35	4 19		Z		Z	Z	Z	Z
28. Availability, cost, and student ratings of different kinds of housing	1.7	1 50	2 32	3 12	4 6	Y	X	Y	Y	X	X	X
STUDENT-SERVICES INFORMATION												
In selecting a college, how important is it to have information about:												
29. The availability and extent of general student services (handicapped-student services, advising, counseling, health services, placement, library, etc.)	1.7	1 49	2 37	3 11	4 3	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	X
30. Frequency of use of the different student services	2.4	1 14	2 40	3 34	4 12	Z	Z	Z				
31. Users' ratings of the different student services	2.3	1 17	2 42	3 32	4 9	Z	Z	Z	Z	Z	Z	
32. The availability and extent of special academic assistance (tutoring, additional help from instructors, reading and writing skill development, etc.)	1.7	1 46	2 36	3 15	4 3	Y	Y	Z	Y	Y	Y	Y
INFORMATION ABOUT OUT-OF-CLASS ACTIVITIES												
In selecting a college, how important is it to have information about:												
33. Opportunities for participation in cultural activities	2.2	1 22	2 40	3 30	4 8	Y	Z	Z	Z	Z	Z	Y
34. Opportunities for participation in religious activities	2.5	1 18	2 32	3 35	4 15	Z	Z				Z	Z
35. Opportunities for participation in social activities	2.2	1 21	2 40	3 32	4 7	Z	Z	Z	Z	Y	Z	Y
36. Opportunities for participation in recreational activities	2.2	1 22	2 44	3 28	4 6	Z	Z	Z	Z	Y	Z	Y
37. Frequency and extent of participation that has been taking place in different out-of-class activities	2.7	1 12	2 30	3 39	4 20					Z		
38. Students' ratings of the different out-of-class activities	2.6	1 12	2 30	3 39	4 19					Z		

QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS	RATINGS GIVEN BY COLLEGE UNDERGRADUATES					PROFILE OF GROUP DIFFERENCES						
	Very Important ..... 1 Important ..... 2 Desirable ..... 3 Not Needed 4					College Sophomores and Others	Parents of College Sophomores	1st-Choice College Transfer Students	2nd Choice College Transfer Students	High-School Seniors	Parents of High-School Seniors	High-School Counselor
	Arith. Avg.	% of Total Group Selecting Each Response										
INFORMATION ABOUT INSTRUCTION AND INSTRUCTORS												
In selecting a college, how important is it to have information about:												
39. Number of students in different courses (class sizes)	1.7	1 48	2 34	3 15	4 3	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
40. Descriptions of the instructors (teaching experience, experience outside of teaching, interests, teaching and grading philosophy and methods, etc.)	1.7	1 53	2 30	3 14	4 4	Y	X	Y	Y	Y	Y	Z
41. Number of freshman courses taught by graduate or undergraduate students	2.0	1 35	2 [illegible]	3 22	4 9	Z	Y	Z	Z	Z	Y	Y
42. The way classes are taught (lecture, seminar, independent study, laboratory and field work, etc.)	1.6	1 56	2 33	3 9	4 3	Y	X	Y	Y	Y	X	Y
43. Percentage of their time that faculty spend on different activities (teaching, class preparation, advising students, conducting research, committee work, etc.)	2.2	1 28	2 33	3 26	4 13	Z	Z	Z	Z	Y	Z	Z
44. Student ratings of instructors (how good is the teaching?)	1.8	1 49	2 29	3 17	4 6	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Z
45. Student ratings of instructional facilities and equipment	1.9	1 40	2 37	3 18	4 5	Y	Y	Z	Y	Y	Z	Z
46. Availability of courses at night and on weekends	1.8	1 43	2 35	3 17	4 5	Y	Z	Z	Y	Z	Z	Z
47. Information about education taking place primarily outside of the classroom (internships, cooperative education, residence-hall programs, field study, etc.)	1.9	1 36	2 41	3 20	4 3	Y	Y	Z	Y	Z	Y	Z
INFORMATION ABOUT COLLEGE MAJOR												
In selecting a college, how important is it to have information about:												
48. When a student must declare a major field of study if he or she is to graduate on time	1.5	1 62	2 26	3 10	4 3	Y	X	Y	X	X	X	X
49. The year in school in which different students actually declare a major	2.2	1 28	2 34	3 30	4 9	Z	Z	Z	Z	Y	Y	
50. The minimum number of courses (or credit hours) *in* the college major required for graduation; the minimum number of courses (or credit hours) *outside* of the college major required for graduation	1.4	1 73	2 21	3 4	4 2	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
51. The average number of courses taken by students *in* their college major; *outside* of their college major	2.1	1 32	2 35	3 23	4 10	Z	Z	Z	Z	Z	Z	Z
52. How often and when students changed their college major and the directions in which they tended to change	2.5	1 19	2 29	3 32	4 21		Z					

