



WHITE PAPER SERIES

Why Admitted Students Did Not Attend APSU Summer, 2022

Decision Support and
Institutional Research

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the spring semester the office of Decision Support and Institutional Research conducted a comprehensive study to determine why students who were accepted to APSU for the fall 2021 semester decided to attend another institution.

This study consisted of data gathered from the National Student Clearinghouse as well as a survey that was developed by DSIR with assistance from Communications and Marketing.

A total of 2,442 students were called by various volunteer APSU staff and students and, out of this number, a total of 354 (15%) completed the survey.

A summary of the results of the study are as follows:

- Most of the students who choose to go to another institution stayed in Tennessee, decided to go to a public four-year institution, and chose academic programs offered by APSU.
- While the majority of students cited scholarship availability as the main reason they attended another institution, other reasons that received larger responses were that students either wanted to live further or closer to home than APSU, they did not have a good application experience, and they were concerned about cost and financial aid availability.
- The majority of the students believed they did not have a close academic or community connection with APSU during the application process and they knew very little about APSU's academic offerings when applying.
- The majority of the respondents were either neutral or disagreed that the institution they attended had a better reputation or could provide better opportunities for job placement than APSU.

DSIR recommends that it may be advantageous for the institution to fine tune its positioning in relation to market and to determine the key drivers of that market. Such drivers could focus on increased customer service, greater communication efforts, and greater community outreach.

INTRODUCTION

Because of decreasing enrollment nation-wide, higher education institutions face increasingly stringent competition. It has become necessary for colleges and universities to create brand messaging that can speak to what students want in the school they attend. According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, there was a 4.7% decrease in the number of undergraduate students enrolling in courses in Spring 2022. Many of the students who chose not to attend school opted to enter the workforce because they questioned the necessity of a college degree. With college enrollment continuing to drop and the value of a college degree under scrutiny (Saul, 2022), understanding what drives student choice and how those factors affect enrollment and marketing is imperative. Like other colleges and universities, Austin Peay State University has been facing a decrease in enrollment. The purpose of this study is to understand the reasons students who were accepted to APSU decided to enroll at other institutions.

There are more than six thousand colleges and universities in the United States, so how do students narrow down their choices? While the number of higher education institutions is vast, not every student is aware of each school's characteristics. A student's awareness set includes the institutions they are directly aware of (Stephenson et al., 2015), and, due to increased branding of these institutions as well as college sports, most students today are aware of more universities than past students. However, most of these students apply only to a few institutions where their knowledge of the school is greatest. The decision of which school to apply for admission is influenced by many factors including location, reputation, price, and job placement possibilities. After being accepted to schools, students must decide among their final choice schools (Stephenson, et al. 2015).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, students rated academic quality/reputation, desired program of study, and job placement as the top three factors in choice of college. Other factors include cost of attendance, graduate school placement, social life, and sports (LaFave et al., 2018). Of course, each student values various aspects of a higher education institution differently

“The decision of which school to apply for admission is influenced by many factors including location, reputation, price, and job placement possibilities.”

than others. In general, high achieving students, who may be wealthier students with high GPAs may have different criteria in choosing an institution over a moderate student who will have to maintain either part-time or full-time employment during their college career. Likewise, athletes on a full scholarship may not worry about the cost of a school and can choose to apply to various in-state, out-of-state, private, and public schools. Meanwhile, disadvantaged non-athletic students, who are usually lower income first-generation college students, may see the cost of attendance to be prohibitive. These students may try to apply only to in-state schools, so they can receive in-state tuition and take advantage of in-state incentives (Shaw et al., 2009). Female academics are more likely to apply to selective schools, while privileged low achievers may prefer state schools (Shaw et al., 2009).

Understanding the factors that influence student choice can shed light on the reasons students chose to attend one institution over another. These factors raise questions about how students perceived APSU versus their school of choice. For example, did the school they chose to attend have higher academic quality or reputation? Did their school of choice have programs of study that were not available at APSU? Was perceived job placement after graduation lower at APSU versus their chosen school? Finding answers to these questions can help discover gaps in the process and direct efforts to gain new students.

“Understanding the factors that influence student choice can shed light on the reasons students chose to attend one institution over another.”

METHODOLOGY

This study examined why students who were admitted to APSU decided not to return. After DSIR completed its official collection of census data from the fall 2021 semester, it generated a list of those individuals who were admitted to the institution but who did not enroll (n=3,757). This list was forwarded to the National Student Clearinghouse to determine the status of each of these individuals.

The National Student Clearinghouse is the nation's leading source for education verification and student outcomes research. Currently most US higher education institutions participate in data sharing with this organization and, according to the Clearinghouse, it maintains data on almost 98% of all higher education students within the US. The research center within the Clearinghouse provides student outcomes data to higher education institutions, states, school districts, and educational organizations.

