

AIR Forum Presentation

TITLE:

Alabama Bound:
Identifying Factors Associated with Secondary Education
Students' Choice of Attending The University of Alabama

AUTHORS:

Jon Charles Acker
William W. Hughes
William R. Fendley, Jr.

Significance or Timeliness of the Topic

The choice of a college has remained one of life's greatest undertakings. Little has changed regarding the importance of this decision since the 1920s when Comfort (1925, 3) stated, "With the exception of marriage and the choice of a career, perhaps no subject in life is fraught with greater consequences. Indeed, the choice of a college is much like that of a life-companion: one usually makes the choice but once and for always." This study's primary purpose is to understand the factors that draw secondary education students to The University of Alabama. Secondly, it seeks to identify characteristics (demographic, academic preparation, personal perceptions) within these factors.

Historical, Theoretical, and/or Conceptual Framework

There are numerous factors that contribute to student enrollment at a particular institution. These variables include, but are not limited to, tuition cost, type of institution, programs/curriculum offered by the institution, parental and peer influences, scholarship awards, admissions standards and institutional reputation, athletics, local and national economic conditions, and recruitment efforts by the institution. Some of these variables are easily quantifiable, while others are more dubious.

There have been many models proposed to depict the path leading a student from secondary education to higher education. They range from very complex models (see Figures 1 and 2) to very simple models (see Figure 3). Naturally, the process followed by individual students varies. For some the path to college might be quite simplistic and straightforward, while for others it may be very convoluted.

