



# Using student-college fit for admissions: Do applicants really know what is good for them?

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# Outline

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- Research Questions
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- Results
- Discussion

# College Search Engine

## COLLEGE Navigator

### Name of School

Type name of school here

### States (use map for more than 1 state)

No Preference

Alabama

Alaska



ZIP Code

Miles from

Programs/Majors 0 Items

Select

### Level of Award ?

Certificate

Associate's

Bachelor's

Advanced

### Institution Type ?

Public

4-year

Private

2-year or less

### MORE SEARCH OPTIONS

#### Tuition & Fees ?

Maximum

State you live in

#### Undergraduate Student Enrollment

Minimum

to

Maximum

Housing?  Yes ?

#### Campus Setting ?

Rural

Suburban

Town

City

#### % of Applicants Admitted

Minimum

to

Maximum

#### Test Scores – 25th Percentile ?

SAT Critical Reading:

Min

Max

SAT Math:

Min

Max

ACT Composite:

Min

Max

#### Varsity Athletic Teams

Men

Women

No Preference

#### Extended Learning Opportunities

**NEW!**  
Estimated student expenses, Admissions,  
& Program/Majors have been updated



**BEGIN** your  
**SEARCH**

your source for college information



### FIND THE RIGHT COLLEGE for you...

- » **Begin your Search** from the search menu or choose [Guide Me](#).
- » **Refine your search** by selecting *More Search Options* to use additional search criteria.
- » **Build a list of schools** using *My Favorites* for side-by-side comparisons.
- » **Pinpoint school locations** with an *interactive map*.
- » **Export search results** into a *spreadsheet*.
- » **Save your session** including search options, results, and favorites.

### » | ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

#### Preparing for your Education

Find out what you need to do to prepare for education beyond high school. [» GO](#)

#### Financial Aid

Apply for Federal Student Aid on FAFSA. [» GO](#)

#### Careers

Deciding on a career? Consult the Occupational Outlook Handbook from bls.gov. [» GO](#)

# Background

“To me, ‘fit’ is the most important part of the college process. Beginning with a list of attributes that a student is looking for in a school is a terrific way to begin to narrow the search...”

- Karen Guastelle, Sacred Heart University

“Fit is one of those things that is really tough for us to judge. We do not offer interviews at Marist College so we never really “know” the applicants. When reviewing the application we can get a general idea about how good a match the student will be based upon where the student is from, what they want to study and the other schools they are applying. *A student’s essay is a good place for them to tell us why they think they would be a fit* [italics added]. We judge the seriousness of a student by looking at how closely the student has researched the college. A student who writes about how they want to go to college and become anonymous in large lecture would not be a good fit for a medium/small school like Marist College.”

- Jay Murray, Marist College

# Background

- When admitting students, colleges and universities employ many different criteria to select the most qualified applicants (Camara, 2005).
  - Among these, the most widely used measures are high school grade point average (HSGPA) and standardized test scores (Hawkins & Clindinst, 2006).
  - Accumulated evidence has overwhelmingly substantiated their use (e.g., Camara & Echternacht, 2000; Morgan, 1989).
- On the other hand, other admissions criteria have not received the same rigorous psychometric scrutiny despite the fact that they are often influential in the decision making process.
  - Meta-analysis by Kuncel, Cooper, Klieger, Borneman, Vannelli, and Ones (2007) showed that the true validity coefficients for personal statement and letters of recommendation range from .10 to .25 in predicting a variety of graduate school outcomes.

# Research Question

- Why the lack of validity evidence for these alternative measures?
  - Subjective nature of ratings given by admissions committee members based on qualitative responses?
  - Do these non-cognitive characteristics lead to a more successful college experience in the first place?
- Purpose of this research:
  - Systematically and objectively capture student-college fit
  - Evaluate the predictive validity of student-college fit in terms of college graduation

# Data

- **National Student Clearinghouse (NSC)**, which captures information on student enrollment and degree completion, were matched to the SAT cohort of 1,288,842 students graduating high school in 1999.
  - Based on listwise deletion on key study variable, the final available sample size used in our analyses was 125,034.
  - Cases were also dropped if students did not show a strong preference for the college characteristics analyzed in this study (discussed in more detail later).