In February, the Clearinghouse responded with a report indicating the enrollment status and other demographic data of each student on the list. The Clearinghouse was able to find data on 2,692 of the original 3,757 individuals submitted (71.65%). The reasons why the Clearinghouse could not find data on all of the students can be attributed to either the institution where the student enrolled did not share data with the Clearinghouse, or the student decided not to attend a higher education institution. In addition to the descriptive data, DSIR also conducted a telephone interview with those students who attended elsewhere.

Telephone Survey

APSU was interested in learning why students who were accepted to the institution decided to attend an institution other than APSU. As part of this research report, DSIR, as well as other volunteer APSU staff and students, conducted individual telephone interviews with students who decided to attend elsewhere. Phone numbers and other data were obtained through APSU's student data system via the application process.

Among the 2,692 names on the list of individuals attending other institutions, DSIR removed names on the list that had missing or

“The Clearinghouse was able to find data on 2,692 of the original 3,757 individuals submitted (71.65%).”

incorrect phone numbers. This left a total of 2,442 to call. After a three-week telephone campaign, a total of 367 students agreed to participate in the interview. A total of 13 of these respondents were removed because they failed to complete at least half of the survey. Therefore, the total number of useable respondents was 354 or about 15% of the original call list.

The survey consisted of 12 questions or statements that were created with the assistance of a literature review completed by a graduate student specifically assigned to the project. These questions were reviewed by DSIR, APSU's marketing department, and the Provost's Office. The first question identified whether the student or parent of the student was responding to the survey. The second question was internal where the telephone interviewer input a unique respondent identifier. This identifier was used to match a larger database in order to obtain the respondent's HS GPA and gender.

The third question was open-ended and asked the respondent why he/she decided not to enroll at APSU. These responses were codified by DSIR. The fourth question contained eight statements concerning the student experience with APSU. The respondent was asked to respond with each statement in one of five Likert-type scale responses from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The last question was also open-ended and asked students how they heard about APSU. Again, these responses were codified by DSIR.

The Likert-type scale responses were coded as ordinal data (strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neutral, etc.) so that frequency responses could be computed. They were also coded as interval data (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) so that averages and higher-order inferential statistics could be computed.

In addition to the frequency distributions of the question, DSIR also ran a series of statistical tests to determine if, at the .05 level, a statistically significant difference occurred between gender and GPA groupings.

“Therefore, the total number of useable respondents was 354 or about 15% of the original call list.”

WHERE DID STUDENTS GO?

Using data from the fall 2021 semester, Decision Support and Institutional Research (DSIR) determined that 3,757 prospective students who were admitted to APSU were not enrolled on census day. After submitting names of these individuals to the National Student Clearinghouse, 1,065 of these students did not match the NSCH database, indicating they did not go to another college or they enrolled in one of the small percentages of institutions that did not participate in the Clearinghouse. Therefore, the remaining 2,692 students matriculated into other institutions. Out of the 2,692 students who chose another institution, over 68% were female with an average high school GPA of 3.46 and an average ACT Composite score of 21.26. Within the 1,064 students who did not attend another institution, 64% were female with an average high school GPA of 3.19 and an average ACT Composite score of 20.44.

For the students who attended other institutions, over 77% chose

another 4-year institution, as indicated in **Figure 1**, while over 22% chose a 2-year institution. While **Figure 2** indicates that over 77% of the 2,692 prospective students chose public institutions, over 22% of the students enrolled in more costly private institutions. Some of these institutions are considered Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and others were either faith-based or proprietary.

As shown in **Figure 3**, the majority of these prospective students chose institutions within Tennessee while almost 15% chose either Kentucky, Alabama, Mississippi, or Georgia.

Figure 1
Type of Chosen Institution

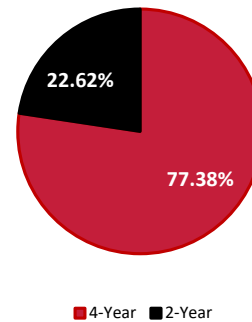
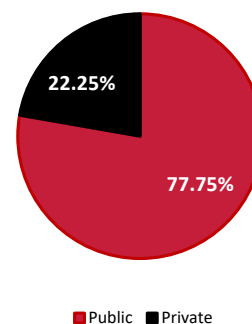


Figure 2
Support Status of Chosen Institution



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As shown in **Figure 4**, almost 25% of the 2,692 prospective students chose to go to one of the top four alternative institutions, Middle Tennessee State University, University of Tennessee, University of Memphis, and University of Tennessee Chattanooga. This table also indicates that over 8% chose to attend Nashville State and Volunteer State community colleges.

Other results found that, out of the 2,692 students in this group, over 88.5% enrolled in programs that were also offered at APSU. Shown in **Figure 5**, the top majors chosen by these students are majors APSU offers.