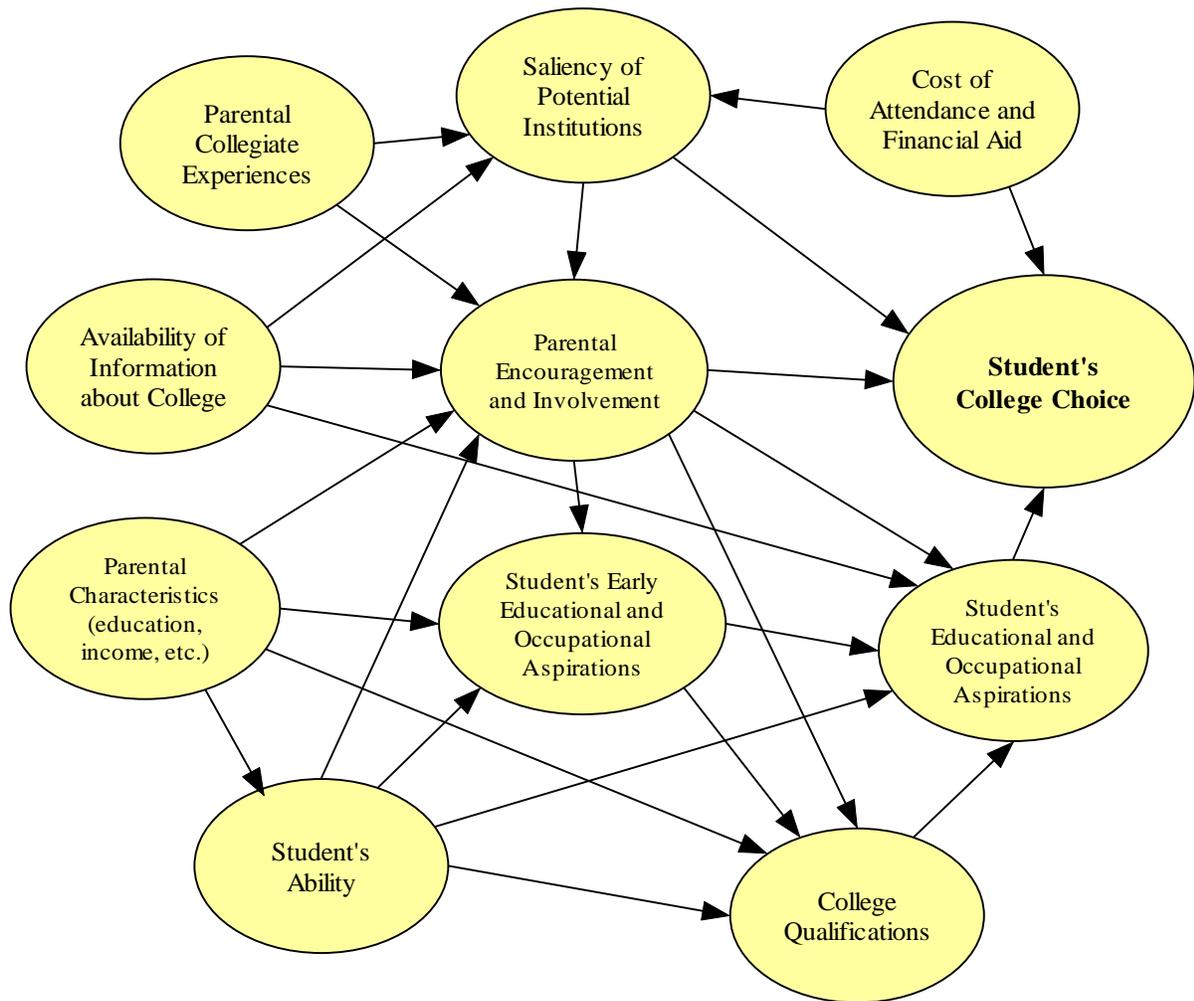


Figure 1. College-Choice Process Model of Cabrera and LaNasa, 2000

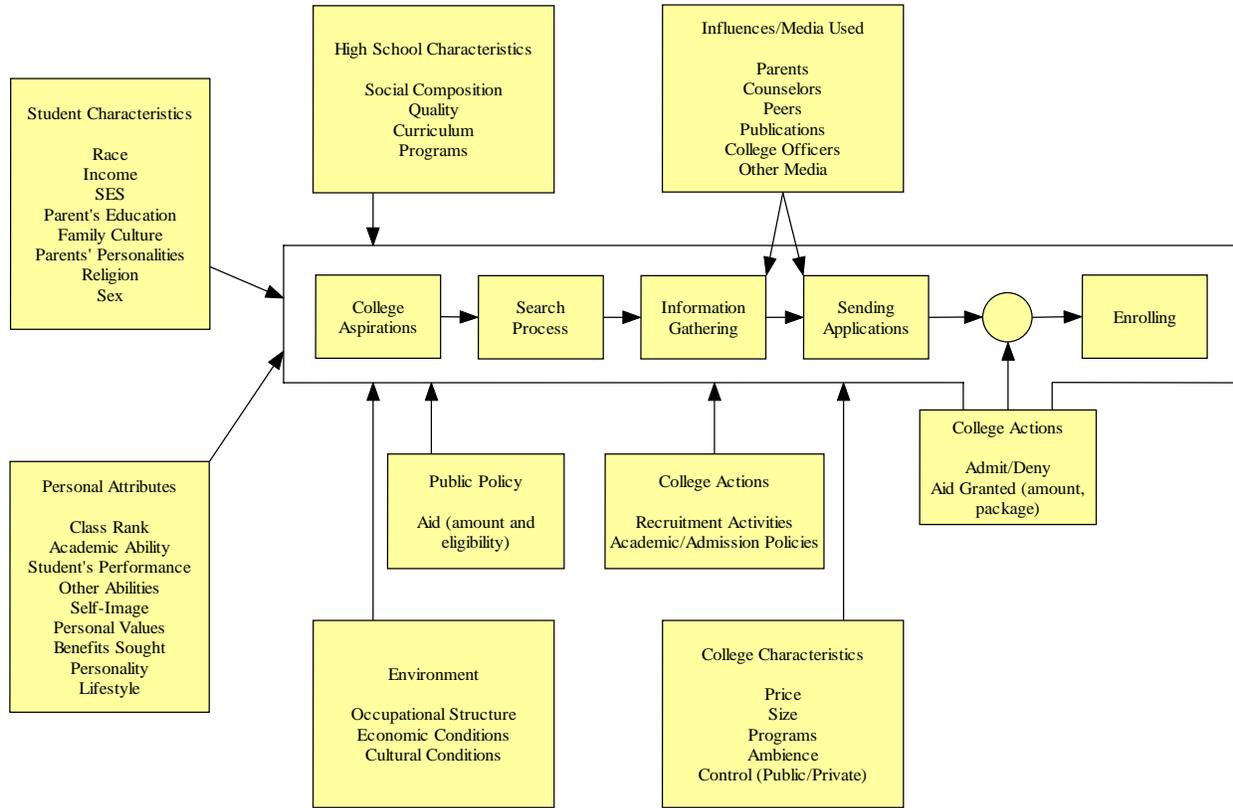


Figure 2. Hanson and Litten Model, 1982

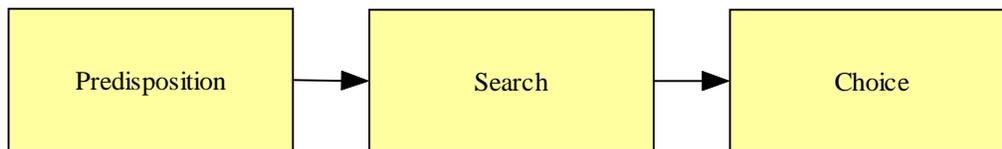


Figure 3. Hossler and Gallagher Model, 1987

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. Where do non-accepted and non-enrolled students go to school?
2. What relationships, if any, exist between post-secondary attendance and demographic and academic preparation characteristics?
3. What are the principal factors that draw students to The University of Alabama?
4. What relationships, if any, exist between UA attendance factors and student demographic, and academic preparation characteristics?

Data Collection and Methods

Quantitative and qualitative data are collected from numerous sources, including the University's Student Information System (SIS), the National Student Loan Clearinghouse (NSLC), and from in-house (i.e., *Graduating Senior Survey*) and out-sourced student assessments (i.e., *CIRP Freshmen Survey*). The information gathered is tabulated into frequency tables, longitudinally where possible to show trends, or viewed spatially in map form.

Intended Audience

This research is intended to aid administrators, researchers, and policy-makers in acquiring a better understanding of what attracts students to The University of Alabama. It will help effect more efficient enrollment management processes through better enrollment planning, student marketing, and recruitment.

Results

This section of the analyses answers research questions 1 and 2. One must start at the beginning of the process that eventually leads to enrollment, i.e., an application for admission. Over 7,000 students apply for undergraduate admission to The University of Alabama every year. Of these applicants roughly 80 percent will be accepted and roughly one-third will enroll in classes. If a student is accepted and does not attend UA, or if a student is not accepted at UA, it is useful to locate where these students actually go to school. In doing so you can identify the institution's recruiting battlegrounds for prospective students. This can be done by utilizing the EnrollmentSearch® Service of the National Student Loan Clearinghouse (NSLC). This is a for-pay service provided by the NSLC that allows unit record matching of students with an enrollment institution at a point in time. The NSLC database covers approximately 92% of enrolled students.

All applied but not admitted and admitted but not enrolled students (N = 10,109) between the fall 2001 and spring 2003 terms were identified and submitted to the NSLC for an enrollment search. The NSLC search found a total of 8,907 records of which 8,626 indicated the student attended an institution of higher education. The tables below show the applicant status by demographic characteristics (Table 1), entrance examination score distributions by applicant status (Table 2), and the top schools attended by applicant status (Table 3), race and sex (Tables 4a & 4b), and ACT composite ranges (Tables 5a & 5b).

