Student Choice of College:

How Far Do Students Go For An Education?

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Abstract

The topic of distance from home is often discussed when students begin narrowing down colleges they want to apply to; however, there is a scarcity of research actually examining student behavior. The purpose of this study is to address this research gap using data based on a national sample of nearly one million students. Distance was computed in miles based on the zip code of the student's home and the zip code of his/her college. The median distance students go away for college is 94 miles (25th percentile = 23 miles and 75th percentile = 230 miles). We also examined average distance from home by state, SAT score, high school GPA, parental income, parental education, ethnicity, and gender. Results reveal that the average distance students go for college does vary as a function of these variables. Implications are discussed.

Students often consider the location, specifically the distance from home, of a college/university when narrowing down the ones they want to apply to. Despite this fact, there is a limited amount of research investigating actual student behavior. High schools may examine their own graduating class and college and universities may report the percentage of in-state and out-state students, but very little is known at the national level. The current study addresses this research gap by using a national sample of nearly one million students to examine the median distance students travel for college at the national level as well as the state level. Furthermore, data were examined by student characteristics such as academic achievement (i.e., high school grade point average [HSGPA], SAT scores) parental income, parental education, race/ethnicity, and gender.

Review of Past Findings

There is limited published research on the topic of the distance students travel to college. For example, the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) published a study (Pryor et al. 2005) that indicated that first-generation students, students whose parents have no college experience, are more likely to stay closer to home. Whereas 50 percent of first-generation students attended schools within 50 miles of their home, only 36 percent of their non first-generation peers stayed that close. The data are based on a national survey of college freshman for the class of 2005.

Another study conducted by the Post-Gazette (Chute 2006) with data on more than 13,800 students who graduated from high school in 1995 in Allegheny, PA (or surrounding counties) found that 69 percent of students travel less than 100 miles away for college. Although interesting, these results may not generalize to other cities in Pennsylvania, other states, or the nation. The study reported that the 1995 HERI annual American college freshman survey (Sax et al. 1996) found that 56 percent of students attend a college within 100 miles of their home, indicating that Allegheny students tend to stay closer to home than students in other parts of the nation.

Another report by HERI (Pryor et al. 2007) provided trend data over the last 40 years on many academic outcomes, including the distance students travel for college. They found that in 1969, 35.9 percent of students stayed within 50 miles of their permanent home. In 2006, this percentage remained roughly the same, with 35.3 percent of students staying within 50 miles of home. The report also provided results of distance traveled by gender. In 1969, 34.4 percent of males stayed within 50 miles as compared to 37.9 percent of females. In 2006, the percentage of males staying that close remained roughly the same, 34.6 percent, whereas the number dropped slightly for females, to 35.6 percent. Besides the HERI report disaggregating results by gender, very little is known about the impact of student characteristics on distance traveled to attend college.

One study (Postsecondary Education Opportunity 1996) provides insight into this question by examining distance traveled based on student demographic variables. Specifically, utilizing data from the previously mentioned 1995 HERI annual American college freshman survey (Sax et al., 1996), the article examined the median distance students traveled by parental income, father's education, and race/ethnicity. The results showed that parental income was positively related to median distance traveled with students whose parental income was less than $6,000 traveling 43 miles compared to students whose parental income was $200,000 or more traveling 258 miles[1]. A similar pattern emerged for father's education, with more education associated with farther distance traveled. For example, students whose fathers had an education level of grammar school or less traveled 37 miles whereas the number rose to 185 miles for students whose fathers had a graduate degree. As for race/ethnicity, the study found that black students traveled the farthest (median = 94 miles) while Chicano students traveled the shortest distance (median = 29 miles). The median distance traveled was 71 miles for white students. Results should be interpreted with caution given that interpolation was used to transform the interval response data (i.e., 10 or less, 11 to 50, 51 to 100, 101 to 500, and more than 500 miles) into integer numbers.

The results showed that parental income was positively related to median distance traveled with students whose parental income was less than $6,000 traveling 43 miles compared to students whose parental income was $200,000 or more traveling 258 miles.

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The current study expands upon the previous research in four ways. First, distance from home is an objective indicator, not self-report, based on actual distance between a student's home zip code and his or her college/university zip code. The HERI data is comprised of student self-report data. Second, the previous research relied on interval response options whereas our measure is continuous. Third, these analyses were conducted on a national sample of nearly one million students. The HERI survey was also a national sample, but the number of students was notably smaller and may not be as nationally representative as the sample used in this study. Finally, this research will expand on the previous research by examining other potential moderating variables such as students' academic achievement and home state as well as demographic variables in order to more fully understand the complex phenomenon of school choice and location.