Key

X = average group rating of 1.5 or less

Y = average group rating of 1.51-2.00

Z = average group rating of 2.01-2.50

blanks = average group rating of over 2.50

The lower the score, the greater the perceived importance

INFORMATION ABOUT COLLEGE IMPACT ON LAST YEAR'S GRADUATES

In selecting a college, how important is it to have information about:

53. Success of last year's graduates in passing certification and licensing examinations (nursing exam, cosmetology exam, state teaching certificate, etc.)
54. Success of last year's graduates on graduate and professional-school entrance exams (Law School Admissions Test, Graduate Record Examination, etc.)
55. The percentage of last year's graduates applying to graduate or professional school (or to four-year colleges for two-year graduates), and the percentage of these who were admitted
56. The success of the college's graduates in graduate or professional school (or for two-year college graduates, the success in four-year colleges)
57. Of last year's graduates wanting employment, the percentage who obtained a job that would be considered to be in their field of training
58. The reported success and satisfaction of last year's graduates with their jobs, and the contribution they feel that the college made to this
59. The number of last year's graduates who formally applied to the college placement office for help in finding a job after graduation, and the percentage of these who were helped
60. The percentage of last year's graduates who reported that the college affected the social roles they play outside of their occupation (in the home, the church, the community, etc.)
61. The percentage of last year's graduates who reported that the college affected their appreciations, attitudes, values, and philosophies of life
62. The percentage of last year's graduates who reported that the college affected the personal skills they possess (intellectual skills, leadership and other social skills, adaptability, etc.)
63. The percentage of last year's graduates who reported that their college experiences had adequately prepared them to live in the "real world"
64. The percentage of last year's graduates who reported satisfaction with their overall education at the college

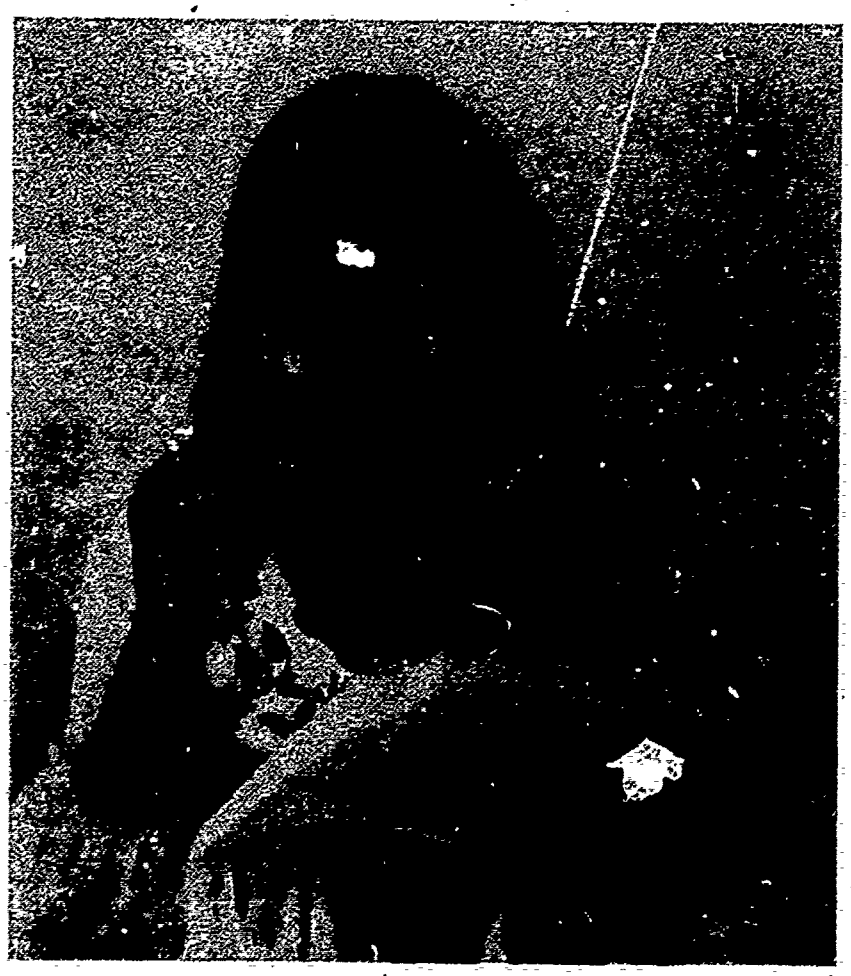
1.9	1 42	2 35	3 17	4 6	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
1.8	1 44	2 35	3 17	4 5	Y	X	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
1.9	1 39	2 35	3 21	4 5	Y	Y	Z	Y	Y	Y	Y
2.1	1 32	2 35	3 26	4 7	Z	Y	Z	Z		Y	Y
1.7	1 50	2 32	3 14	4 5	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	X
2.0	1 35	2 33	3 24	4 8	Z	Z	Z	Z	Y	Z	Z
2.0	1 37	2 35	3 23	4 5	Y	Y	Z	Y	Z	Y	Y
2.7	1 14	2 26	3 36	4 25							
2.6	1 16	2 25	3 36	4 23		Z				Z	
2.4	1 23	2 30	3 30	4 17	Z	Z	Z		Z	Z	
2.3	1 30	2 27	3 27	4 17	Z	Z	Z	Z	Z	Z	Z
2.1	1 34	2 31	3 26	4 9	Z	Z	Z	Z	Y	Z	Z