Table 1. Applicant Status: Fall 2001 through Spring 2003

Status	N	Sex %		Race %	
		Female	Male	White	Black
Applied- Not Admitted	2,964	52.6	47.4	60.0	31.6
Admitted- Not Enrolled	7,145	56.7	43.3	85.9	9.6
Enrolled	5,054	55.5	44.5	85.6	10.3
All	15,163	55.5	44.5	80.4	14.1

Table 2. Entrance Examination Scores by Applicant Status: Fall 2001 through Spring 2003

ACT Composite	Status		
	Applied Not Admitted	Admitted Not Enrolled	Enrolled
<16	191	7	8
16	188	11	12
17	269	46	39
18	189	268	162
19	176	375	395
20	134	470	460
21	109	505	492
22	95	514	421
23	95	499	442
24	67	476	395
25	67	467	332
26	46	402	296
27	37	367	279
28	22	359	250
29	32	265	177
30	16	243	122
31	10	165	93
32	6	126	67
33	4	66	40
34	3	40	18
35	0	15	4
36	0	1	1
Total	1,756	5,687	4,506
Mean Score	19.65	24.18	23.59

It is evident in Table 2 that students scoring less than 18 on the ACT Composite were for the most part not accepted at UA, while most students scoring above 23 were accepted. Interestingly, roughly half of the students scoring less than a 22 that were admitted chose to enroll at UA, *while those scoring higher were increasingly less likely to attend UA.*

Looking at where UA applicants, non-admits and non-enrollees, matriculated in higher education it is shown that Auburn University stood alone and far above all others as the institution of choice (see Table 3, Appendix A & B). Focusing on the non-enrollees it is apparent that a sizable majority of these students chose peer, i.e., Southern University Group (SUG), institutions such as Auburn University, the University of Georgia, the University of Mississippi, and the University of Tennessee, or remained within the UA system by enrolling at UAB or UAH. One needs to keep in mind that the values given in Tables 3-5 include duplicate attendance. A student is counted at each institution that he/she has attended. For example, the NSLC enrollment search for UA's non-enrolled admits found 1,298 students with multiple attendances. It should also be remembered that not all institutions participate in the NSLC. For example, Shelton State Community College located near UA does not participate in the NSLC and undoubtedly enrolls many UA non-admits and non-enrollees.

Table 3. Top 25 Institutions Attended by UA Admitted Non-Enrolling Students and UA Non-Admitted Students

Admitted Non-Enrolling N = 7,145, Found = 6,632			Non-Admits N = 2,964, Found = 2,275		
Institution	State	N	Institution	State	N
Auburn University	AL	880	Auburn University	AL	187
University of Georgia	GA	328	UAB	AL	112
UAB	AL	327	University of South Alabama	AL	78
University of Mississippi	MS	268	University of Mississippi	MS	70
University of Tennessee	TN	189	Alabama A&M University	AL	65
University of South Alabama	AL	186	Alabama State University	AL	58
Birmingham Southern College	AL	167	University of North Alabama	AL	45
Samford University	AL	130	Southern Union State CC	AL	44
UAH	AL	129	University of Tennessee	TN	43
University of North Alabama	AL	127	Troy State University	AL	42
Troy State University	AL	121	University of Montevallo	AL	34
Florida State University	FL	113	Faulkner State College	AL	32
Mississippi State University	MS	108	Mississippi State University	MS	32
University of Montevallo	AL	103	Tuskegee University	AL	29
University of South Carolina	SC	83	UAH	AL	26
Tuskegee University	AL	64	University of West Alabama	AL	26
College of Charleston	SC	63	Miles College	AL	23
Georgia Southern University	GA	62	Florida State University	FL	22
University of Southern Miss.	MS	58	Bevill State CC- Walker	AL	20
Southern Methodist University	TX	55	University of Georgia	GA	20
Southern Union State CC	AL	54	Georgia Southern University	GA	17
Bevill State CC- Walker	AL	54	University of Southern Miss.	MS	17
Spring Hill College	AL	49	Birmingham Southern College	AL	14
University of Florida	FL	49	Truett McConnell College	GA	14
Vanderbilt University	TN	48	AUM	AL	13
University of Memphis	TN	48	Middle Tennessee State U.	TN	13
			West Virginia University	WV	13

Source: NSLC EnrollmentSearch® Results

Found = The number of students NSLC was able to identify.

Institutions in red are SUG institutions.

Tables 4a and 4b summarize a breakdown by race and sex for the institutions attended. A notable peculiarity among the groups is that white students, both males and females, were much more likely to go to Auburn University than Black males or females. In fact, Auburn ranked third among black females and slightly edged out UAB among black males for the top spot. Another difference was that a large percentage of black UA non-enrollees chose Historically

Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), such as Alabama A&M University, Alabama State University, and Tuskegee University.

Table 4a. Top 25 Institutions Attended by UA Admitted Non-Enrolling Students Broken Down by Race and Sex

White Males N = 2,664, Found = 2,479			White Females N = 3,435, Found = 3,239		
Institution	State	N	Institution	State	N
Auburn University	AL	359	Auburn University	AL	437
University of Mississippi	MS	111	University of Georgia	GA	212
University of Georgia	GA	101	University of Mississippi	MS	151
UAB	AL	93	UAB	AL	130
Birmingham Southern College	AL	73	University of Tennessee	TN	117
University of South Alabama	AL	67	University of South Alabama	AL	87
University of Tennessee	TN	62	Birmingham Southern College	AL	83
UAH	AL	57	Samford University	AL	83
Troy State University	AL	54	University of North Alabama	AL	64
Mississippi State University	MS	50	Troy State University	AL	59
University of North Alabama	AL	49	University of Montevallo	AL	58
Samford University	AL	42	Florida State University	FL	56
Florida State University	FL	37	Mississippi State University	MS	48
University of South Carolina	SC	36	UAH	AL	45
University of Montevallo	AL	34	University of South Carolina	SC	43
Georgia Southern University	GA	31	College of Charleston	SC	42
Tulane University	LA	27	Southern Methodist University	TX	35
Southern Union State CC	AL	26	Spring Hill College	AL	33
Vanderbilt University	TN	24	University of Southern Miss.	MS	31
University of Southern Miss.	MS	23	Bevill State CC- Walker	AL	28
Georgia Institute of Technology	GA	22	University of Kentucky	KY	27
Bevill State CC- Walker	AL	21	Georgia Southern University	GA	26
University of Florida	FL	20	University of Memphis	TN	26
Southern Methodist University	TX	20	Northwest Shoals CC	AL	24
College of Charleston	SC	19	Southern Union State CC	AL	24
University of Memphis	TN	17	Huntingdon College	AL	22

Source: NSLC EnrollmentSearch® Results

Found = The number of students NSLC was able to identify.