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Participants and Procedure

Sample

Data from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), which tracks student enrollment and degree attainment for more than 3,100 two-year and four-year colleges and universities in the United States (a list of participating institutions is located at www.studentclearinghouse.org), which translates to 91 percent of the US college going population[2], were matched to the College Board's 1999 College Bound Seniors cohort of 1,417,847 students, which includes all students graduating high school in 1999 who had taken either the SAT, PSAT/NMSQT, or Advanced Placement (AP) exam.

Data from the three College Board programs were merged together in order to arrive at the sample of 1,417,847 students. The College Bound Seniors database includes students' SAT scores along with their responses to the SAT Questionnaire (SAT-Q), as well as data for a student's performance on the PSAT/NMSQT examination, and any AP Exams the students may have taken. An optional survey that students complete during registration for the SAT, the SAT-Q collects data on demographic information along with past education experiences and preferences. For students who took the SAT, the student's home zip code was derived from his/her SAT registration form. Students who took either the PSAT/NMSQT or AP without taking the SAT exam also provided their home zip code, and their respective zip codes were used in this study.

The zip code for each college and university was provided by The College Board's Annual Survey of Colleges[3]. Analyses for the total group as well as by state were based on a sample size of 916,466 students, who were enrolled at four-year institutions in the United States and had taken at least one of the three examinations described. However, for the analyses by student characteristics, the sample was restricted to students who had taken the SAT since student level data on the remaining students was not available, which resulted in a sample size of 697,610.

Measures

Distance from Home

The distance between a student's home address and college address was calculated based on an algorithm that measured the number of miles between the center points of the two zip code areas using Statistical Analysis System (SAS) software (Hadden and Zdeb 2006).

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[1] In a telephone conversation with the author on August 12, 2008, Tom Mortenson stated that he used a mathematical transformation on the interval response category data in order to present the results as integer numbers.

[2] Roughly 9 percent of US college students attend a college or university that does not provide student enrollment data to NSC; therefore, students included in 1999 College Bound Seniors cohort but attending one of these institutions are excluded from the analyses, which may potentially bias the results.

[3] The Annual Survey of Colleges is a yearly survey of colleges, universities, vocational/technical, and graduate schools with the objective to obtain information that is important for potential students.

SAT Scores

Scores on the SAT were obtained from official College Board records. The SAT was comprised of two sections[4], Math and Verbal, with possible scores ranging from 200 to 800. A single index for SAT was created by combining the most recent scores for each section resulting in score scale range of 400 to 1600. An additional variable, SAT score band, was created by partitioning these scores into 100-point bands.

High school GPA

Self-reported HSGPA was obtained from the SAT-Q and is reported on a scale from F (below 65) to A+ (97-100). Due to small sample sizes for grades below a C, all values between F and C- were collapsed into a single category titled "Below C".

Parental income

Household income is also obtained from the SAT-Q and was collapsed into five categories; less than $30,000, between $30,000 and $50,000, between $50,000 and $70,000, between $70,000 and $100,000, and more than $100,000.

Parental education

Parental education was created from responses to the SAT-Q items asking students about their mothers' and fathers' highest level of educational attainment. Parental education level was assigned according to the highest degree earned by either parent. The six categories include less than high school diploma, high school diploma, associate's degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, and graduate degree.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is self-reported from the SAT-Q[5]. The response options include American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander, black or African American, Mexican or Mexican American, Puerto Rican, other Hispanic, Latino, or Latin American, white, and other. The three categories of Mexican or Mexican American, Puerto Rican, and other Hispanic, Latino, or Latin American were collapsed into a single broader category labeled "Hispanic."

Analyses and Results

Overall Sample

Based on a sample size of 916,466 students, the median distance traveled to college was 94 miles (25th percentile = 23 miles and 75th percentile = 230 miles). Furthermore, 72.1 percent of students attended a school in their home state, 11.9 percent went to a school in a bordering state, and 16.0 percent went to a school in a non-bordering state. As is evident by the intraquartile range, there was much variability across students, and the distribution is positively skewed with some students going thousands of miles away for college with a mean distance of 268 miles (standard deviation (SD) = 467). Table 1 provides the frequency distribution of miles traveled for college for the total group. For example, similar to the HERI national survey (1995), which found that 56 percent of students attend a college within 100 miles of their home; the percentage was 51.4 percent for the current sample.

Table 2 provides the average distance students travel from home to college by state. First, students from Utah stayed the closest with a median distance from home of only 21 miles. Furthermore, the median distance from home was 100 miles or less for 31 states. On the other hand, students from Hawaii traveled the farthest (median = 2,520 miles), perhaps unsurprisingly, given its isolation from the rest of the United States. In the second to last column, the percentage of students who stay within their home state for college is provided. The College Board (CB) participation rate[6] by state for 1999 is also presented in Table 2 to provide information on the percentage of high school students who took either the PSAT/NMSTQT, SAT or AP for each state. It should be pointed out that CB participation rates vary greatly as a function of the state. Even though roughly 24 percent ($n = 218,856$) of the sample is comprised of non-SAT takers, the state results should be interpreted with caution as states with low CB participation rates may have students who are not typical of their student population. This percentage will provide an indication of how many high school students were excluded from the analyses. However, it should be pointed out that not all students who take one of those examinations end up enrolling in college and therefore would have been excluded from the analyses either way.