APPENDIX C

Recommended Questions for Prospective Students

Utilizing a federally sponsored study, the American Institutes for Research has developed a package to make students more discriminating consumers. Included in the package are tapes and a handbook (Hamilton et al. 1976) that lists questions that students should ask and that colleges should thus be prepared to answer. This list has been reprinted with permission from J.A. Hamilton, H.M. Wolff, and C.W. Dayton.

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION



There are lots of questions you should ask before you decide to spend your money on an educational program or course. In this section, we have listed some of the most important questions. Sometimes you'll be able to find the answer in the school's brochure or catalog, other times you'll have to ask employers, the school's representatives, teachers, or students, and others.

POSTSECONDARY SCHOOLS: WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Refund and Cancellation

- Does the school require you to pay (or sign a legally binding note to pay) tuition, room and board charges, or application fees *before* you start classes?
- If so, under what circumstances could you expect a full or

partial refund?

- Will the school refund fees and charges to you if it cancels one or more courses you have enrolled for?
- Will the school refund fees and charges to you if you withdraw before you complete an enrollment period?
- How long does it take to get a refund after you formally apply for one?

- Are the school's refund and cancellation provisions stated clearly in the catalog or contract?

Tuition Payment and Loans

- Does the school offer a reasonable schedule for payment of tuition?
  - Is it possible to make deferred tuition payments?
  - Are there penalty charges if you pay your tuition on a deferred basis?
- Does the school furnish you the opportunity to apply for a loan or some other type of financial aid?
  - When you apply for a loan, does the school give you a pamphlet explaining the terms and conditions of repayment?

Recruiting and Admission Requirements

- Does the school require that you sign an enrollment agreement describing complete costs, tuition or fee payment requirements, and educational services to be provided?
  - Does the school require that you get a chance to change your decision to attend, if you are enrolled by a recruiting agent away from the school?
  - Is a personal interview at the school required?
- Can anyone attend the school?
- Does the school give you a placement test to determine the level of course work appropriate for you?
  - Does the school provide you courses in basic English composition and mathematics if you are not well prepared in these areas?
  - Does the school give you the chance to take advanced courses, if you show that you are prepared for them?

Qualifications of Instructors

- Were their credentials issued by legitimate and accredited institutions?
  - Do they have teaching experience or backgrounds in their subject area?
  - Do they hold legitimate degrees or certification in the subjects which they teach?
  - Has the school published their credentials or professional resumes in the catalog of courses or some other place where prospective students may check them?
- Does the school furnish regular opportunities to fill out written evaluations of your instructors?
  - Does the school give you the results of students' evaluations of the faculty?
- Does the school often have to replace an instructor after instruction has begun?

Disclosure in Written Documents

- Does the school furnish you with a catalog (or other booklet that serves as a catalog)?
- Does the catalog show a date when it was printed?

- Does the catalog contain a calendar showing when classes start and end, and if there are holidays when classes aren't held?
- Does the catalog include a description of the school's educational goals?
- Does the catalog clearly show the courses offered during the next enrollment period, and those which are not?
  - Is a range of courses offered in the field you wish to study?
  - What are the size and duration of most classes?
- Does the catalog describe your total costs of attending, including tuition, room and board charges, registration or lab fees, etc.?
- Does the catalog describe the school's policies for: handling absences; allowing make-up work; dealing with mis-conduct; dealing with requests to leave school and come back later, if you wish?