How far a student lives from home is often a deciding factor when attending an institution. While some students desire to live far away from home, others want to be much closer. Therefore, part of this study focused on the average distance from the student's home to the institution they attended as compared to the distance from their home to APSU. Zip codes for the student's home, the enrolled institution, and APSU were included in the database. To calculate distance using zip codes, the longitude and latitude coordinates were added to the data file for each zip code. Next, each longitude and latitude value was converted to radians, and the Great Circle Distance Formula was used to calculate distances in miles between the two pairs of values.

Figure 3 State Where Enrolled at Chosen Institution		
State	Enrolled	Percent
Tennessee	1,955	72.62%
Kentucky	217	8.06%
Alabama	99	3.68%
Mississippi	43	1.60%
Georgia	35	1.30%
Ohio	27	1.00%
Arkansas	24	0.89%
Illinois	24	0.89%
Others	268	9.96%
Total	2,692	100.00%

Figure 4 Chosen Institutions Enrolled		
Institution	Enrolled	Percent
Middle Tennessee State University	207	7.69%
University of Tennessee	152	5.65%
University of Memphis	150	5.57%
University of Tennessee Chattanooga	138	5.13%
University of Tennessee Martin	117	4.35%
Tennessee State University	111	4.12%
Nashville State Community College	110	4.09%
Tennessee Technological University	108	4.01%
Volunteer State Community College	106	3.94%
Western Kentucky University	79	2.93%
Others	1,414	52.53%
Total	2,692	100.00%

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Mean distances between home and attending school, as well as mean distance between home and APSU, were calculated.

Results indicated that only a slight variation existed between the two measures; the home distance to the enrolled institution averaged

141 miles while the home distance from APSU was slightly lower at 128 miles. Home distance from APSU was then used to create four mutually exclusive groupings: those students who lived within 50 miles of APSU, 50-100 miles of APSU, 100-200 miles of APSU, and over 200 miles from APSU. Results, indicate that almost 56% of the students who chose to not attend APSU lived less than 100 miles from the APSU campus. Over 34% of the students who attended elsewhere lived 100 to 200 miles from APSU while less than 10% of these students

lived more than 200 miles from the APSU campus. These percentages are proportional to the geographic area where APSU mainly recruits its students. Specifically, there are more applications from students who live less than 100 miles from the APSU campus.

Out of the 3,757 students sent to the Clearinghouse, a total of 1,064 students were not found within the Clearinghouse data. While the Clearinghouse works with approximately 98 percent of higher education institutions within the US, there are some institutions that do not participate. Therefore, the 1,064 students who did not match the database could have attended a non-participating institution or could have decided not to attend any institution. DSIR recognizes that many of these students may have decided, for whatever reason, to forgo their college education. Since contact information for these potential students already exists, APSU could create a unique opportunity by reaching out to answer questions, create an educational plan, or help meet a need these individuals may have.

Figure 5 Selected Major of Chosen Institution		
General Studies/Liberal Arts	555	20.62%
Nursing	182	6.76%
Management/Marketing	177	6.58%
Education	148	5.50%
Biology	143	5.31%
Psychology	104	3.86%
Health/Human Performance	73	2.71%
Computer Science	45	1.67%
Chemistry	31	1.15%
Social Sciences	31	1.15%
Others	1,203	44.69%
Total	2,692	100.00%

TELEPHONE SURVEY RESULTS

As part of a three-week telephone campaign by DSIR as well as volunteer APSU staff and students, a total of 2,442 students were called with 367 of these students agreeing to participate in the interview. A total of 13 of these respondents were removed because they failed to complete at least half of the survey. Therefore, the total number of useable respondents was 354 or about 15% of the original call list.

Based on the survey, respondents were initially asked why they chose not to attend APSU. This was an open-ended question and the telephone interviewer did not prompt the respondent with possible answers. This method allowed for the respondent to answer freely without the confines or biases of a list of choices. After all of the answers were recorded, DSIR codified the responses into a reasonable number of subgroups. Specifically, open-ended survey questions often provide the most useful insights into issues. However, in making sense of the variety of responses, some type of summarizing is needed. This means that the researcher has to assign one or more categories (called codes) to each response. While this can be done either manually or through the use of automated coding, DSIR chose to codify the responses manually due to the relatively small number of responses and because the office wanted to ensure consistency, provide adequate coverage, and prevent bias.

It is also important to note that, because the question was open-ended, the respondent could give more than one reason. Therefore, the total number of responses on why students choose another institution will be greater than the total number of respondents because some respondents had more than one reason of why they chose to go elsewhere.