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[4] In 2005, the College Board revised the SAT reasoning test. Changes included renaming the Verbal section to Critical Reading and adding a Writing section, which resulted in a new composite score scale of 600 – 2400. However, the data used for the current analyses were collected prior to this change; therefore, we refer to the Verbal section and report scores on the old composite score scale of 400 – 1600 accordingly.

[5] Ethnicity and home zip code were obtained from alternative College Board records (e.g., AP, PSAT records) for students who did not take the SAT or did not complete the SAT Questionnaire.

[6] For all states, this percentage was computed using the number of 1999 high school graduates reported by the 2008 edition of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) as the denominator and the number of students in the class of 1999 who took the PSAT/NMSTQT, SAT, or AP. The participation rate for the District of Columbia is the estimated 2000 participation rate, determined by an internal estimate of the number of 2000 high school graduates and the number of students in the class of 2000 who took the SAT Reasoning Test.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of the Number of Miles Students Travel for College

Miles	N	%	Cumulative %
0 – 25	238,728	26.0	26.0
26 – 50	90,808	9.9	36.0
51 – 75	75,966	8.3	44.2
76 – 100	65,863	7.2	51.4
101 – 125	55,696	6.1	57.5
126 – 150	49,692	5.4	62.9
151 – 175	43,708	4.8	67.7
176 – 200	27,665	3.0	70.7
201 – 225	24,969	2.7	73.4
226 – 250	20,814	2.3	75.7
251 – 275	15,903	1.7	77.5
276 – 300	12,180	1.3	78.8
301 – 325	12,994	1.4	80.2
326 – 350	9,607	1.0	81.2
351 – 375	7,499	0.8	82.1
376 – 400	6,654	0.7	82.8
401 – 425	5,667	0.6	83.4
426 – 450	5,821	0.6	84.0
451 – 475	5,012	0.5	84.6
476 – 500	3,785	0.4	85.0
501 – 600	17,542	1.9	86.9
601 – 700	19,197	2.1	89.0
701 – 800	9,828	1.1	90.1
801 – 900	8,369	0.9	91.0
901 - 1000	11,135	1.2	92.2
1001 - 1500	37,941	4.1	96.4
1501 - 2000	15,201	1.7	98.0
2001 - 3000	16,808	1.8	99.8
3,000 miles or farther	1,414	0.2	100.0
Total	**916,466**	**100.0**	

Alternatively, Table 3 presents the median distance students traveled to attend college in a particular state. The table reveals that students attending colleges in Hawaii or Alaska came from nearby communities, suggesting that a large percentage of college students come from within that state. This is confirmed by the last column, which provides the percentage of in-state students. Texas and California also have a high percentage of in-state students attending their colleges, 92 percent and 89 percent respectively, which is expected given their admission policy. In Texas, the top 10 percent of in-state students in terms of high school rank are guaranteed admittance. For California, it is the top 4 percent.

Subanalyses

Next, we examined whether the average distance students go away for college varies as a function of academic performance and demographic variables. Because student level data were only available for students who had taken the SAT (76 percent), the subanalyses are based on this restricted sample of 697,610. The median distance traveled for this subset of students was 96 miles (25th percentile = 24 miles and 75th percentile = 233 miles), which is slightly higher than the total group distance of 94 miles. Results for each variable are presented below.

Academic performance

Two indicators of academic performance, SAT scores and HSGPA, were analyzed. It was expected that students who performed well on these indicators were more likely to go farther away because they would be more likely to have more options when deciding which school to attend. The results are presented below.

SAT scores

Examining the average distance students go away for college by SAT scores, the positive trend between the two variables is readily apparent. As one's SAT score increases so does the average (median) distance they travel to college. The correlation between students' SAT score and distance from home was 0.15 ($p < .001$). Figure 1 provides the median distance students go away to college by 100 point score bands. For example, the median distance for low performing students ($n = 699$), who scored between 400 and 490, is 42 miles. However, for the highest performers, who scored between 1500 and 1600 ($n = 9,294$), the median distance jumps to 234 miles. That is roughly 5.6 times further.