# Student-College Fit - Calculating fit indices

- Student's preferences for college - Prior to the test administration, students who registered for the SAT volunteered to respond to the SAT questionnaire (SAT-Q), which includes a series of survey questions about their interests, activities, and plans. The SAT-Q includes six specific questions asking about their preferences for college in terms of
  - 1) campus size
  - 2) location
  - 3) distance from home
  - 4) four-year vs. two-year
  - 5) co-educational vs. same-sex
  - 6) public vs. private sector



# SAT-Questionnaire Items

1. What type(s) of institutions are you interested in attending? (You may mark more than one.)
  - A four-year college or university
  - A two-year community or junior college
  - A vocational/technical school
  - Undecided
2. Which of the following are you considering? (You may mark more than one.)
  - A public university, state college, or community college
  - A private university, college, or junior college (not religiously affiliated)
  - A private religiously affiliated university, college, or junior college
  - Undecided
3. What size of college(s) are you thinking of attending? (You may mark more than one.)
  - Less than 1,000 students
  - About 1,000 to 5,000 students
  - About 5,000 to 10,000 students
  - About 10,000 to 20,000 students
  - More than 20,000 students
  - Undecided

# SAT-Questionnaire Items

4. What college setting(s) do you prefer? (You may mark more than one.)
  - Large city or metropolitan area
  - Medium-size city
  - Small city or town
  - Suburban community
  - Rural
  - Undecided
5. Where would you like to go to college? (You may mark more than one.)
  - Close to home
  - In my home state
  - In a state bordering mine
  - Outside the United States
  - Undecided
6. What type(s) of colleges are you considering? (You may mark more than one.)
  - All women or all men
  - Coeducational
  - Undecided

# Student-College Fit - Calculating fit indices

- Fit variables were created by determining whether students' responses on the SAT-Q matched the characteristics of their attending postsecondary institution.
  - For example, if a student indicated she wanted to go to a private religious school on the SAT-Q and then attended a private religious school, she would be assigned a “1” for “sector fit”. Students who had a mismatch between their SAT-Q responses and their college characteristics were assigned a “0” for misfit.
- Only students with a “strong” preference were used for the fit analyses.
  - For each of the six items, students had the option to mark more than one response option per item. Therefore, we defined students with a strong preference as those students who only selected one response option per question

# Outcome Variable

- Graduation
  - Graduation data was provided by university records. If a student graduated from the first institution he/she attended, they received a value of “1”, otherwise they received a value of “0”.
    - There were 8 years of longitudinal data available

# Results – Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for 4 yr institutions

## Relationship between S-C Fit dimensions and

Fit Dimension	Mean	SD	Graduation
Campus Fit	0.41	0.49	-0.05*
Distance Fit	0.68	0.47	0.01*
Gender Fit	0.98	0.14	0.02*
Sector Fit	0.76	0.43	0.00
Size Fit	0.40	0.49	0.06*
Year Fit	0.98	0.14	0.05*

Note. \*  $p < .01$ . Listwise N = 87,507

# Results – Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for 2 yr institutions

## Relationship between S-C Fit Dimensions and Graduation

Fit Dimension	Mean	SD	Graduation
Campus Fit	0.39	0.49	-0.04*
Distance Fit	0.72	0.45	0.03*
Gender Fit	0.98	0.14	0.01
Sector Fit	0.85	0.36	0.00
Size Fit	0.29	0.45	0.01
Year Fit	0.15	0.35	0.02*

Note. \*  $p < .01$ . Listwise  $N = 37,527$

# Discussion

- Student-college fit as operationalized in the current study was not a viable predictor of college success.
  - Other variables?
- “When is the right time to assess fit?” Furthermore, “How closely does one’s *anticipated* fit actually line up with actual fit once immersed in that situation?”
  - The notion of whether or not one “fits” would seem to require students to become immersed in the culture and everyday activities of that college before they would know if they “fit” in

# Conclusions

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- The best solution prior to enrollment may be for students to do more in-depth research on the colleges they are interested in attending by scheduling campus visits, meeting with faculty and current students, and maybe, sitting in on a classroom discussion
- Colleges and universities may be better served by investing time and money on outreach programs that provide positive and rewarding experiences to successfully retain enrolled students rather than attempting to measure fit to select students.



# Questions, Comments, Suggestions

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