Standards of Satisfactory Progress

- Does the school use a grading system or some other way to evaluate your course work?
- Does the school's catalog or student handbook state that you will be prepared for a certain occupation after successful completion of a designated number of courses?
  - How is successful completion defined?
- What types of degrees or certificates are awarded to you when you graduate?
- What is the absolute minimum number of credits needed to graduate?
  - Does the school accept credits earned at other institutions?
  - Do the credits awarded by the school transfer to other institutions?

Accreditation and Reputation

- Is the school fully accredited by one or more national or regional accrediting agencies?
  - Does the school have a certified audit done on its financial records and reports each year?
- Has the school received a license or charter from the State to operate?
- Does the school provide instruction on topics necessary for state or professional certification of graduates?
- Are there complaints against the school on file at the Better Business Bureau or the Federal Trade Commission?

Student Orientation

- Does the school give you an orientation to the school when you first enroll?
  - Does the school's orientation tell you how to go about filing a complaint or a grievance?
  - Does the school furnish you with a written orientation guide or student handbook?
  - Does the school's orientation incude an opportunity to hear from students who have been enrolled for a year or more?
  - Does the school's orientation furnish you information on student financial aid that is available?
- Does the school have a hearing board with student representation to hear grievances?

Facilities and Equipment

- Are they adequate for the courses you wish to take?
  - Will overcrowding prevent you from adequate use of facilities and equipment or necessary contact with instructors?
  - Is the equipment worn or out-of-date?
- Will you have to report to other locations to use certain facilities and equipment, raising the cost of attending the school in extra transportation or fees?

Job Placement and Follow-Through

- Is there a placement bureau or office at the school?
  - Are the placement services free, or do they cost extra?
  - If the services cost extra, what are the charges for?
  - What do the placement services include?
    - Contacting potential employers and setting up job interview appointments,
    - Counseling on how to get and hold a job, etc.
- Does the school do well in placing its students in jobs?
  - Does the school make broad claims or guarantees about placing its students which you have reason to doubt?
  - Does the school claim to have special connections with business, industry, or government employers, and that you will receive special consideration if you apply to them for a job after you graduate?
  - Does the school do actual studies to find out the job success and income level of its recent graduates?
  - Are the results of these studies made available to you if you ask for them including the names and addresses of graduates?

WHERE YOU CAN GET INFORMATION ON POSTSECONDARY SCHOOLS

We've listed a lot of questions. Here are some tips on where you can find the answers

PRESENT AND FORMER STUDENTS . . .

- curriculum, faculty and facilities
- job success after graduation
- orientation programs and materials
- living facilities, food, and social life

HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELORS . . .

- compare schools on costs and entrance requirements
- compare school courses, faculty and facilities
- starting salaries for various jobs

PERSONNEL OFFICES OF LOCAL EMPLOYERS . . .

- their experience with graduates of the school
- requirements for employment
- graduates of the school employed because of their training
- effect of training on starting salary

STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION. . .

- license or charter of the school
- other schools that provide similar services or training
- complaints made against the school in the past

ACCREDITATION BODIES

- accreditation status of the school
- accreditation standards that the school is required to meet
- complaints made against the school in the past

BETTER BUSINESS BUREAU CHAMBER OF COMMERCE CONSUMER PROTECTION AGENCY OR FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION . . .

- complaints made against the school in the past
- possible fraudulent claims made by the school in the past

APPENDIX D

Selected Remarks from the Central State University Institute

1. *Jan Vanderpool, psychiatric social worker, Oklahoma City*—Students are greatly influenced by the attitudes and choices of their parents and relatives. Postsecondary institutions need to reach students with career and college information, well before they get into high school.

2. *Hardy Doyle, President, Adsociates, Inc., Tulsa*—One of the first steps is to identify your market and find out who they are. . . . The first thing to do is identify their needs—not your needs—and match those needs with what your institution has to offer. . . . Communication made in one area can help reinforce communication in other areas. You must be consistent—you can't say different things to different markets without being accused of being untruthful. . . . Students are not very interested in bricks and mortar and things like that. . . . You can still present facts, but you do it from their perspective.