Table 4b. Top 25 Institutions Attended by UA Admitted Non-Enrolling Students Broken Down by Race and Sex

Black Males N = 232, Found = 208			Black Females N = 450, Found = 407		
Institution	State	N	Institution	State	N
Auburn University	AL	28	UAB	AL	61
UAB	AL	25	Tuskegee University	AL	44
Alabama A&M University	AL	15	Auburn University	AL	33
Tuskegee University	AL	15	Alabama A&M University	AL	24
Morehouse College	GA	7	Alabama State University	AL	17
University of North Alabama	AL	4	University of South Alabama	AL	17
Alabama State University	AL	4	UAH	AL	13
Troy State University	AL	4	Tennessee State University	TN	10
Florida State University	FL	4	Florida State University	FL	8
Tennessee State University	TN	4	University of Montevallo	AL	7
University of South Alabama	AL	3	University of West Alabama	AL	6
Georgia Institute of Technology	GA	3	AUM	AL	5
Mississippi State University	MS	3	Spelman College	GA	5
Birmingham Southern College	AL	2	Southern Union State CC	AL	4
UAH	AL	2	Bevill State CC- Walker	AL	4
University of Montevallo	AL	2	Talladega College	AL	3
Yale University	CT	2	University of North Alabama	AL	3
University of Florida	AL	2	Howard University	DC	3
Georgia Southern University	GA	2	Georgia State University	GA	3
Emory University	GA	2	Washington University	MO	3
Mercer University- Macon	GA	2	17 Institutions		2
North Carolina A&T State U.	NC	2			
Miami University	OH	2			
University of The South	TN	2			
Vanderbilt University	TN	2			

Source: NSLC EnrollmentSearch® Results

Found = The number of students NSLC was able to identify.

Institutions in red are HBCU institutions.

Tables 5a and 5b show the institutions attended broken down by ACT composite ranges. When comparing the ranked placement of various schools across the four categories, some interesting patterns emerge. Auburn University ranks tops, overwhelmingly, in each category, while UAB ranks second in all but the highest where Birmingham-Southern College edges it out. The choice of a number of schools increases as the score groupings increase. This is the case for Birmingham-Southern College (14,10,4,2), the University of Georgia (15,7,5,5), Mississippi State University (20,16,11,4), and Troy State University (12,13,7,6). The numbers in the

parentheses are the institution's rank in each of the ACT composite score groups from lowest (<21) to highest (>29). Vanderbilt University, the Georgia Institute of Technology, Tulane University, and the University of Florida emerge among the top 25 institutions in the two highest score groupings ranking 8, 7, 12, and 16 respectively in the highest group. Some schools decrease in popularity as the score groupings increase. The University of Mississippi is a

Table 5a. Top 25 Institutions Attended by UA Admitted Non-Enrolling Students Broken Down by ACT Composite Score Range

Less than 21 N = 1,177, Found = 1,076			21 - 24 N = 1,994 Found = 1,834		
Institution	State	N	Institution	State	N
Auburn University	AL	161	Auburn University	AL	294
UAB	AL	74	UAB	AL	96
University of Mississippi	MS	60	University of Mississippi	MS	69
University of Tennessee	TN	34	University of Tennessee	TN	67
University of South Alabama	AL	30	University of South Alabama	AL	64
Tuskegee University	AL	29	University of North Alabama	AL	49
University of Montevallo	AL	25	University of Georgia	GA	49
University of North Alabama	AL	25	Samford University	AL	42
Southern Union State CC	AL	20	UAH	AL	40
Alabama A&M University	AL	19	Birmingham Southern College	AL	39
UAH	AL	19	University of Montevallo	AL	37
Troy State University	AL	17	Florida State University	FL	37
Bevill State CC- Walker	AL	15	Troy State University	AL	28
Birmingham Southern College	AL	12	Bevill State CC- Walker	AL	24
University of Georgia	AL	12	Southern Union State CC	AL	23
Samford University	AL	11	Mississippi State University	MS	23
University of West Alabama	AL	11	Tuskegee University	AL	22
Florida State University	FL	11	University of Southern Miss.	MS	20
Georgia Southern University	GA	11	Northwest Shoals CC	AL	16
Mississippi State University	MS	11	University of Kentucky	KY	15
Alabama State University	AL	10	Alabama A&M University	AL	14
Northwest Shoals CC	AL	10	Spring Hill College	AL	14
Spring Hill College	AL	9	University of Memphis	TN	14
Faulkner State College	AL	9	Southern Methodist University	TX	14
Kennesaw State University	GA	9	Faulkner State College	AL	13
			College of Charleston	SC	13

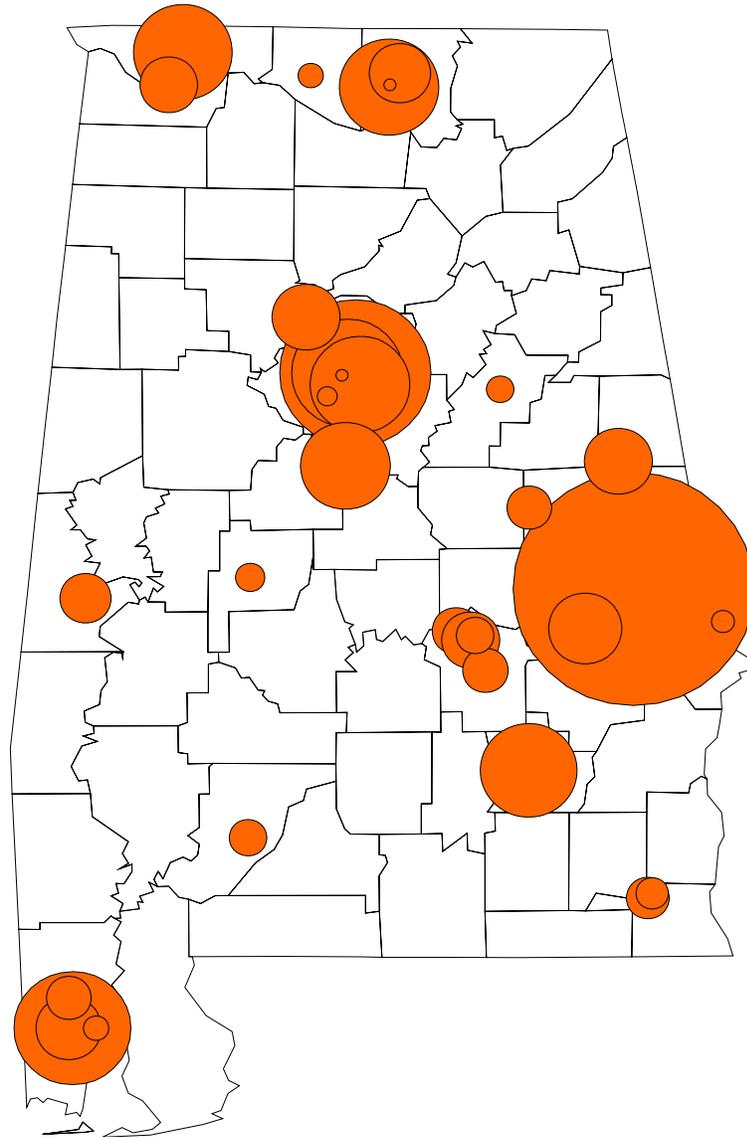
Source: NSLC EnrollmentSearch® Results
 Found = The number of students NSLC was able to identify.