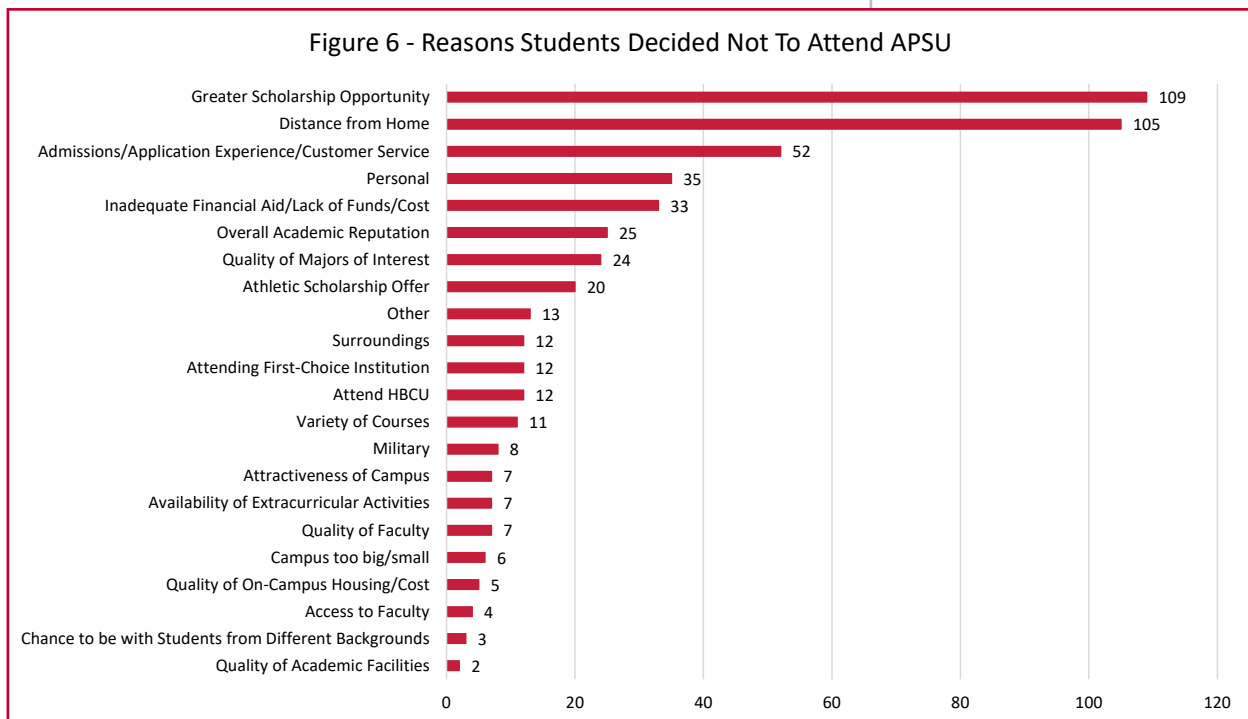
The main reason students indicated that they chose not to attend APSU was scholarship opportunities (n=109). They indicated that they were either able to receive scholarships that APSU did not provide to them (non-athletic, academic and sponsored) or the amount of scholarships offered at their chosen institution was greater than what was offered at APSU. The next reason students indicated that they did not attend APSU was distance from home (n=105). Specifically, students

"This was an open-ended question and the telephone interviewer did not prompt the respondent with possible answers. This method allowed for the respondent to answer freely without the confines or biases of a list of choices."

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either wanted an institution further away from home than APSU or they wanted an institution closer to home than APSU. In most cases, whether the choice was nearer or further, the recent COVID pandemic had a lot to do with students' choice of this category. A total of 52 respondents indicated that they did not attend APSU due to a poor experience with the admissions/application experience and overall customer service. In many of these cases, students expressed that they did not feel as connected to APSU as they did with their institution of choice. While 35 respondents indicated that they had personal reasons for not attending APSU, over 30 indicated they had concerns over the cost as well as the availability of financial aid at APSU. **Figure 6** indicates all of the reasons respondents gave for attending another institution.

Another question on the survey consisted of 8 Likert-type scale questions, which are listed in **Figure 7**. More than 50% of respondents had a somewhat or strong desire to attend APSU, while more than 60% of students had a somewhat or strong desire to attend the university where they enrolled. Only 29% of students indicated that they had a personal connection with someone at APSU who helped them learn



more about the school, while almost 60% of respondents indicated that they did not have a personal connection at APSU. When students

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were asked if they believed the school where they enrolled had a better reputation than APSU, 47% indicated that the school where they enrolled and APSU were similar in terms of reputation. Job placement chances between APSU and the school of choice were also seen as equal by 40% of respondents, while 18% somewhat or strongly disagreed that job placement chances were higher at the school where they enrolled versus APSU.

