To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Stephen Ray Lykins entitled "Higher Education--The Hard Sell. A Descriptive Study of Advertising Done by Private Four-year Colleges and Universities in the Southeast United States." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Communications.

Alan D. Fletcher, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

George A. Evans

Malcolm McFarland Jr

Accepted for the Council:

L Evans Roth

Vice Chancellor
Graduate Studies and Research

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HIGHER EDUCATION--THE HARD SELL. A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF ADVERTISING DONE BY PRIVATE, FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN THE SOUTHEAST UNITED STATES

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Science

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Stephen Ray Lykins

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ABSTRACT

This research was an examination of recent advertising efforts of private four-year colleges and universities in the southeast United States. The purpose of the study was to provide basic information on the present state of the practice of advertising done to recruit students, since no central information source on that practice presently exists.

Information was gained through a mail survey in the Spring of 1980. The questionnaire was mailed to the admissions officers of the total population of private, four-year colleges and universities in eleven southeastern states, or 160 schools. A 63% completion rate was achieved with one mailing.

Twice as many schools advertise to help recruit students as do not, 67% compared to 33%. Over 80% of schools that advertise have begun their programs in the past ten years. Print media are used considerably more than broadcast media, both in terms of the number of schools using the media and in terms of the amount of money spent in the media.

Over 90% of the schools that advertise direct some ads to high school students. Less than one-third work with an outside agency in preparing ads, and just over one-half formerly evaluate their programs.

Cross tabulation revealed that with respect to advertising, no significant differences existed between church-affiliated schools and those with no religious affiliation. The only difference between schools of less than 1000 enrollment and schools with 1000 or more, was that larger schools generally spend more money on advertising and promotional efforts.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND PROPOSAL

Gone are the obscenities and radicalism of the 60's, the complacency and expansion of the 70's. Colleges and universities face a new dilemma in the 1980's--perhaps less newsworthy, but every bit as real. Our nation's post-secondary schools will experience sharp decreases in enrollment figures in the 1980's primarily because of the shrinking high school population, rapidly rising tuition rates, and a growing belief that a college degree is not a prerequisite of success.

According to a report made before a United States Senate committee by Duke University's Robert Behn, at least 15% of the nation's independent colleges and universities will fail in the coming decade. Donald Pike of the University of Southern California forecasts even gloomier times; he expects fewer than 200 of the existing 1500 private post-secondary schools to survive the century ("Small is Perilous," 1979). In the past three years, 40 have already failed.

The cause of their failure is chiefly a shift in the population groups--fewer college-age students, hence less financial support. The numbers of 18-year-olds in this country peaked in 1979 at 4,292,000 and will hit a low of 3,188,000 in 1992--a decline of 26%. For the broader 18-24 population group, the decline will begin in 1982 (Magarrell, 1980).

At the same time student enrollment figures are dropping, tuition fees are rising. Private school expenses range from $4,000 to $8,000 a year, often double that of a nearby state school. These higher costs compound the problem by driving away many students who simply cannot afford the soaring dues.

Small schools are thus competing for students--with new curriculums, specialized programs, avid recruitment in high schools, and even price competition. "Marketing is not a popular term in the academic world," says Hans Jenny, Ohio's College of Wooster's vice president for finance. "But marketing is one thing colleges must learn to do" ("Small is Perilous," 1979, p. 100).

Many, it seems, are learning the now-necessary skills of marketing well. Of the traditional 4 P's of the marketing mix--product, price, physical distribution, and promotion--each is currently being altered by a number of schools to better suit the needs of prospective students. Perhaps the most interesting, and unquestionably the most noticeable, are recent efforts in the promotion category, of which advertising is a vital part.

Advertising itself is not new to the academic world. College catalogs, brochures, and handbooks have long been helpful information tools and are a very real form of advertising. Direct mail advertising, too, has been a tool of the college admissions office. In contrast, paid, non-personal communication through either broadcast or print mass media aimed at recruiting traditional, full-time students is a recent innovation.