favorite destination among all groups but drops off slightly as the scores increase (3,3,6,9), while the University of Tennessee drops markedly in the top two groups (4,4,13,25). The University of Montevallo's rankings drop also as the scores rise (7,11,12,18). The University of South Alabama ranks highly in all but the highest group (5,5,3,13), with the University of North Alabama following a similar pattern (8,6,10,14). Florida State University (18,12,19,15) and Samford University (16,8,9,10) fluctuate across the score groupings.

Table 5b. Top 25 Institutions Attended by UA Admitted Non-Enrolling Students Broken Down by ACT Composite Score Range

25 - 29 N = 1,860, Found = 1,754			Greater than 29 N = 656 Found = 622		
Institution	State	N	Institution	State	N
Auburn University	AL	251	Auburn University	AL	77
UAB	AL	107	Birmingham Southern College	AL	40
University of South Alabama	AL	75	UAB	AL	38
Birmingham Southern College	AL	71	Mississippi State University	MS	29
University of Georgia	GA	68	University of Georgia	GA	24
University of Mississippi	MS	63	Troy State University	AL	22
Troy State University	AL	54	Georgia Institute of Technology	GA	20
UAH	AL	53	Vanderbilt University	TN	19
Samford University	AL	51	University of Mississippi	MS	17
University of North Alabama	AL	43	Samford University	AL	16
Mississippi State University	MS	42	UAH	AL	15
University of Montevallo	AL	33	Tulane University	LA	15
University of Tennessee	TN	33	University of South Alabama	AL	13
University of Memphis	TN	24	University of North Alabama	AL	9
Huntingdon College	AL	22	Florida State University	FL	9
Spring Hill College	AL	21	University of Florida	FL	9
University of Southern Miss.	MS	21	University of Southern Miss.	MS	8
University of Florida	FL	16	University of Montevallo	AL	7
Florida State University	FL	16	Wake Forest University	NC	7
Vanderbilt University	TN	16	Mercer University- Macon	GA	6
Bevill State CC- Walker	AL	15	Millsaps College	MS	6
Tulane University	LA	15	Emory University	GA	5
Georgia Institute of Technology	GA	12	Harvard University	MA	5
University of Kentucky	KY	12	University of South Carolina	SC	5
Southern Methodist University	TX	12	Furman University	SC	5
			University of Tennessee	TN	5

Source: NSLC EnrollmentSearch® Results
 Found = The number of students NSLC was able to identify.

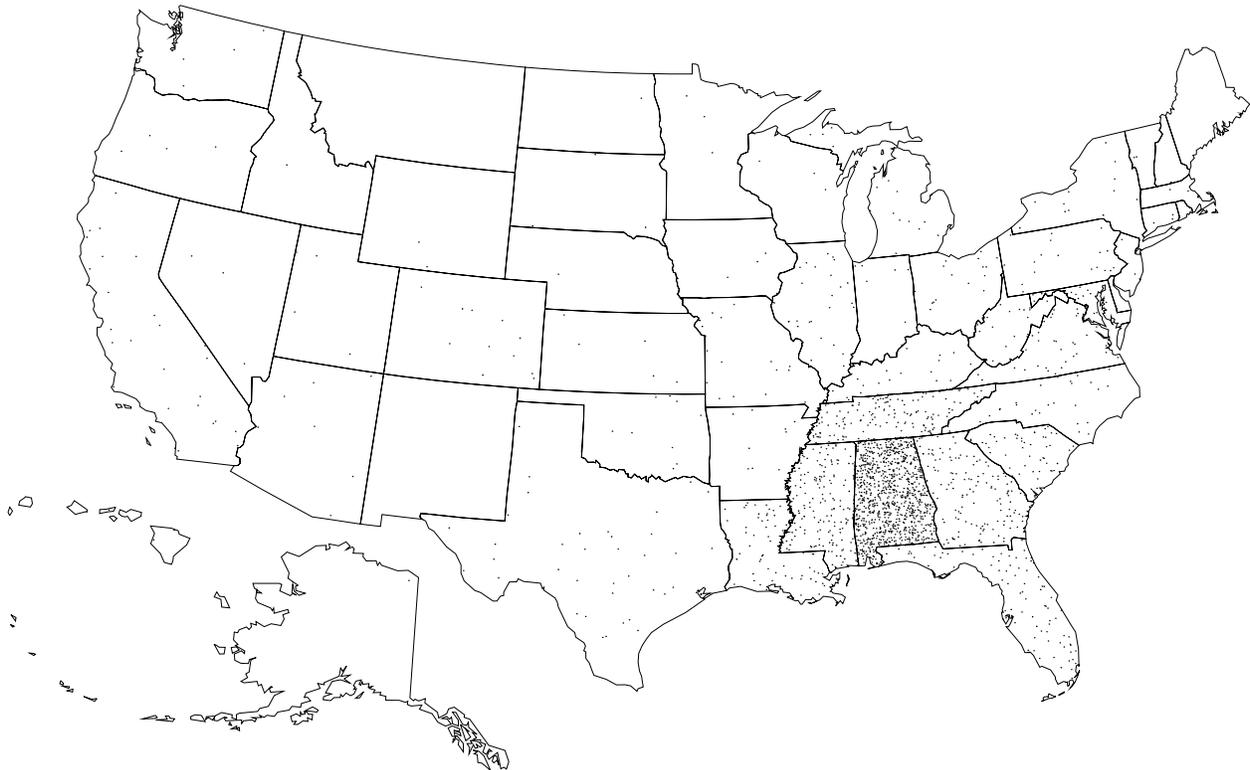


Auburn University is the largest circle with 880 students.