High school GPA

A similar pattern as the SAT results emerges for HSGPA. That is, those with higher HSGPAs went farther away for college; however, the differences are smaller than those for the SAT score bands. For example, students who have a HSGPA lower than C went 64 miles away for college. However, students with an A+ HSGPA went 118 miles. See Figure 2 for more details. The correlation between HSGPA and distance from home is 0.06 ($p < .001$).

Demographics

Four demographic variables of parental income, parental education, race/ethnicity, and gender were assessed. We expected that students with a higher socioeconomic status

Table 2. Average (median) distance from home by state (listed in ascending order)

State	N	Median	25%	75%	% In-State	Participation Rate
UT	6,527	21	8	89	84	5.3
RI	4,199	30	13	133	50	73.5
DE	3,968	38	8	118	55	69.8
LA	12,001	49	10	121	83	8.7
WV	5,302	53	17	126	76	19.4
KY	11,721	53	10	100	81	13.3
OK	6,703	61	22	133	76	8.9
GA	31,194	63	18	166	78	77.7
CO	14,999	64	21	378	72	34.8
AK	5,916	65	23	136	82	6.3
PA	64,898	66	22	135	79	72.3
OH	37,407	67	19	151	77	27.4
CT	18,283	68	24	178	44	85.3
MA	29,821	71	27	131	56	80.9
CA	83,486	71	17	345	83	48.5
SC	15,008	71	20	130	82	70.0
MD	21,479	71	18	217	50	68.0
TN	13,980	79	14	195	72	16.6
WI	18,710	79	29	160	76	7.3
NH	7,625	80	44	134	48	78.6
AL	10,639	80	18	157	80	10.8
NC	27,780	82	34	142	87	65.8
KS	9,490	84	28	148	78	9.6
IN	13,787	85	25	183	60	63.1
ME	7,212	94	35	198	55	75.4
IA	7,555	95	45	158	72	5.5

State	N	Median	25%	75%	% In-State	Participation Rate
AZ	11,976	95	11	204	79	36.6
VT	3,365	96	33	208	43	64.0
VA	29,743	96	34	199	73	69.5
TX	61,225	98	16	255	80	52.5
ND	2,182	100	17	232	57	5.8
OR	10,798	103	37	364	66	57.3
IL	35,541	111	28	187	66	13.6
SD	3,127	115	49	245	67	5.4
FL	40,064	119	15	304	79	57.6
NY	83,006	139	32	203	73	81.8
WA	16,419	141	36	503	68	50.8
ID	3,969	143	26	310	65	17.9
NJ	34,034	162	73	249	35	84.6
DC	1,786	192	80	361	13	81.0
WY	1,500	215	104	425	41	11.7
AK	3,243	505	12	1,957	54	54.6
MI	26,718	569	69	632	81	12.0
NV	3,405	698	119	2,295	53	33.8
MO	14,042	975	218	1,141	73	9.0
MN	17,047	978	129	1,078	66	9.8
MS	4,135	1,071	114	1,089	76	4.8
NE	6,910	1,229	949	1,250	75	9.1
NM	4,584	1,263	142	1,893	67	13.6
MT	4,046	1,781	326	1,968	69	23.8
HI	3,911	2,520	13	2,863	39	60.6

Figure 1. Median Number of Miles Between a Student's Home and his/her 4-Year College or University by SAT Score Band

Note. The sample sizes per SAT Score Band (starting from lowest score band to highest) are B1= 699, B2= 3,783, B3=12,843, B4=34,907, B5=74,343, B6= 114,743, B7= 140,339, B8 = 127,893, B9= 94,965, B10= 56,416, B11= 27,385, and B12= 9,294.
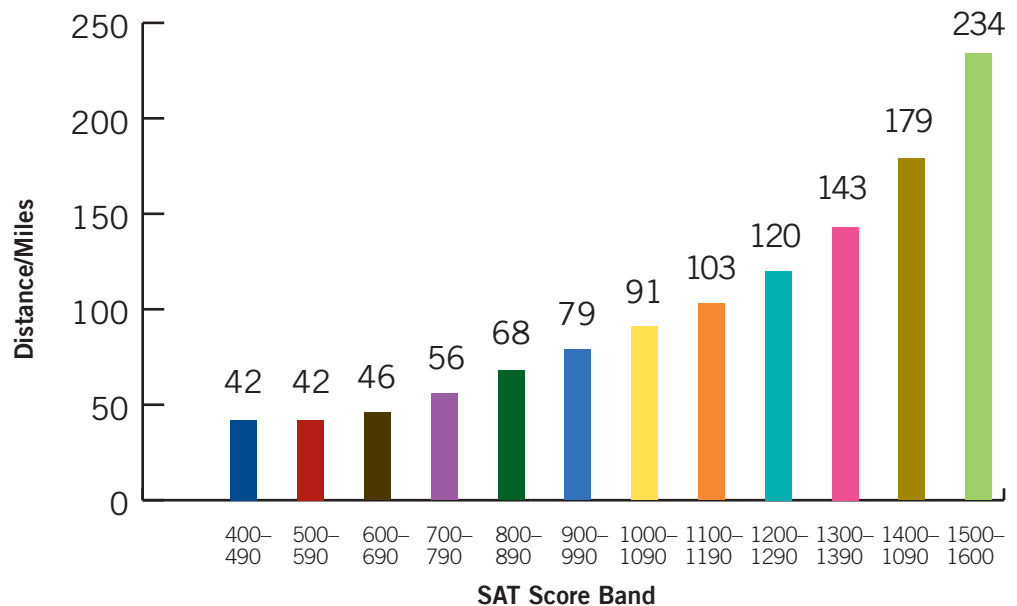
Table 3. Average (median) distance a student traveled to go to college in a specific state (listed in ascending order)