There is evidence that the use of the mass media to advertise colleges is widespread and rapidly becoming a big business venture. In 1973, New York University began spending over $150,00 annually for an advertising program ("Sophisticated Sell," 1974). Additionally, many small schools such as Minnesota's Winona State and Tennessee's Covenant College are actively engaged in soliciting students through the mass media.

Many questions surround this controversial practice. First of all, is it economically feasible? Does it work? Which types of ads are most successful in communicating with students?

Second, is the practice appropriate? Is it ethical? How do students and faculty feel about recruiting students through advertising? Do large schools with big budgets have an unfair advantage?

And third, is advertising of this type deceptive or misleading? Is a college education being portrayed through advertising as more than it really is?

Surely these questions must be answered, especially if student recruitment is to become more competitive and advertising done by colleges is to become widespread. Yet before these questions can be answered, a pool of much more basic information must be uncovered. Tony McAdams of the University of Kentucky said in 1975, "Reliable aggregate data as to advertising expenditures solely for student recruitment are unavailable" (p. 230).

Four years later the situation is much the same: We have no facts on the present state of advertising done by colleges and universities to recruit students. No central information source reveals specifically how many schools use advertising, how much they spend, how long they have used the tool, what the results have been, or other basic information.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to gather through a mail survey of private colleges and universities information which will help define the present state of the practice of advertising done by private higher education institutions to recruit students. Collecting this

preliminary information will allow future studies to investigate the more crucial areas of the economics, ethics, and legality of higher education advertising.

The terms "advertising" and "private college or university" must be defined for the readers of this report.

"Advertising" is defined as paid, non-personal communication through either broadcast or print mass media. For the purpose of this study, direct mail solicitation is not considered advertising because of its role as a traditional student recruitment tool.

A "private college or university" is defined as any accredited, four-year post-secondary educational institution not supported directly by state, local, or federal government funds.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND AND PERSPECTIVE

Despite the fact that the freshman class of 1979-80 surprised many statisticians by boosting the overall college enrollment figure to 11.7 million, a 5% increase over the year before, the admissions scene for many schools is not promising (Magarrell, 1980). The 2.5 million new students who showed up on campuses in the Fall of 1979 came mostly from the largest group of 18-year-olds the country has ever had--and larger than it will have in any year the rest of this century, according to the Census Bureau Projections.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) forecasts an actual decrease in the number of full-time undergraduates in the nation's schools early in the 1980's ("Projections," 1978). The Center's study explains that projections of enrollments in institutions of higher learning are never as accurate as those of enrollments in elementary and secondary schools. Unlike those schools where education is mandatory through age 16, enrollment in higher education institutions is subject to much variability. Enrollments here are affected by economic conditions, political and administrative decisions, the status value of a degree, the intrinsic value of higher education, and many other factors. Some are impossible to quantify; others defy anticipation.

To account for this difficulity in forecasting higher education enrollment figures, NCES employs three alternative projections--one low, one high, one intermediate. Each of these projections forecasts a lower total of full-time students at institutions of higher learning in 1986 than in 1978 (see Figure 1).