Figure 2. Proportion of students attending in-state institutions that were accepted but did not enroll at UA: Fall 2001 through spring 2003 applicants.

Note: Shelton State Community College is not a participant in the NSLC and thus is not represented on the map.

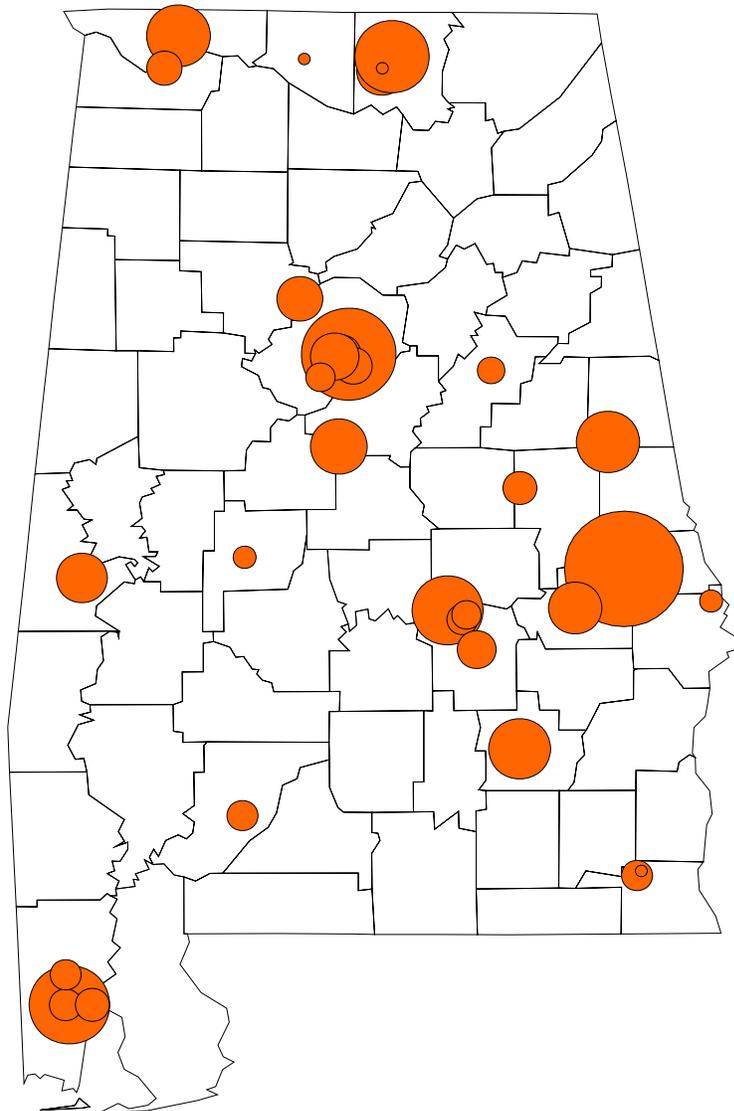
Figure 3 displays spatially the destination by state of the UA non-accepted students. Similar to the non-enrolled admits, a large majority of these students choose to remain within the state. Figure 4 breaks down the enrollment of the non-admit students by the institution attended in Alabama.



Note: each dot equals one applicant.

Source: NSLC EnrollmentSearch® Results

Figure 3. Destination of UA non-accepted applicants by state: Fall 2001 through spring 2003 applicants.



Auburn University is the largest circle with 187 students.

Figure 4. Proportion of students attending in-state institutions that were not accepted to UA: Fall 2001 through spring 2003 applicants.

Note: Shelton State Community College is not a participant in the NSLC and thus is not represented on the map.

This section of the analyses answers research questions 3 and 4. The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) *Freshmen Survey* produced by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA provides quite a bit of insight as to why students choose an institution. The CIRP *Freshmen Survey* is administered to entering UA freshmen during summer orientation sessions.

Tables 6-9 below relate information pertinent to this topic from the CIRP *Freshmen Survey* for the five years that The University of Alabama has participated. It is evident in Table 6 that UA has a wide geographic draw with over half of the students coming from more than 100 miles from campus.

Table 6. How many miles is UA from your permanent home?

	1999	2000	Percent 2001	2002	2003
5 or less	4.4	4.2	4.2	4.1	3.8
6 to 10	5.0	5.2	3.8	4.3	3.5
11 to 50	11.9	12.5	11.7	11.5	12.0
51 to 100	25.7	23.3	23.0	23.5	22.4
101 to 500	45.6	46.0	49.4	48.8	49.8
Over 500	7.5	8.8	7.9	7.7	8.5

Source: CIRP Freshmen Survey

Table 7 highlights the importance these students place on attending UA with roughly 80% indication that UA is their first choice and roughly 95% indicating it is their first or second choice. Evidence of this is also shown in table 8 which notes that over one-quarter of these students do not apply to any other institutions.

Table7. College choice

	1999	2000	Percent 2001	2002	2003
UA First Choice	81.8	80.7	84.9	79.0	80.7
UA Second Choice	14.1	14.7	11.0	16.0	14.7
UA Third Choice	2.8	3.5	2.4	2.9	2.9
UA Less than Third Choice	1.3	1.1	1.8	2.1	1.7

Source: CIRP Freshmen Survey

Table 8. How many colleges other than UA did you apply for admission?

	1999	2000	Percent 2001	2002	2003
None	29.8	28.7	29.5	27.2	29.0
One	15.3	16.1	15.4	15.0	16.4
Two	18.7	18.4	18.6	19.3	18.5
Three	17.9	16.8	17.8	19.1	15.7
Four or more	18.1	20.1	18.7	19.6	20.4

Source: CIRP Freshmen Survey

Table 9 provides a breakdown of specific reasons that students chose UA. Two factors stood above all others and weighed equally in drawing students to UA- it's *academic* and *social activities* reputations. Following distantly were factors related to a *campus visit*, *financial assistance* and the *size* of the school. UA has a strong legacy influence as well. Many students are the children of alums. Nearly one out of eight freshmen in the 2003 survey indicated that their family wanted them to attend UA. This is up considerably from the 1999 results (8.3%). Of particular note is the importance of rankings in national magazines. This factor is on the rise for UA students as evidenced by the consistent increase in those saying it was very important in influencing their decision to attend UA since 1999 (7.6% to 18.0%).