State	N	Median	25%	75%	% In-State	State	N	Median	25%	75%	% In-State
HI	1,898	13	5	164	81	NC	34,260	104	47	223	70
AK	2,179	37	6	507	80	SD	3,082	105	46	321	68
CT	13,046	42	17	85	62	IL	31,098	106	24	173	76
MD	16,783	43	16	154	64	FL	38,395	110	14	277	83
KY	12,608	51	11	98	76	WA	14,589	111	29	254	76
DE	5,071	52	12	133	43	VA	32,062	114	44	223	68
CA	78,015	58	15	289	89	IA	8,821	116	56	208	62
GA	29,746	59	18	169	82	AZ	15,317	118	14	766	62
LA	13,614	62	12	214	74	TN	16,949	122	19	329	60
WV	6,843	63	23	155	59	VT	4,667	129	53	207	31
OH	36,509	66	18	148	79	NY	81,220	140	27	189	76
OK	7,352	66	27	195	69	NJ	14,173	151	25	167	84
CO	16,059	69	24	775	68	ND	2,186	163	40	1218	57
MA	32,697	73	32	172	52	WY	969	196	86	282	64
TX	53,197	74	14	177	92	UT	11,249	217	15	666	49
PA	72,814	78	25	150	71	ID	5,420	224	52	621	47
NH	8,520	80	43	106	44	DC	6,318	278	123	458	4
RI	8,981	80	30	171	24	MS	5,302	298	115	1089	60
WI	19,921	81	32	165	71	MN	16,521	476	100	1043	68
AR	6,849	86	26	191	71	NE	2,562	523	11	2437	71
IN	13,221	87	29	194	63	MI	26,792	540	68	623	81
ME	6,245	89	31	181	64	NM	4,161	666	52	1893	74
KS	9,430	89	30	166	79	MO	16,170	968	164	1066	63
SC	17,721	91	27	204	70	NE	6,849	1210	344	1250	75
AL	13,474	97	34	208	64	MT	4,139	1777	272	1901	68
OR	10,402	99	35	294	69						

Figure 2. Median Number of Miles Between a Student's Home and his/her 4-Year College or University by HSGPA
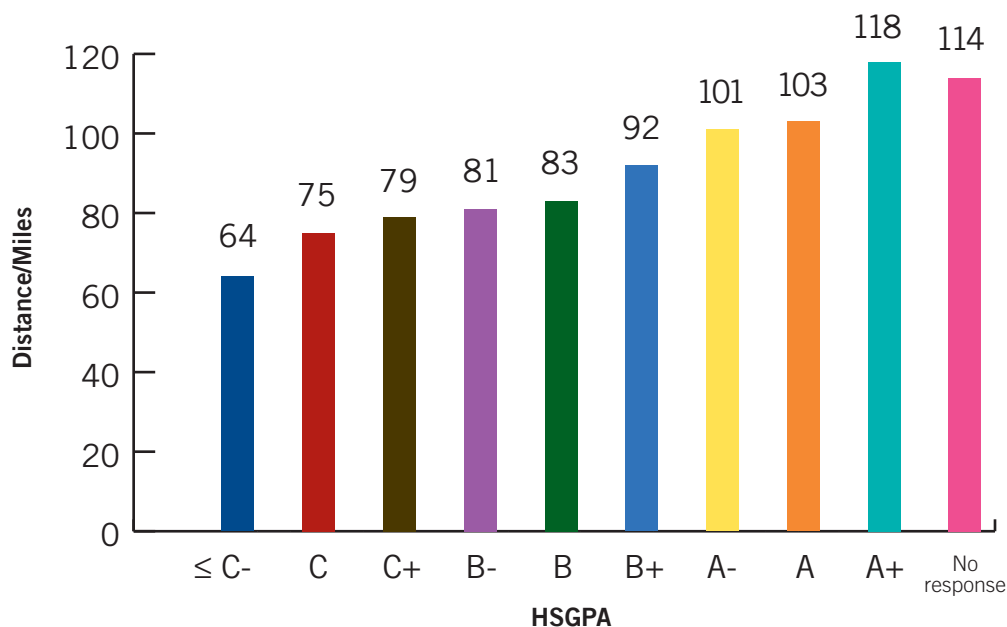
Note. The sample sizes per HSGPA grade are ≤ C-= 4,013, C= 14,871, C+= 28,878, B-= 53,431, B= 115,010, B+= 115,672, A-=122,049, A= 123,796, A+= 58,028, No response= 61,862.