It should be noted that over 57% of respondents indicated they knew very little about the programs at APSU during the application process. This unfamiliarity with APSU's academic programs may also be related to the lack of customer service experience expressed by the respondents as well as their lack of connection to a specific individual at APSU. While less than 13% of respondents somewhat or strongly agreed that they had a personal connection with professors and students in their program of study at APSU, almost half of respondents

Figure 7 - Question Responses

Scale	I Had a Strong Desire to Attend APSU	I Had a Strong Desire to Attend the School Where I Enrolled	When Applying to APSU, I Had a Personal Connection with Someone Who Helped Me Learn More About the School	I Feel the Reputation of the School Where I Enrolled is Better Than the Reputation at APSU
Strongly Disagree	7.5%	4.6%	43.5%	8.7%
Somewhat Disagree	11.2%	6.3%	15.9%	12.2%
Neutral	28.0%	20.2%	11.5%	47.0%
Somewhat Agree	25.1%	31.1%	16.1%	18.5%
Strongly Agree	28.2%	37.8%	13.0%	13.6%

Scale	I knew Very Little About the Programs at APSU During the Application Process	I Feel that I Will Have a Better Chance at Job Placement at the School Where I Enrolled than at APSU	I Had a Personal Connection with Professors or Students from the Program of Study I was Interested in at APSU	I Had a Personal Connection with Professors or Students from the Program of Study I was Interested in at the School Where I Enrolled
Strongly Disagree	11.1%	7.8%	51.0%	19.5%
Somewhat Disagree	16.6%	10.5%	21.6%	13.0%
Neutral	14.9%	40.7%	14.9%	20.9%
Somewhat Agree	26.2%	17.7%	7.6%	20.1%
Strongly Agree	31.2%	23.3%	4.9%	26.5%

somewhat or strongly agreed that they had a personal connection with professors or students in their program of study at the institution where they attended.

Academic Quality/Reputation is one of the top factors that influence student choice along with desired program of study and job placement (Stephenson, 2015). The students who took part in this survey

were more likely to view APSU in a positive light regarding school reputation and job placement chances, and as previously mentioned, 88.5% of students that were accepted to APSU but chose to enroll at other schools chose majors also offered at APSU. Again, the lack of personal connections to APSU and the low understanding of the programs offered may be affecting how many accepted students are choosing to enroll at other institutions.

A two samples T-test was run to compare answers to the Likert-type scale questions across males ($n = 120$) and females ($n = 202$). There were no significant differences by gender, indicating that the way male and females reacted to each question was statistically similar.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) procedures were run using the GPA ranges <2.50 , $2.5 - 2.99$, $3.00 - 3.49$, and $3.50 - 4.00$ to determine if there were significant differences in the way each of these groups reacted to the questions. Only three of the eight questions indicated a significant different response to the question within this group. Students with a GPA from $3.0 - 3.49$ were more likely to have a personal connection with APSU that helped them learn more about the institution's program than those with a GPA < 2.50 , $F(3, 343) = 2.84$, $p = .04$, 95% CI $[0.04, 1.40]$. Students with a GPA of $3.5 - 4.0$ are more likely to believe that the school where they enrolled had a better reputation than APSU, $F(3, 341)$, $p = .004$, 95% CI $[0.05, 1.01]$. Furthermore, students within the same GPA grouping of $3.5 - 4.0$ are more likely to believe that the school where they enrolled had a better chance for job placement than APSU, $F(3, 340) = 3.4$, $p = 0.01$, 95% CI $[0.09, 1.13]$.

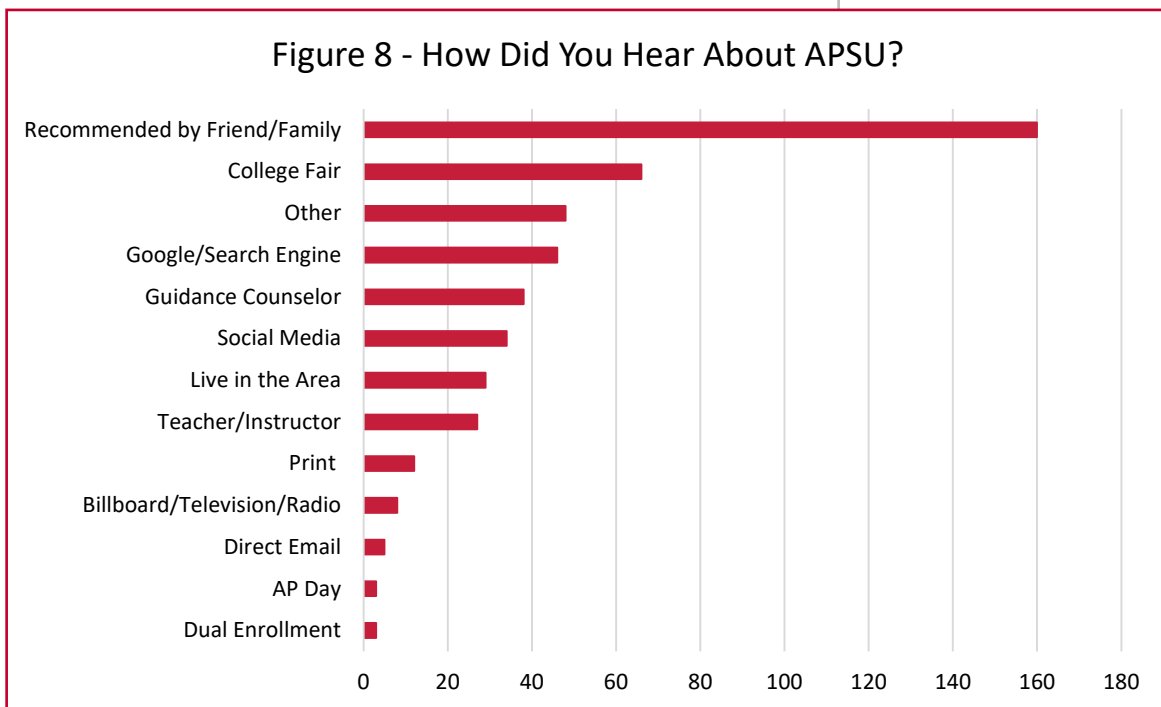
There was a moderate positive correlation between school reputation and job placement. In other words, respondents who believed their school of choice had a better reputation than APSU also believed that the job placement opportunities was greater than at APSU, $r(342) = 0.58$, $p < 0.0001$. A positive correlation also existed between students who had a strong desire to attend the school where they enrolled and students who had a personal connection with professors or students in their program of study at that school, $r(342) = 0.27$, $p < .0001$.