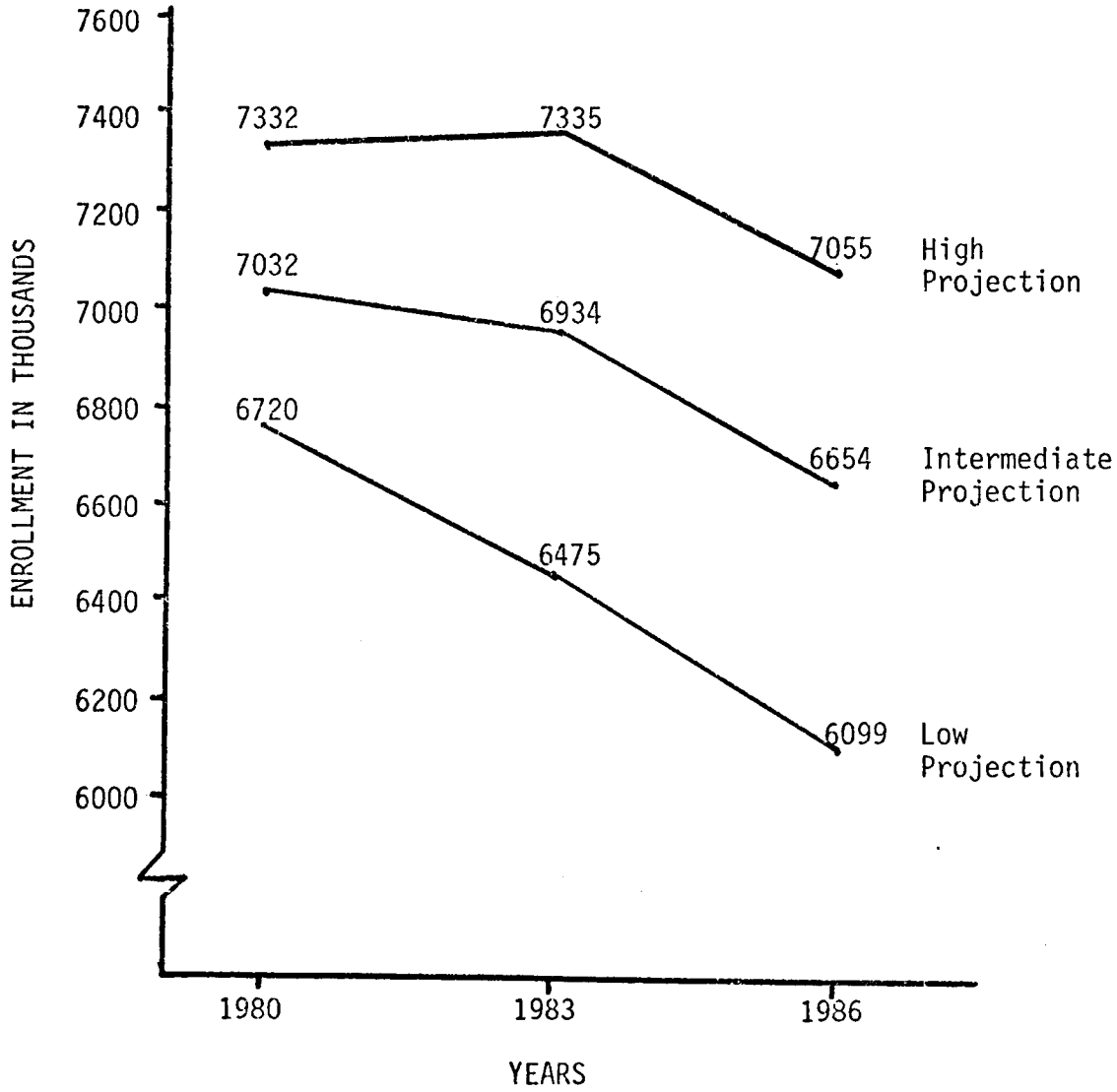


Figure 1. Projected college enrollments from 1980 to 1986. ("Projections," 1978)

Joseph Froomkin, who runs a research center in Washington D.C., believes the decline in the number of college students has already begun. He estimates present enrollment figures at 10.8 million. He further predicts a 20% loss in full-time enrollments by 1985, five years earlier than other predictions (Hechinger, 1979).

Alexander Astin, head of the Higher Education Research Institute in Los Angeles, agrees with Froomkin, blaming the naivete' of many statisticians for the widespread miscalculations. Astin maintains that the number of college freshmen began to decline several years ago. "Colleges began to drag in other constituents to fill the vacancies," he says. "Now we've topped out on part-time and adult recruits and there's no way to fill the vacancies" (Hechinger, 1979, p. C5).

A shrinking high school population is not the only factor contributing to declining college student enrollments. Soaring tuition fees have caused a number of young people to opt for work experience rather than a college degree. In 1973, the United States Office of Education estimated that it cost an average of $3,281 a year to attend a private college, a 7% increase over the previous year. The 1978 estimate was $5,110--almost a 45% increase from the already inflated level of just five years before (World Almanac, 1979, p. 197).