3. *Jim Conrady, Account Executive, Adsociates, Inc., Tulsa*—Before you develop a plan, it is important to conduct what we call a marketing audit. Go into every aspect of the institution and find out what's there. . . . Identify your strong points and strong areas and build on them. Narrow the role and scope of the institution to that which you can identify with the market. We believe in advertising, but it has to be a very structured marketing system. You cannot throw out all that you have to offer and

then leave it up to the student consumer to sort it out and find out about the little bit that he is interested in. . . . You may feel it would be helpful for kids in the seventh and eighth grades to have a favorable opinion or image of your school, but you only have limited resources so you cannot target your communication to them. What you have to do is target on those people where a decision can be made in the foreseeable future—within the next year. And if you do that carefully, you may be accomplishing the secondary objective, too. . . . You must base your communication budget on your objectives: how good you want your consistent and unified program to be and how long you want it to be. We talk in terms of task-oriented budgets. "Objectives" is where it all starts. What do you want to accomplish? Who is it you want to reach? What is it you want them to do? . . . What percentage of your target market do you want to reach? How many impressions do you want to make upon them? . . . First of all, you want to establish your image, then sustain your image. . . . We use a special formula to tell whether or not a particular communication program is affordable or not. . . . We calculate that the decisionmaking cycle for a typical freshman is approximately 18 months, prior to the date of entry. . . . There are some periods during this interval that are much more important than others. . . . We try to have a creative theme that lasts at least one year. It should look the same and be said similarly every time so that there is reinforcement. . . . Media campaigns can be very costly. You could have a modest three-week campaign for Oklahoma City and have it run as much as $30,000 to $35,000. For Central State University to cover Oklahoma City for 1976 with a comprehensive communications system, a minimum of $200,000 would be needed.

4. *Juanita Kidd, school counselor for 18 years, former Oklahoma Education Association President and Student Needs Assessment Director, and currently Community Relations Coordinator, Tulsa Area Vocational Technical School*—Strangely enough, the questions asked by prospective students from high schools have very little to do about the academics of the school itself. It is moving away from home, moving into a totally different world, how much is it going to cost me to do that, may I stay out late at night, may I have a telephone in my room, and things that seem irresponsible to us who have come well prepared with our academic lessons. . . . In deciding what information to provide, keep in mind that it must not meet the needs of the students' parents or the needs of the students' friends, but it must meet the needs of the students themselves. . . . I have found that what counts for prospective students are practical, down-to-earth answers and information in straightforward terms. . . . You could take a little lesson, I think, from vocational-technical schools, because not one of them offers a program or subject without having a parent committee or a community advisory committee composed of people in industry . . . and there is always a survey made of whether the

students will obtain a job once they get out. . . . In communicating with prospective students. it is especially important that we counteract three myths: (1) college must prepare you for a specific job in order for it to be worthwhile; (2) the general skills you acquire in college are of little help when you get into the real world; and (3) if you make a wrong choice of major, you are necessarily locked into a job or career you don't really want.

5. *A member of a panel of five high-school students*—I wish they would send me some information about the person I am going to room with, but they won't do it. They tried for awhile, but too many people were trying to change roommates the first couple of days.

6. *Vince Orza, Professor of Marketing, Central State University*—Most college catalogs and other materials are still aimed primarily at those just out of high school. Ages at many colleges have increased markedly, so if you are still talking about intramurals and social life, you are probably not talking about the things they want to hear. Before beginning a publication, you need to examine (1) the purposes for writing it and the purposes of the institution, and (2) the purposes for which the prospective student will be reading it. This is probably not done very often by those writing catalogs. . . . Information about fees is usually found at the end of the publication, but it should probably go at the beginning. . . . The purpose of market segmentation is to be able to better speak to them, plus tell them what they want to know and not tell them what they don't want to know. . . . Quite often colleges and universities do not go back and do any kind of research on who did go to their institution and on who did not stay. . . . The normal way of writing catalogs is to change faculty names, dates, and the picture on the front. Rather, it should be changed to reflect changes in college goals, other college changes, and changes in the community. . . . I would suggest that maybe we should get into writing brochures and specialized bulletins that deal with particular areas of information. Replacing catalogs with these would save money, give people the information they want to read. This means that you have a better chance of getting it read. . . . If you have a lot of students from different regions of the country, you should perhaps have customized bulletins for each region. . . . Perhaps catalogs that have a regional or an international taste to them would tell other things than what a local person would want to know. . . . I would suggest that you do use pictures that are up to date. . . . You say that you have small classes. Harvard says that also, as does the University of California—what's the number, that's what is important. "Small" is a relative term. . . . You should make it a point to bring out how your institution is different from those around you. . . . You should talk to your recent graduates to find out the major points they like and the major points they don't like about your

school. At the same time, find out from those who quit school why they quit. Then base your catalog around what they told you. It shouldn't be just a book of facts. You do want facts, but you also want to know what those who have experienced the college think and perceive. . . . Before you write any brochure, or before you do anything else, go and look through the United States Statistical Abstract. It is a book that simply states, for the U.S. as a whole and by region, numbers of people, jobs, dollars earned, number of degrees by area, and so on. It can give you some trends that should be considered in communicating to prospective students. You may even want to refer to some of these trends and show your institution in relation to them. . . . If you see a catalog that has football and athletics at the front and academics at the back, what does that imply to you? What you say first in your catalog may imply things to people. How you say it may imply things to people. And it may imply what you don't want it to imply.