The final question on the survey asked respondents how they heard about APSU. This was an open-ended question and the telephone

"Students with a GPA from 3.0 – 3.49 were more likely to have a personal connection with APSU that helped them learn more about the institution's program than those with a GPA < 2.50..."

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interviewer did not prompt the respondent with possible answers. This method allowed for the respondent to answer freely without the confines or biases of a list of choices. After all of the answers were recorded, DSIR had to codify the responses into a reasonable number of subgroups. DSIR chose to codify the responses manually due to the relatively small number of responses and because the office wanted to ensure consistency, provide adequate coverage, and prevent bias. As seen in **Figure 8**, most students (n = 160) were introduced to APSU through the recommendation of a friend or family member. Other common avenues include college fairs (n = 66), Google (n = 46), high school guidance counselor (n = 38), and social media (n = 34). Notably,



print ads (n = 12), billboard/television/radio (n = 8), and direct emails (n = 5) performed rather poorly. Students were more likely to hear about APSU through a personal connection or through more technological methods like search engines and social media than from more traditional methods of communication.

MARKET POSITIONING

Higher education nationwide is in a state of change and instability. The cost of attending public higher education has significantly increased in response to substantial decreases in state revenue. Furthermore, the media have brought national attention to the problem of rising student debt while others start to question the actual value of a college education in today's world.

Potential students have more higher education options than ever before including traditional brick-and-mortar institutions, online universities, hybrid programs, or studying overseas. Against this backdrop, education marketers have to develop and refine the messages necessary to attract and retain students while generating sufficient revenue to keep institutions active.

In many instances, college choices are geographically motivated so there is instant local demand. Similar brand messaging has been employed for a long time, and largely successful. But over time as trends change, brand messaging needs to be updated and channels adapted to reach the right consumers despite where they reside.

Higher education, therefore, is becoming more competitive from a variety of perspectives. Internally, institutions must manage costs, while at the same time, meet a growing need to specialize and communicate a unique message to an expanding marketplace. From the applicant's vantage point, student prospects are faced with more education options than ever before. Therefore, a solid marketing and enrollment strategy can directly affect the bottom line of a higher education institution through the measurement and understanding of its position in the marketplace, the elimination of weaknesses, and building upon its strengths.

A successful strategic or enrollment management plan, however, cannot be created without solid data to support it. To use a literary example, in *The Copper Beeches* (Doyle, 2002), Sherlock Holmes exclaimed, "Data! Data! Data! I can't make bricks without clay." Holmes' exclamation is perhaps one of his most famous lines, and with good reason. For it points to a tendency of doing the impossible: to make bricks without the proper materials. When applied to marketing

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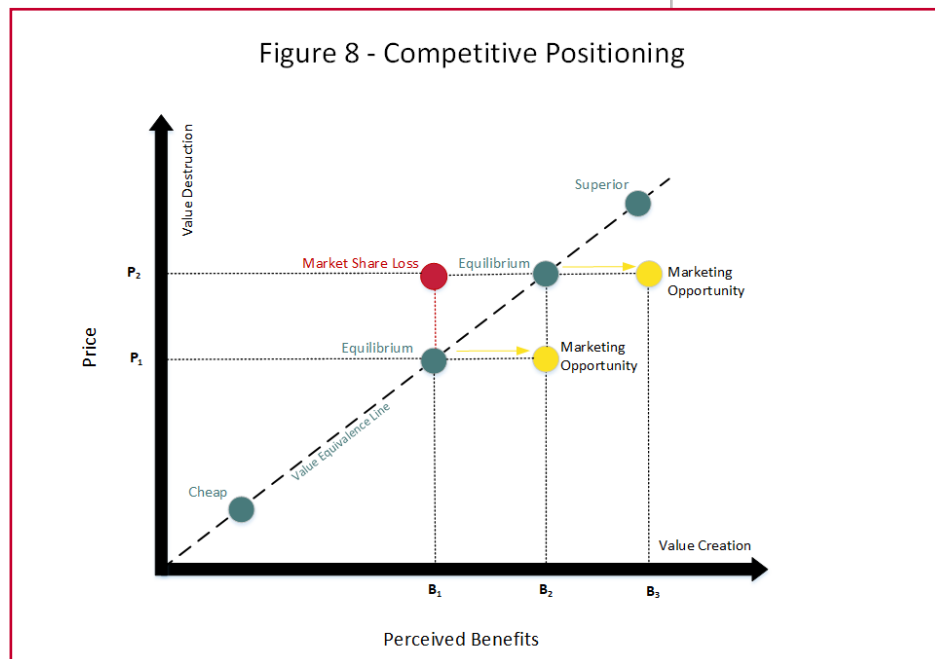
and enrollment management, “making bricks without clay” simply means to establish theories, strategies, policies, and practices in the absence of anything on which to base them. Without sufficient data the institution creates speculation, absent of any hard facts.