Higher education is one of the hardest hit victims of inflation. According to a higher education cost-of-living index devised by Hans Jenny of Ohio's College of Wooster and Richard Wynn of the University of Michigan, educational costs over the past decade have risen nearly twice as fast as the consumer price index. Rising tuition rates reflect only a portion of the increased cost, with private college costs rising 50%

faster than public school tuition costs ("The Coming Shakeout," 1974). Tax revenues and government subsidies help support public schools as much as possible; private schools are finding it necessary to dip into previously untouched endowment funds.

Another reason for declining full-time student enrollment rates is becoming more apparent: Americans are beginning to end their long love affair with higher education. Many individuals--especially young people--have begun to doubt the value of a traditional college education, especially the broad liberal arts background provided by many private colleges. Work experience, travel, and independent study are increasingly being seen as valuable alternatives to college life.

Students are much more vocationally oriented than they once were. Enrollments at trade schools and vocationally oriented community colleges are holding steady or rising in many cases where nearby liberal arts colleges are floundering. Lower costs and the career education thrusts of these schools have attracted many students who might otherwise have attended the four-year institution.

Garland G. Parker (1972) explains:

> The extent to which the normal college education prepares one for a specific job assignment or insures greater earning power has come increasingly into question, and has caused some students to question the long-heralded value of a college education. In effect, the relevance of college to life in our time is being challenged. (p. 123)

Other reasons, too, are cited for the declining enrollment figures. One is the leveling off in the recruitment of minorities. Because of the increase in high school drop-out rates, the supply of college material blacks is drying up. Additionally, because many schools are becoming

financially strained, they are more reluctant to recruit students in need of financial aid, many of whom are members of minority races (Hechinger, 1979).

Another reason for the enrollment decline is the drop in Scholastic Aptitude scores and lessened interest in academic subjects on the part of today's youth. Los Angeles' Alexander Astin explains:

> Many high school kids are taking more non-academic subjects, and they look upon intellectual work--particularly reading and writing--as a chore. If their academic skills are not highly developed, they are less likely to go to college. Nobody wants perpetual punishment. (Hechinger, 1979, p. C5).

Colleges and universities are consequently put into a bind: The number of traditional college-age students is dwindling and of that amount, a smaller percentage is choosing to attend a four-year school. Therefore student recruitment has become an increasingly competitive task. "It's becoming a dog-eat-dog situation," according to Charles A. Marshall, assistant executive director of the National College Admissions Counselors (Jenkins, 1974, p. 35). Some colleges are reported to have slipped recruiters onto the campuses of rival institutions to woo potential transfer students. Many others have hired professional recruiting firms whose services cost from a few hundred dollars to the entire budget of a hopeful school (Jenkins, 1974). And still colleges feel the increased pressure of fewer students. How can the college survive economically? How can it continue to support itself?

The answer comes back almost in unison from college administrators everywhere: marketing (Berry & George, 1975) (Gorman, 1974) (Huddleston, 1975) (Lord, 1975) (Murphy & McGarrity, 1978). In this era of declining enrollments and shrinking supplies of young people, higher education

institutions are increasingly turning to marketing techniques once limited to use in the private commercial world. The competitive atmosphere has spawned a number of college marketing entreprenuers, such as Robert Kristan of a Baltimore based communications planning and programming service. Kristan says, "Today a college either has a problem or wants to avoid one. It's changed from a seller's market to a buyer's market. The new approach of the 70's is to view recruiting as a marketing problem" (Colman, 1973, p.34).

Never before has the world of higher education been so pressured to think in terms of the business world--productivity analysis, cost centers, information systems, waste curtailment, segmentation, marketing. Yet, many college administrators are without business management backgrounds, and most colleges do not have a tradition of being run like a business firm. Some argue that a college is much different from a business and, therefore, the techniques used in business by and large are not appropriate for the university (Surface, 1971). However, much evidence suggests--and a great number of college admissions personnel agree--that the differences between the management of a business firm and that of a college or university are today only slight. Of the differences that do exist, many are due to the fact that colleges have had to hustle for students only recently the way business has hustled for customers for many years.