For students who reported that their parent's highest education level was less than a high school diploma, the median distance from home was 28 miles. On the other hand, students who reported their parent's highest education level to be a graduate or professional degree tended to go 130 miles.

would tend to go farther away to college because they would have more resources with which to do so. Therefore, we expected a positive correlation between both parental income and education with distance from home. No specific hypotheses were made in regards to gender and ethnicity.
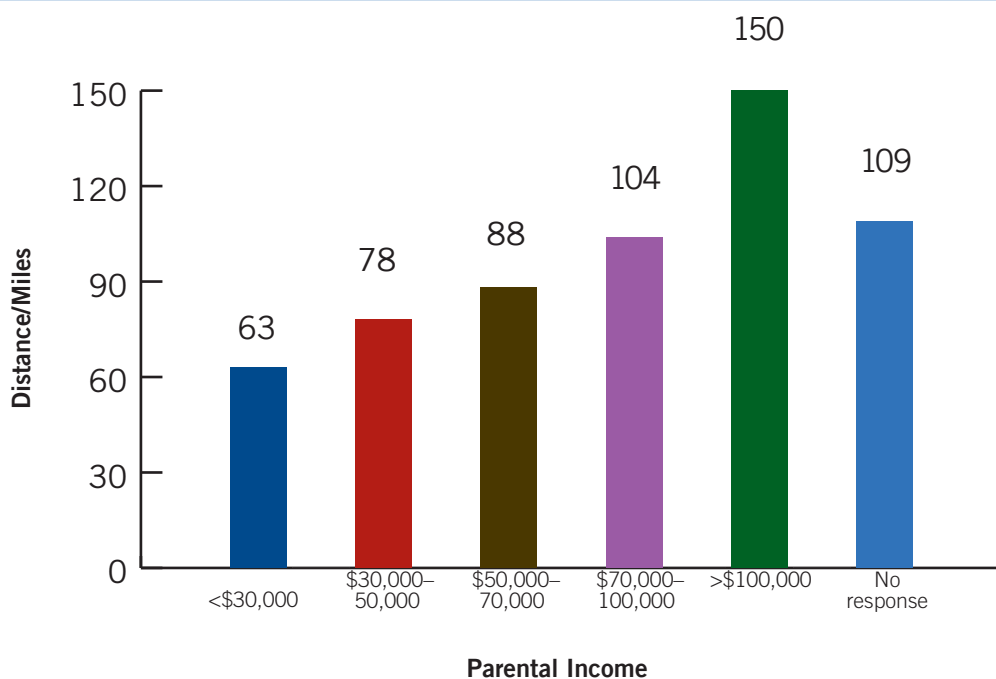
Parental Income
Figure 3 provides the average distance per income band. Again, a positive trend is apparent ($r = 0.10$, $p < .001$). For example, students who reported a family income of less than $30,000 ($n = 108,918$) went a median distance of 63 miles.

For students who reported a family income of more than $100,000 ($n = 98,911$), the median distances increased to 150 miles. These results emulate what was found for our academic indicators. As expected, students from families with more income tended to go farther away for college. Several explanations could be offered to account for these results. For one, higher-income families have more money to pay out-of-state tuition and are therefore more likely to have children that go farther away for college. Furthermore, given the fact that parental income is positively related to SAT scores, these students may also be more academically able and therefore are afforded the opportunity to go to more prestigious schools that may not be near their homes.

Parental Education
Similar to parental income, students whose parents have more education tended to go farther away for college. The correlation between parental education and distance was 0.12 ($p < .001$). For students who reported that their parent's highest education level was less than a high school diploma ($n=19,847$) the median distance from home was 28 miles. On the other hand, students who reported their parent's highest education level to be a graduate or professional degree ($n=183,427$) tended to go 130 miles. Median distance by parental education categories is provided in Figure 4. The pattern of results for both parental income and education is similar to that reported in the *Postsecondary Education Opportunity* article (1996).