7. ***Hall Duncan, Institute Director and Professor of Advertising Design, Central State University***—Having worked on catalogs myself at two institutions, one of the problems I have wrestled with is a committee that knows as much about the marketing of services to students as does a Buddhist priest in China. Once the catalog has begun to be formulated to get the wording right, it is almost like a legal committee. The consumer is shut right out. . . . One of the primary problems we face is that often we start late—and committees are slow. Often the deadline approaches, so we skip the final crucial step of going back to the potential consumers and having it evaluated by them before it is finalized and published. . . . What sort of lead time do you see as necessary in listening to the consumer, production, and evaluation before you go to press?

8. ***Gloria Rehrig, Counselor, Edmond (Okla.) High School, and Linden Ballard, Counselor, Moore (Okla.) Public Schools***—It is many times difficult for counselors to get a catalog from some colleges and universities. . . . Colleges should encourage counselors to be more specific in their requests. . . . Catalogs have not changed much in the last 15 years. Counselors need to get together and tell colleges what information they really need, and colleges should encourage and facilitate this. . . . Counselors don't have much time for each student. . . . I am a tenth-grade counselor for 485 students. When I write to colleges for information, often they do not send it because they think it is not important for tenth graders. I feel strongly that it is necessary to start orienting students to colleges while they are in tenth grade. . . . Oklahoma State University has a course-of-study book that gives a title outline of every course that will be required for a major, in every major that is offered. I really appreciate this. . . . Teachers seem to have more of an idea about what financial aid is available than do the counselors.

9. *Joe Park, formerly Director of Public Relations for the Oklahoma City Schools and currently Director of Public Relations and Public Information, Central State University*—High-school newspapers are a way of getting important information to high-school students that is usually overlooked. A survey of public-relations practitioners in Oklahoma City indicated that none of them had ever held a news conference for high-school youth, even though there were a dozen high-school newspapers with editors and staff. Similarly, the Coors Beer distributor held a high-school can-collection competition but didn't think to invite high-school-newspaper editors.

10. *Reba Collins, formerly Central State University public-relations director and currently Director of Public Relations and Curator, Will Rogers Memorial, Claremore, Oklahoma*—If students go to school because their friends are there, they need to be reminded that their friends are there. Hometown news releases serve this purpose. Even small accomplishments should receive a story. Tell what he is majoring in, what he did in high school, and who his parents are: . . . It is important to get current students to go back home with information. . . . Visits by prospective students to the campus are very important, especially if they are allowed to meet and get to know some individual faculty members and students. It is important that they know you care for them and see them as important persons.

11. *Dan Murphy, Copywriter, Adsociates, Inc., Tulsa*—One way to test out what you say in your publicity is to have a couple of people actually apply and see what treatment they get. . . . Concerning communication, it is crucial to keep it simple. . . . Some things are already known—for example, the excellent football team—so you don't need to talk about them. . . . When something that the prospective student sees reminds him of other of your pieces that he has seen, that's economy—for example, a TV spot that reminds the student of a direct-mail piece he previously received. . . . After the appearance of informational ads aimed at prospective students, one of our clients unexpectedly experienced increased financial gifts from alumni. . . . Everything that you do must come out of the goals you establish from the very beginning. The media to use depends on the problem you have and if you know how to use it in the right way. Somewhere in the enrollment process, try to find a playback of your central message to test out your advertising. Try to see if they are talking to you in the way you want to be heard.

12. *Donald Edwards, high-school principal, Oklahoma City, consultant for human-relations workshops, and specialist on disadvantaged youth*—The breakdown in communication usually occurs at the point of interpretation by the receiver. Two variables are primary in determining how

the message is interpreted: values held by the receiver and the level of the receiver's self-concept. . . . A book by Virgil A. Cliff, *Curriculum Strategy Based on the Personality Characteristics of Disadvantaged Youth,* published by the Consultative Center of the University of Oklahoma in Norman, discusses a number of characteristics of many disadvantaged youth important to understand. . . . We often communicate acceptance or rejection more successfully through the nonverbal processes—body language. Culturally disadvantaged youngsters are very sensitive to these things. . . . It only takes one unintentional slip, misstatement, or expression to turn these youngsters off. And once they become turned off, it is very, very difficult to recapture their attention, trust, and acceptance. . . . In communicating with disadvantaged youth, there are some false myths that we should keep in mind. First, many people think that when they tell a person something, they have given that person the message; that he or she has received the message. Meaning cannot be transmitted. All you can do, as the sender, is to arouse or stimulate in the receiver an interpretation of meaning, which may be the same or different from your interpretation of the message you sent. . . . Another myth that is false is that our eyes and ears tell us the truth . . . what each person sees as the truth depends on his or her previous experiences. Your previous experience will indicate how you interpret what you saw or see. Each person has his or her own truth. In communicating with disadvantaged youngsters, it is important to be aware of their slang or folkways. . . . In communicating with a disadvantaged person, it is important to understand the ideals and attitudes from his or her point of view.