Table 9. Reasons noted as very important in influencing student's decision to attend UA.

	Percent				
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
My relatives wanted me to come here	8.3	10.5	9.9	13.8	11.4
My teacher advised me	2.3	2.1	3.2	4.2	3.8
This college has a very good academic reputation	53.8	54.5	49.3	49.9	48.6
This college has a good reputation for its social activities	43.6	46.9	48.9	46.6	47.7
I was offered financial assistance	28.1	29.1	27.1	34.0	29.6
This college offers special educational programs.	16.1	19.2	21.7	20.7	21.9
This college has low tuition	14.8	15.8	12.7	16.5	15.3
High school counselor advised me	2.8	3.3	4.2	4.3	4.7
Private college counselor advised me	0.7	1.5	1.6	2.4	2.6
I wanted to live near home	10.2	11.8	10.9	13.0	10.6
Not offered aid by first choice	6.3	6.3	5.2	7.1	6.0
This college's graduates gain admission to top graduate/prof. schools	28.4	28.5	25.9		
This college's graduates get good jobs	48.5	52.3	47.0		
I was attracted by the religious affiliation/orientation of this college	2.9	3.1	3.2	3.4	3.2
I wanted to go to a school about the size of this college	28.5	31.7	33.6	30.7	33.4
Not accepted anywhere else	1.3	1.7	1.7		
Rankings in national magazines	7.6	10.2	10.7	16.5	18.0
Information in a multicollege guidebook	4.5				
Information from a website		5.8	6.9	9.7	14.7
I was admitted through an Early Action or Early Decision program	2.4	2.7	4.5	3.9	4.2
My friends are attending		9.8	11.4		
I was offered an athletic scholarship		3.8	4.1		
I was offered a merit-based scholarship		21.6	19.1		
I was offered a need-based scholarship		6.8	7.2		
A visit to the campus					40.5
The athletic department recruited me				4.4	
Reputation for campus safety				5.1	

Source: CIRP Freshmen Survey

In the spring 2002 term the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment began administering a Graduating Senior Survey within which the topic of the choice of UA is addressed. Tables 10-15 look at various characteristics of the UA choice options, such as demographic differences, distinctions based on entrance examination score, and comparisons with other related questions in the survey.

Table 10. What is the primary reason you chose to attend UA? Demographic breakdown

Reason	Race Sex N	Percentage					
		Black		White		All	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Academic reputation		20.0	17.4	10.3	7.7	10.7	9.5
Cost		10.0	9.3	7.0	6.7	6.9	7.3
Family		26.7	16.3	16.0	19.5	17.2	18.5
Friends came here		3.3	2.3	4.9	4.4	4.8	4.1
Major/Field of study		3.3	15.1	13.6	14.6	13.1	14.2
Location		16.7	27.9	17.3	21.3	17.5	22.1
Scholarship/Financial aid		6.7	5.8	11.5	11.4	11.3	11.0
Social life		0.0	0.0	3.7	2.1	3.1	1.9
Athletics		10.0	1.2	7.0	4.2	7.2	3.9
Other		3.3	4.7	8.6	8.1	8.2	7.5

Source: UA Graduating Senior Survey: 2002-03

Some notable race and sex differences stand out in Table 10. Not surprisingly, males, especially African-American males, were more likely to be drawn to UA for athletics. Males were also more likely to consider academic reputation in their choice of UA. Females, on the other hand, placed much more importance on UA's location. The field of study or major was also a greater draw for females, particularly African-American females. Curiously, no African-American students noted social life as the primary reason for attending UA, but nearly three percent of White students indicated as much.

Table 11. What is the primary reason you chose to attend UA? ACT Composite breakdown

	ACT N	Percentage								
		<18	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Academic reputation		13.6	15.0	16.4	16.7	14.3	4.5	8.5	10.9	5.0
Cost		9.1	0.0	3.6	2.1	5.4	4.5	8.5	3.1	10.0
Family		22.7	30.0	25.5	18.8	19.6	22.7	25.4	28.1	27.5
Friends came here		4.5	0.0	0.0	4.2	7.1	9.1	5.1	3.1	2.5
Major/Field of study		9.1	10.0	14.5	10.4	16.1	15.9	10.2	20.3	12.5
Location		22.7	30.0	18.2	18.8	21.4	27.3	15.3	18.8	25.0
Scholarship/Financial aid		0.0	0.0	9.1	4.2	0.0	2.3	3.4	1.6	10.0
Social life		0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.8	6.8	6.8	4.7	2.5
Athletics		13.6	10.0	5.5	12.5	5.4	0.0	5.1	9.4	2.5
Other		4.5	5.0	7.3	12.5	8.9	6.8	11.9	0.0	2.5
	ACT N	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	>32	
		44	41	31	34	33	24	11	7	
Academic reputation		22.7	4.9	9.7	8.8	6.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	
Cost		9.1	12.2	12.9	2.9	9.1	12.5	0.0	0.0	
Family		9.1	12.2	12.9	5.9	9.1	8.3	9.1	0.0	
Friends came here		2.3	2.4	0.0	5.9	3.0	0.0	0.0	14.3	
Major/Field of study		9.1	14.6	9.7	17.6	9.1	12.5	18.2	0.0	
Location		15.9	24.4	22.6	11.8	15.2	0.0	18.2	0.0	
Scholarship/Financial aid		13.6	17.1	19.4	35.3	39.4	45.8	54.5	71.4	
Social life		0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.0	4.2	0.0	0.0	
Athletics		2.3	0.0	3.2	0.0	6.1	4.2	0.0	0.0	
Other		15.9	12.2	9.7	11.8	0.0	12.5	0.0	14.3	

Source: UA Graduating Senior Survey: 2002-03

Looking at a breakdown in the primary choice of UA by ACT composite score shows some interesting patterns (see Table 11). The importance of academic reputation generally decreases as scores increase. A similar pattern is found in the importance of family on the decision to attend UA. A striking pattern is a dramatic increase in importance of financial aid as scores increase. A curious relationship exists with that of the importance of social life. Social life as a factor in drawing students to UA is essentially non-existent at the extremes of the ACT scores, but is a noteworthy force for those scoring between 21 and 25. Athletics attracts many students to UA as well, but is more of a draw for students that score lower on the ACT Composite.