US higher education is not unlike most goods and services, because its customers (i.e. students) have a wide array of choices for their education dollar. It is the job of the institution within the market to find their competitive edge and meet student needs better than the next institution. Therefore, when there are only a finite number of unique academic programs out there, how do higher education institutions set tuition at different rates with different degrees of success?

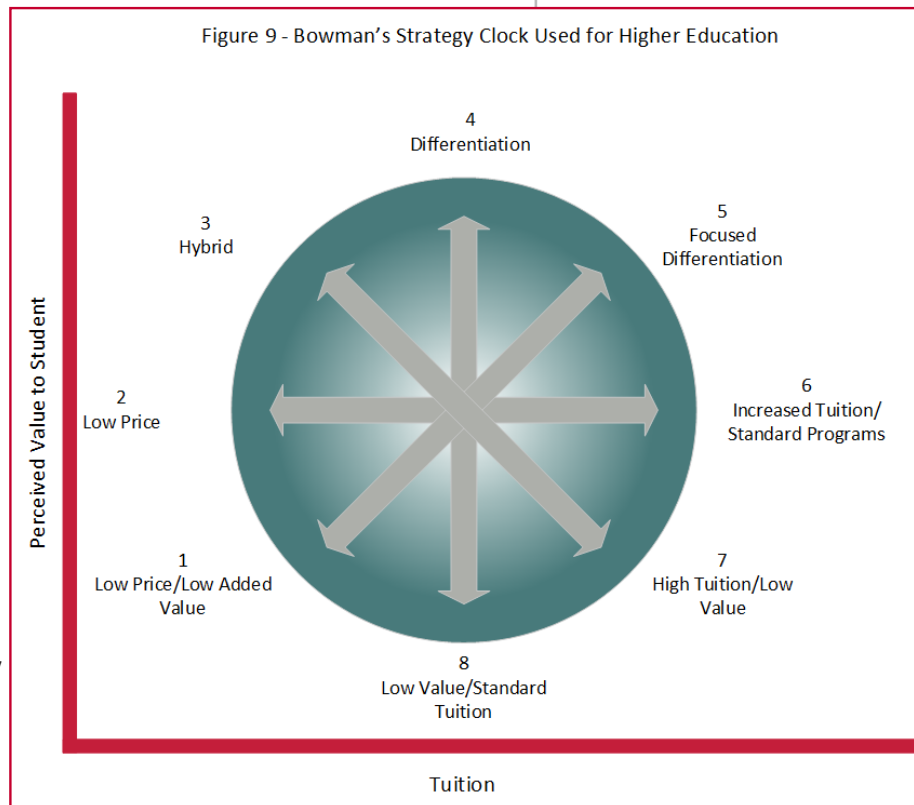
Prospective students and their families oftentimes perform a cost-benefit analysis to determine overall value and whether the amount of money, time, and energy spent on a specific higher education institution will

net them a sufficient amount of tangible and intangible benefit. In other words, will the perceived benefit of higher education be worth the cost associated with it?

While most institutions tend to primarily look at the cost side of the cost-benefit equation, overlooking the perceived benefit could cause a marketer or enrollment manager to miss out on significant opportunities. For example, refer to the Competitive Positioning chart (**Figure 8**). Where price and benefit are perceived as equal, value balance or



equilibrium is achieved. This position is shown by the green dots within the graph. In the past, most state institutions were able to keep tuition moderately low due to the amount of state revenue used to supplement it. With state revenue increasingly being redirected to other agencies, tuition has had to commensurately increase to the point where perceived value of an institution has diminished. An actual diminished value or market share loss occurs when the price increases while the perceived benefit either does not change or decreases. This position is shown by the red dot on the graph. When an institution can show an increased benefit that is higher than the cost associated with it, the consumer will perceive a greater value even if the costs increase. This position is shown by the yellow dots on the graph. Increasing institutional value can be accomplished through a change of branding strategy induced by exploiting key value-added benefits such as the inclusion of unique academic programs, increasing student/faculty and student/staff connections, and improving customer service.