Some academicians may see marketing a college as the corruption of lofty ideals. Yet, Leonard Barry (1973) of Virginia Commonwealth University explains:

> All organizations in society, whether business or non-business in nature, offer some kind of product to some kind of customer and, more or less, use marketing activities to further consumer acceptance. The product may be an idea, such as how to stop smoking; or a person, such as a political candidate; but it is nonetheless a product being offered to the market . . . in short, no organization, whether it be business or non-business, can avoid marketing. The choice is whether to do it well or poorly. (p. 8)

Many college admissions officers may not fully understand what marketing involves, according to a 1978 Murphy and McGarrity study. Of the 214 private college admissions officers surveyed, almost 90% believed marketing to be synonomous with promotion. Fewer than 3% stipulated that marketing is a combination of competitive strategies including product, price, physical distribution and promotion. Yet, from other information obtained in the survey, the authors concluded that as a whole, college admissions officers do have a good grasp of the full range of marketing variables. This is supported by the fact that each of the traditional four P's of the marketing mix has been altered in some way by many colleges to attract more students.

Numerous schools have changed their educational "product" to appeal to different segments of the market. For example, evening programs aimed at older adults are growing at many schools. Salem College in West Virginia has recently implemented an equestrian program to attract students (Jenkins, 1974). A small, midwestern women's liberal arts college has begun a "weekend college" program aimed at housewives and older women unable to attend college in the traditional fashion. Another former women's college is now admitting men and offers a new MBA program (Murphy & McGarrity, 1978).

Price, too, is being altered in an attempt to make gains in student enrollments. Many schools offer a variety of pricing packages that allow students to pay back tuition at a later date (Murphy & McGarrity, 1978). Some schools are implementing tuition rebates for the student who gets someone else to enroll at the college. Tennessee's Milligan College grants a $50 rebate per semester to every student recruiter who persuades someone else to enroll--provided they both remain at the school (Stent, 1977). Salem College gives $100 rebates (Jenkins, 1974). Complaints against these recruitment techniques have recently been filed with the National Assocation of College Admissions Counselors.

Even the physical distribution aspect of the marketing mix is being somewhat altered for new students. Increasingly, colleges are offering classes on military bases, industrial firm sites, in high schools, and sometimes presenting courses on television.

College marketing efforts in the promotion category of the marketing mix include a variety of activities. Mass telephoning campaigns, direct mail blitzes, college-day fairs, musical shows, and traveling recruiting vans are just a few examples of modern day promotional activities carried on by colleges and universities--all in an attempt to boost sagging enrollment figures.

Murphy and McGarrity (1978) found that the average private college in their study spent approximately 54% of its promotional budget on personal recruiting in high schools, 20% on direct mail recruiting, 10% on campus days, and a total of 16% on mass media advertising--including radio, newspaper, television, and magazine advertising.

The authors of that report state, "Mass media advertising does not appear to be a widely accepted promotional vehicle by private colleges

and universities at this time" (Murphy & McGarrity, 1978, p.254). In their study, 42% of the schools they surveyed used newspaper and magazine advertising, 16% used radio advertising, and 6% employed television advertising. The 1978 report goes on to say that it seems too soon to establish any trend in the use of paid advertising for recruitment purposes, yet it also indicates that as competition for prospective students has intensified, "there has been an increased willingness to employ advertising media, effectively used for commercial products" (p.255).

It should be noted that higher education is not alone among nonprofit institutions in resorting to sales mechanics. Charities, museums, libraries, and hospitals engage in extensive publicity campaigns. Subsequent to the ending of the draft, the armed services launched an intensive advertising effort. Additionally, both the U.S. Postal Service and the Catholic Church have recently employed aggressive ad campaigns (McAdams, 1975).

As a result of the impending decline in enrollments, colleges are now discovering the many advantages of advertising. The small school can become more visible. The innovative school can explain its inventiveness. A specialized program of study can reach the narrow segment of the population for which it was designed. Sidney Kobre, in his 1974 book Successful Public Relations for Colleges and Universities, points out additional advantages: A school can get the needed amount of space in the media, have the proper timing, emphasize the most important points, and receive the continuity the message needs (p.156). All of these advantages, Kobre asserts, make advertising more effective than

depending on a news editor to display a news release "properly." Advertising fills an essential role for both the school and the student.