Conclusions

Not surprisingly, students come to The University of Alabama for a wide variety of reasons. The enrollment search results showed a number of interesting characteristics among UA applicants. Not surprisingly, UA's primary competitor in recruiting is in-state rival Auburn University which attracts roughly one in eight of UA's admitted students that choose not to attend. More broadly, roughly one-third of non-enrolling UA admits choose a SUG institution, indicating a desire to be at a similar school. The results also showed a notable difference in the choice of schools between white and black admitted but not-enrolled applicants. White students were much more likely to select Auburn University, while black students had a greater affinity for UAB. A large percentage of black students also chose traditionally black institutions. The data also showed that there is a relationship between some institutions selected by non-enrolling UA admits and the student's college entrance examination score, i.e., their ACT composite score. Some institutions are preferred more so by students that scored lower on the ACT composite, and vice versa.

Students, however, that choose to come to UA are, for the most part, resolute to attend the school regardless of the underlying motivation to attend college. UA is the first choice of roughly 80% of entering students and the "only" choice for over one-quarter of these students. This suggests a history, a connection, or relationship that binds the student with the institution. It is common that families or communities form a bond with particular institutions that extends temporally through subsequent generations and laterally into a larger population. This is especially the case

in Alabama and other parts of the South where tradition and loyalty are especially strong. Roughly one in eight UA entering students in 2003 noted that relatives wanted the student to attend UA- a percentage that has increased by roughly 50% since 1999.

Looking at other tangible issues associated with attracting students to UA two factors stand above all others- *academic reputation* and *social activities reputation*. These factors were noted as very important in influencing a student's decision to attend UA by approximately half of entering students. UA has had the reputation of being a "party school" and is perennially ranked in *The Princeton Review's* list of party schools. This is viewed negatively by many in the administration at UA, but given its potential to lure students an active and vibrant social community can be an asset because it draws a certain constituency to the University. One also needs to keep in mind that academic performance is not necessarily negatively related to social life activity.

A visit to the UA campus, financial assistance and the desire to attend a school the size of UA were notable draws as well with about a third or more of entering students stating they were very important factors in their decision to attend UA. Additionally, a very important factor that has more than doubled (7.6% to 18.0%) in its response rate in the past five years is that of UA's rankings in national magazines. Thus, it seems increasing numbers of students are seeking prestige in conjunction with other factors in their college choice.

There are some notable differences among some factors based on demographic and academic characteristics. For example, African-American females noted location and field of study as

more important than any other group, while African-American males indicated family, academic reputation, and athletics more prominently than any other group. Social life was a factor for only White students and financial aid was more of an issue for White students as well. Academically, students scoring on the lower end of the ACT composite were more inclined to indicate academic reputation and family influences as a draw, while those that scored highly place an increasing emphasis on financial aid. Students scoring in the middle of the ACT composite distribution noted social life as a draw to UA.

Future Study

The challenge to UA is to understand why students that have applied and have been admitted to UA then choose to attend school elsewhere. The information above is the outcome, which is the easy part to ascertain. More difficult is discovering the variables (both independent and dependent) that led to the outcome. The University of Alabama's Office of Institutional Research and Assessment is collaborating with the Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE) on a study that should shed light on some of these unknown variables. In particular, UA wants to examine the effect or impact that the high school of record, i.e., the last institution attended and/or graduated from, has on college admission, and college attendance or non-attendance. With more information UA can possibly affect or address the independent variables that can be influenced and hopefully attract more students.

There is a gaping disconnect between students that choose to attend UA because of its academic reputation and those that attend for monetary reasons (scholarship, financial aid, cost).

Generally, students stating academic reputation as the primary reason for attending UA come from the lower range of ACT composite scores, while those noting the monetary categories tend to score on the high end of the ACT composite. As President Witt said in his inaugural fall 2003 faculty and staff speech, UA desires “to be **THE** university of choice for the best and brightest students in Alabama and **A** university of choice for all other exceptional students...” Further research needs to be done to understand why students that score highly on the entrance examination have a poorer view of UA and remedies implemented to attract additional numbers of these students. Additional study needs to be done on identifying why so many UA applicants wind up at competitor institutions, such as Auburn University, UAB, or the University of Georgia. Surveying the admitted but non-enrolled students to see exactly why they chose to go elsewhere for their studies is also being explored.

References

Cabrera, A.F., & La Nasa, S.M. (2000). Understanding the College-Choice Process. In Alberto F. Cabrera and Steven M. La Nasa (Eds.). *New Directions for Institutional Research: Understanding the College Choice of Disadvantaged Students*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Comfort, W.W. (1925). *The Choice of College*. New York: The MacMillan Company.

The University of Alabama *Dialog* Online. (September 15, 2003). Witt Presents Vision for the Future of the University. <http://dialog.ua.edu/dialog20030915/witt20030915.html>

Hanson, K., & Litten, L. (1982). Mapping the Road to Academia: A Review of Research on Women, Men, and the College Selection Process. In P. Perum, (Ed.) *The Undergraduate Woman: Issues in Education*. Lexington, MA: Lexington.

Hossler, D., & Gallagher, K. (1987). Studying College Choice: A Three-Phase Model and the Implication for Policy Makers. *College and University*, 2, 207-21.

Abstract

Alabama's primary competitor in recruiting is in-state rival Auburn University which lures away roughly one in eight of UA's admitted students. Two factors stand above all others in attracting students to UA- *academic reputation* and *social activities reputation*. Factors following distantly are a *visit to the UA campus*, *financial assistance* and the desire to *attend a school the size of UA*. Disparities in these factors, however, exist based on race, sex, and entrance examination scores. This research is intended to aid administrators, researchers, and policy-makers at UA effect more efficient enrollment management processes through better enrollment planning, student marketing, and recruitment.