Figure 3. Median Number of Miles Between a Student's Home and his/her 4-Year College or University by Parental Income
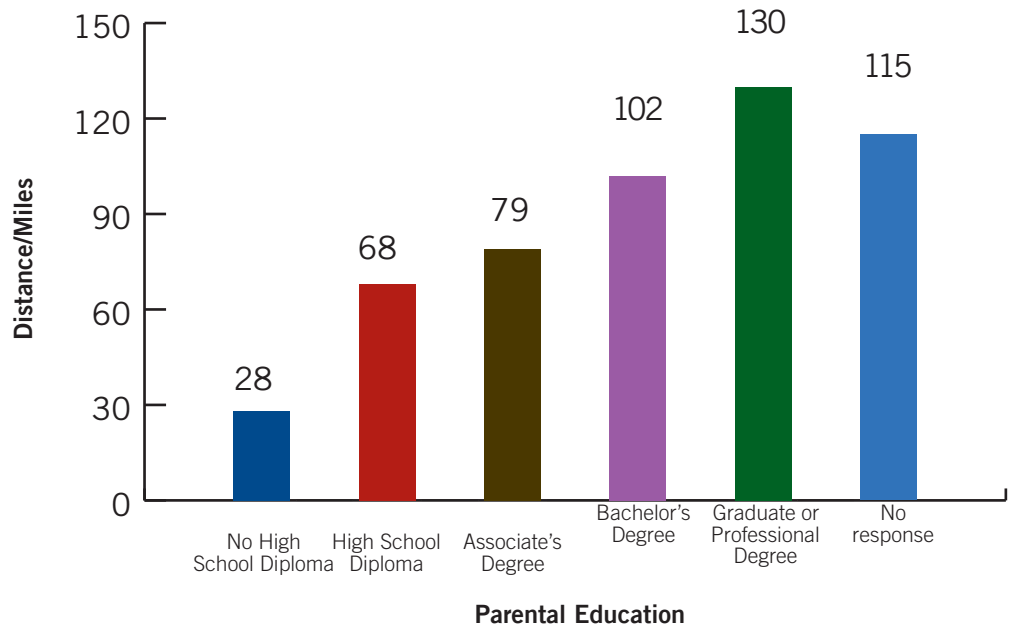
Note. The sample sizes per parental income band (starting from lowest score band to highest) are B1= 108,918, B2= 124,440, B3=115,537, B4=113,116, B5= 98,911, No response = 136,688.

The median distance from home by ethnicity is provided in Figure 5. In general, American-Indian students tended to go the farthest away from home (103 miles). However, these numbers are based on a relatively small sample size with an *n* of 4,331. Next are white students (*n* = 461,186) who travel, on average, 102 miles away for college. Contrary to the results reported from the HERI data (1995), which found that African-American students go the farthest for college than all ethnic groups, we found that African-American students (median = 98 miles) traveled roughly the same number of miles for college as white and American-Indian students. Hispanic (*n* = 45,943) and Asian (*n* = 52,872) students stayed the closest to home with median distances of 39 miles and 60 miles, respectively. These results are displayed in Figure 5.

Figure 4. Median Number of Miles Between a Student's Home and his/her 4-Year College or University by Parental Education

Note. The sample sizes per parental education band (starting from lowest score band to highest) are B1= 19,478, B2= 178,034, B3= 48,203, B4= 194,358, B5= 183,427, No response = 74,110

Figure 5. Median Number of Miles Between a Student's Home and his/her 4-Year College or University by Race/Ethnicity
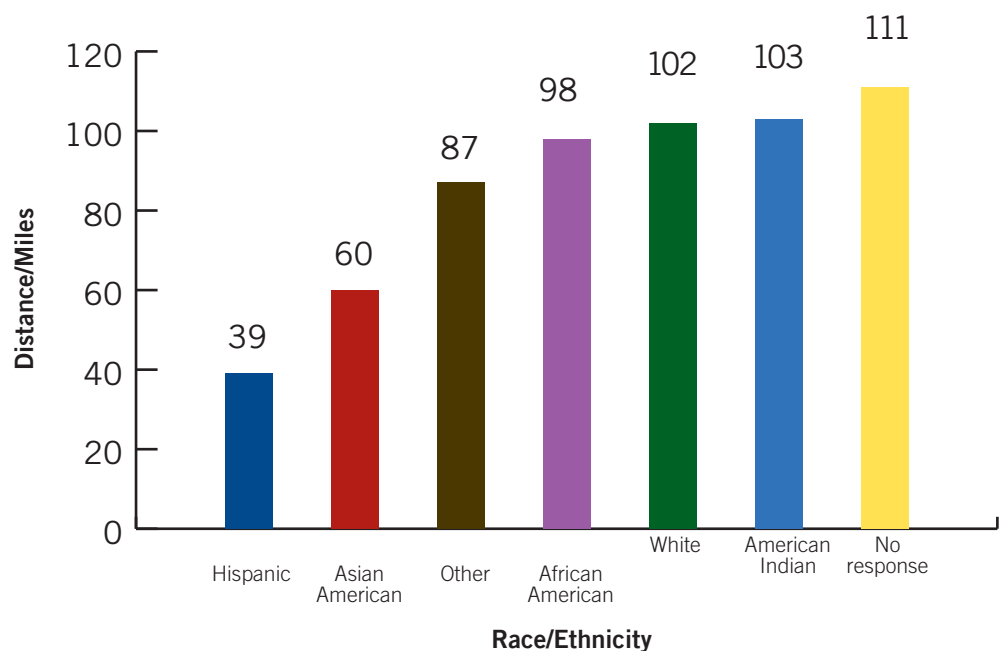
Note. Sample sizes per ethnicity are Hispanic= 45,943, Asian American= 52,872, Other= 20,090, African American= 64,400, White= 461,186, American Indian= 4,331, No Response= 48,788.