Strategies could be developed in which an institution could provide students with what they want at a better price, or more effectively than others. Essentially, Porter (1980) maintained that all companies (higher education included) compete on cost, perceived value (differentiation), or by focusing on a very specific customer (market segmentation). Bowman and Faulkner (1996) took this concept further by developing the Strategy Clock (**Figure 9**). It is a good explanation of the cost and perceived value with which many higher education institutions concern themselves.

Position 1: Low Price/Low Value

Higher education institutions do not choose to compete in this category. This position is considered “bargain basement” and those institutions that are in this position did not plan to be. Here, academic programs lack differential value and the only way to succeed is by selling volume and continually attracting new students. Academic programs are inferior but tuition is attractive enough to entice some students to try them.

Position 2: Low Price

Institutions competing in this category are the low-cost leaders. These are the institutions that drive tuition down to bare minimums and balance low margins with high volume. If low cost leaders have large enough volume or strong strategic reasons for their position, they can sustain this approach to become a powerful force within the market.

Position 3: Hybrid (moderate tuition/moderate differentiation)

Hybrid institutions offer programs at a lower cost but with a higher perceived value than many other low-cost competitors. While volume is an issue with these institutions, they build a reputation of offering fair prices for reasonable goods. In many cases, the two-year colleges fit into this position.

Position 4: Differentiation

Institutions that differentiate offer their students high perceived value. To afford this, they either increase tuition or seek greater market share. Branding is important with differentiation strategies as it allows a company to become synonymous with quality as well as a price point. Many smaller private four-year liberal arts colleges fit into this position.

Position 5: Focused Differentiation

These are the “designer” or “boutique” institutions because they have a high perceived value at a high tuition. Students attend these institutions based on perceived value alone. While the institution may not have any more real value than other institutions, the perception of value is high enough to charge very high tuition. Many of the larger private research institutions fit into this position.

Position 6: Increased Price/Standard Product

When revenue from other sources falls, institutions have to increase their tuition without any increase to the value side of the equation. If the tuition is accepted by students, the institution either enjoys higher revenues or is able to sustain its current revenues given the revenue decline from other sources. If the higher tuition is not accepted by students, market share falls. Many of the master's/comprehensive regional institutions fit into this position.

Position 7: High Price/Low Value

This is classic monopoly pricing. In a market where only one institution offers the program (or delivery of the program), perceived value is not of concern because, if the student needs the program, the student will pay the tuition set. In a free market economy, monopolies do not last long. Many for-profit institutions fit into this position.

Position 8: Low Value/Standard Price

Institutions do not strive for this position, they fall into it. Here, the institution has a perceived low value academic program either through financial problems or accreditation issues. In order to continue to operate, the institution cannot increase its tuition. Some private baccalaureate institutions fall into this position.

In the stream of economic changes, technological innovations, and market fluctuations, higher education institutions have been caught in the undertow of managing scarce resources while trying to meet the needs of diverse populations. Without an active and effective strategic enrollment marketing plan, unprepared institutions will surely succumb. Such a plan should utilize historic and current data to drive institutional decision-making and to effectively position the institution based upon where it would like to be in the future.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine why those students who were accepted to APSU decided to go elsewhere. Based on data collected from the Clearinghouse, most of these students who choose to go to another institution stayed in Tennessee, decided to go to a public four-year institution, and chose academic programs offered by APSU.

While the majority of students cited scholarship availability as the main reason they attended another institution, other reasons that received larger responses were that students either wanted to live further or closer to home than APSU, they did not have a good application experience, and they were concerned about cost and financial aid availability. Furthermore, the majority of the students believed they did not have a close academic or community connection with APSU during the application process and they knew very little about APSU's academic offerings when applying. Interestingly, the majority of the respondents were either neutral or disagreed that the institution they attended had a better reputation or could provide better opportunities for job placement than APSU.

Therefore, while the majority of the reasons students decided to attend another institution centered on scholarships, money, and financing, they also indicated that they knew little about the institution, they did not make any meaningful connections, and their application experience was not optimum. Based on market research, it could be argued that these non-monetary reasons could contribute to the student's conscious or subconscious perception that there is a value imbalance where the cost of attendance (no matter how high or low) is greater than the perceived benefit. This argument is further buttressed with the fact that APSU's average tuition and fees is the second to the lowest in the state. Therefore, while APSU's cost of attendance may be economically attractive compared to other Tennessee 4-year institutions, students may not be fully aware of the non-monetary benefits of attending the institution.

To that end, it may be advantageous for the institution to fine tune its positioning in relation to market and to determine the key drivers of

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that market. Such drivers could focus on increased customer service, greater communication efforts, and greater community outreach.

While it is clear that the higher education enrollment market is tenuous at best, focusing on the right markets and utilizing the best strategies for those markets may help to quell some of the uncertainty of the future.

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