13. *Engel Grow, Professor of Counseling and Guidance, Central State University*—School counselors often get into the provision of information provided after the fact—once the decision is made, they provide information on the application process, scholarships, when to take the ACT or SAT, and so forth. . . . Teachers in certain areas—such as speech and drama, athletics, music, and journalism—influence choice of college more than do counselors. . . . Students list their school preferences on the ACT or SAT, so you can easily get student names and addresses for sending materials. Take some of your own students with you to college days and college nights.

14. *Bobbye Persing, Professor of Business, Central State University*—In calling attention to the aids and programs available for the economically deprived, keep the language positive rather than demeaning in nature. The economically deprived have problems enough. . . . Do not use "girls" if the males are called "men." Use both men and women in all pictures, regardless of whether the portrayal is of home economics, law, or engineering. . . . Even a deep sincerity does not always win out. One must continually practice so that unbiased communication becomes habitual.

APPENDIX E

Sample Instrument for Evaluating Printed Informational Materials

Ten postsecondary institutions each developed an "educational prospectus" to better describe themselves, and an eleventh developed a multimedia prospectus, through projects funded by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education. The following "Prospectus Rating Form" was developed at NCHEMS to be used by students participating in the Central State University Institute to evaluate drafts for several educational prospectuses that were developed as a part of National Project I. The Participants in the Institute also discussed this questionnaire and agreed that all the items were valid, but that some of the coding were hard to use. Thus a new coding arrangement, which was tested on another questionnaire and found effective, has been incorporated here. Asterisks denote the items that a reviewer on the staff of a National Project I institution considered most important for his campus.

Prospectus Rating Form

Overview

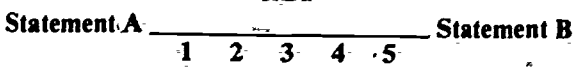
The National Task Force on Better Information for Student Choice, commissioned by the federal Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, was formed to encourage development and dissemination of approaches for

improving the quality of information to prospective college students. As a part of this effort, 11 diverse postsecondary institutions have each been working on the development of a prospectus for their school or some segment of it. An educational prospectus is analogous to a financial one. It should include useful information not typically included in educational-information materials. Furthermore, the information should be presented to give the prospective student an accurate and meaningful picture of (1) what it is really like at the school, (2) what is likely to happen if he or she enrolls and enters a particular program, and (3) other things the student should know before deciding to enroll. These 11 prospectuses, which will receive wide publicity throughout the country, are intended to serve as models to which other schools can refer for guidelines and ideas. Most of the schools are relying completely on written materials as the form for their prospectus, but at least one of them is using several media.

You are being asked to evaluate a rough draft for one of the prospectuses being prepared and to provide suggestions for improvement through this rating sheet. Your advice will be sent to the school for consideration and use. Therefore, you have an opportunity to influence future policies of providing institutional information to prospective students. Thank you for your assistance in the effort.

Instructions

Except for several discussion questions at the end, each item on the following pages contains two potential statements about the prospectus of concern, statement *A* and statement *B*. The items in the questionnaire are designed to elicit responses from you about the prospectus you are evaluating. The two statements are logically at opposite extremes of a five-point, bipolar scale. A response of "1" means complete agreement with statement A, a response of "3" means neutrality or that the two statements apply equally, and a response of "5" means complete agreement with statement B. This scale is illustrated below:



For each item, the bipolar statements are listed, along with five boxes numbered 1-5, corresponding to the five points along the above scale. For each item, please place a check (√) in the box that corresponds to your reaction, and then write any clarifications, suggestions, or other comments you would like to make in the space provided for "comments." Such comments are solicited and will be read. (If you need more space to discuss any item, please continue on the back.)