Gender

Finally, the difference in distance traveled by gender was examined. Of the 386,161 (55 percent) females, the median distance traveled for college was 93 miles while the median distance for males (n = 311,449, 45 percent) was 101. That is, females tend to stay somewhat closer to home than males for college.

> …the trends in attendance patterns suggest possible future studies that might be of interest to educational strategists or state education officials. Nationally, approximately 72 percent of students attend college in their home state and 86 percent attend college in their home region.

Discussion

The median distance a student travels for college is relatively close to home (94 miles). However, as was mentioned, this distribution is highly skewed with some students going thousands of miles away. When analyzing median distance by student characteristics, we find that students of higher achievement levels, as indexed by SAT scores and HSGPA, and students, who come from families with higher levels of SES in terms of parental income and education, go farther away for college. Given that these students are more academically prepared, and thus have more options available, the results are not surprising.

There were two main limitations of the current study. First, student level data was only available on students who took the SAT; therefore, generalizability of the results to all high school students planning to attend college is questionable. Additional research should be conducted on ACT test takers and the comparability of the results from the two samples examined. However, it should be pointed out that analyses for the total group (N = 916,466) as well as the state analyses were comprised of 76 percent SAT test takers. The remaining 24 percent of the sample either took the ACT or no standardized admission test. Therefore,

those analyses are more likely to generalize to the national population of students enrolling in four-year colleges or universities.

Secondly, the data used for the current analyses were based on students who graduated from high school in 1999. Therefore, the current analyses should be replicated with a more recent dataset. Despite this limitation, examining the median distance traveled by student level variables provides useful information that was previously unknown; therefore, these findings offer valuable insight to the study of college location, especially given that the data used in the current study were based on a national sample.

Future Research

This paper investigated the median distance students traveled for college in terms of the first institution they attended. Future research should investigate college outcomes, such as the likelihood of persistence, transfer and graduation as a function of distance from home. In other words, is distance from home related to the probability of persisting, transferring and graduating? Furthermore, of students who do transfer, do they enroll at an institution closer to home, farther away or of the same distance? Such analysis would be a logical extension of this research and should provide insight on the relationship between distance from home and college outcomes.

In addition to the studies suggested above, the trends in attendance patterns suggest possible future studies that might be of interest to educational strategists or state education officials. Nationally, approximately 72 percent of students attend college in their home state and 86 percent attend college in their home region. However, this varies greatly by state. In the New England area, no state has more than 56 percent of graduating seniors initially attending a college in the same state and only 74 percent attending a college in the New England region. Further research, for example, might investigate the academic characteristics of New England students who remain in-state or in-region versus those of students who migrate out of the state or region, as these trends might be different from the national trends.

Additional research should identify the most common destinations (e.g., states, institution type) of students who leave and compare their subsequent college graduation rates with those students remaining in-state. In other words, are students who decide to go out of state for college more or less likely to graduate than those who attend an in-state college? While this research note focused on

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trends at the national level, the data available will also enable analysis at the state or local level. Finally, longitudinal studies within states can inform educators about the impact of popular policy initiatives (e.g., academic incentive scholarships, college readiness standards, changes in tuition rates) and other external factors (e.g., economy) on where students enroll and ultimately persist and graduate.

Conclusion
This research expands on the current literature of college choice and student behavior. First, an objective indicator of distance was used in the current analyses. Much of the previous literature has relied on self-report. Furthermore, the self-report response options were often large ranges (e.g., between 100 and 500 miles) whereas the variable created in the current study was continuous. Secondly, this data examined the relationship between additional student characteristics and average distance a student travels for college. The distance traveled to attend college was demonstrated to be strongly associated not only with students' demographic characteristics but also with academic preparation, and even by the student's home state. This research sheds light on the complex nature of college choice by revealing the student characteristics that impact distance one goes for college; however, much more research is needed to fully understand this intricate process.

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