A completed sample item is:

A. The above instructions are clear.
B. The above instructions are not clear.

1	2	3	4	5
☐	☑	☐	☐	☐

Comments: *The reference to illicit responses in the second sentence of the instructions section was confusing, as was it later on where it talks about "soliciting."*

Before starting the questionnaire, please provide the following information:

—Name of the college whose prospectus is being evaluated _____

—The highest degree you hold and your area of educational specialization _____

—Your occupation (if you are a full-time student during the school year, please so state and indicate the type of program and college in which you are enrolled) _____

—Your age and sex _____

—Are you an instructor *or* a student at this institute? _____

KEY

Statement A _____ **Statement B**

1 2 3 4 5

This prospectus in general:

*1. A. Is too specific
B. Contains too much ambiguity

1	2	3	4	5	
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	(1)

Comments:

*2. A. Has greatly enhanced my understanding of the school
B. Has *not* enhanced my understanding of the school

1	2	3	4	5	
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	(2)

Comments:

KEY					
Statement A					Statement B
	1	2	3	4	5

3. A. Is too detailed
   B. Is too short on detail
   1 2 3 4 5 (3)

Comments:

4. A. Seems well aimed at the diversity of students this institution serves
   B. Is aimed too much at one type of prospective student
   1 2 3 4 5 (4)

Comments:

5. A. Is very pertinent to the information needs of prospective students
   B. Strikes me as *not* pertinent to the information needs of prospective students
   1 2 3 4 5 (5)

Comments:

6. A. Is a creative and innovative way to present information of this type
   B Shows little creativity
   1 2 3 4 5 (6)

Comments:

*7. A. Seems to be objective and striving for accuracy
   B. Seems often to be too subjective or evasive or self-serving
   1 2 3 4 5 (7)

Comments:

8. A. Is too long and wordy
   B. Is too brief and short; needs more detail
   1 2 3 4 5 (8)

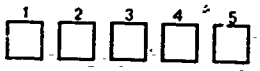
Comments:

*9. A. Covers the areas that definitely need coverage
   B. Leaves out important areas of concern to students
   1 2 3 4 5 (9)

Comments:

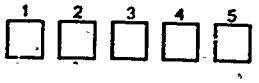
KEY					
Statement A					Statement B
1	2	3	4	5	

*10. A. Is attractive, inviting, and interesting
B. Is unattractive, uninviting, and uninteresting
Comments:



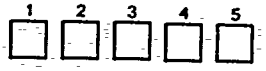
(10)

11. A. Used the best possible format for such information
B. Should definitely have used a different format
Comments:



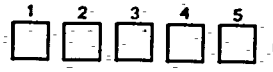
(11)

*12. A. Is well organized
B. Needs to be reorganized
Comments:



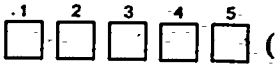
(12)

13. A. Is consistent in content and style throughout
B. Is inconsistent in content and style throughout
Comments:



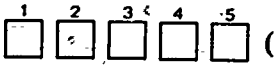
(13)

14. A. Used the best possible communication mode, considering cost
B. Should have used a different communication mode
Comments:



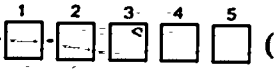
(14)

*15. A. Uses wording that is clear to prospective students
B. Uses wording that is unclear to prospective students
Comments:



(15)

16. A. Includes useful g. ..icks that gain attention and help ...munication
B. Contains too little textual variety, or is too gimmicky in its approach to be interesting
Comments:



(16)

KEY					
Statement A					Statement B
1	2	3	4	5	

17. A. Used too few pictures, drawings, and charts
    B. Used too many pictures, drawings and charts

1 2 3 4 5 (17)

Comments:

*18. A. Is quite readable
    B. Lacks readability

1 2 3 4 5 (18)

Comments:

19. A. Implies a high-quality image for the school
    B. Implies a low-quality image for the school

1 2 3 4 5 (19)

Comments:

20. A. Will help the prospective student develop a realistic set of expectations about the school
    B. May lead the prospective student to develop unrealistic expectations about the school

1 2 3 4 5 (20)

Comments:

21. A. Has no major problems other than those outlined above
    B. Has many problems in addition to those outlined above

1 2 3 4 5 (21)

Comments:

*22. A. Has much practical usefulness for students deciding on a college
    B. Has little practical usefulness for students deciding on a college

1 2 3 4 5 (22)

Comments:

KEY						
Statement A						Statement B
	1	2	3	4	5	

23. A. Is a good model for other colleges and schools to follow
B. Is a poor model for other colleges and schools to follow

1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ (23)

Comments:

*24. What is the first impression one gets upon seeing the document and glancing casually through it?

25. From your observation, what primary purposes seem to be implied by the prospectus?

26. How would you see this prospectus fitting into a total communication system for prospective students?

*27. Of those problems and suggested improvements you have mentioned, which ones should have priority attention in revising the prospectus? Are there specific improvements you would suggest, for any section of the prospectus or for the prospectus as a whole, that haven't already been mentioned elsewhere?

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