Others disagree. Some college officers believe advertising to be a waste of money; some feel it is "undignified for an institution such as ours" (Kobre, 1974, p. 156). In a number of places, the municipal, state, and county higher educational institutions run into opposition for paid advertising from government officials who ultimately control the finances of the colleges. The philosophy of these officers is that advertising is a waste of taxpayer's money and has no place in the school's budget. Perhaps the "anti-advertising" feeling is most fiercely stated by David Treadwell (1973), Director of Admissions at Ohio Wesleyan University:

> Does the Kandy-Kolored Katalogue, Pepsodent-Smile approach work? It doesn't seem so. More and more money is being spent on catalogs and mailings and parties and, well, selling. And more colleges have empty beds. Why? Why aren't students being sold? Because education isn't toothpaste . . . students aren't starry-eyed children . . . they don't want the hard sell. They've heard it and seen it on television and everywhere else for their entire lives. The hard sell approach not only doesn't work, it repels. (p. 16)

Yet, a number of schools are presently employing mass media advertising and are pleased with the results. Current academic literature contains numerous reports from colleges and universities of all different sizes from all across the nation.

Among the biggest reported spenders in higher education advertising is New York University, which in the spring of 1973 began spending upwards of $150,000 annually for an advertising program ("Sophisticated Sell," 1974). The university's campaign was a subtle program focusing on the benefits of living and learning in New York City. One poster

boasts, "If you want to study the best of man and his works, there is a place for you like no other. New York." The first year the ads ran, freshmen applications were up 20% over the previous year.

Other schools have tried music to attract high school graduates. The University of Akron had a radio commercial backed by folk music, while Franconia College had one supported by Mendelssohn. Mississippi State gave away records in the summer of 1973 proclaiming, to a driving rock beat, that M.S. is the "groovy place to get it all together" ("Recruitment Rock," 1973, p. 102). Chicago's Loyola University saturated the airwaves with an original jingle asking:

> Does the world need a better vision
> or a better way to see?
> Would you rather find an apple
> or learn to plant a tree?
> The question is now, the answer is life
> and life's what Loyola's all about.
> ("Recruitment Rock," 1973, p. 102)

Faculty at Loyola seemed pleased, but the student newspaper was outraged. Calling the ads "degrading and embarrassing," an editorial continued, "Loyola is not a used car dealership or a carry-out Chinese restaurant. . . . Aren't we a university?" ("Recruitment Rock," 1973, p. 102).

Winona State, a public Minnesota institution with fewer than 5,000 students, recently spent $40,000 in a state-wide campaign (DuFresne & Nasstrom, 1978). Newspapers, magazines, and television were employed along with full-size purple and white billboards announcing, "Winona State--Your public university in Southeastern Minnesota." The following year's freshman class experienced a sharp increase which the school's president attributes to the ad campaign.

Newspaper ads and twenty-second radio spots were the main substance of a program conducted by Eastern Baptist College in 1972 (Zulker, 1972). Three different print ads were used in the campaign. One asks, "Have you met any great men lately?" and then goes on to describe the great men you can meet at the school. Another, which has received student criticism because of its so-called cornieness, states, "When class-time runs out, we continue at the Prof's house." The third, and perhaps the most popular among students and faculty, features a photo of a girl and says, "Sue Vadis leads a double life--one as a social welfare worker in the inner city and one as a student on campus" (Zulker, 1972, p. 315).

The University of Akron not only conducted an ad campaign, but also sought to measure the effectiveness of the effort (Stear, 1976). More than 2000 incoming freshmen were given a questionnaire which sought answers to questions concerning awareness of the school's advertising, message recall, and comparative media effectiveness. Over 87% of incoming U. A. freshmen had seen or heard the school's advertising. Almost half of the group were able to repeat the slogan fairly well. Newspaper and radio provided the most coverage for the school; 78% of the students heard the ads on radio while 63% had seen the newspaper ads.

From these examples it is obvious that numerous schools are spending large amounts of money on mass media advertising. Yet the merits of advertising on the part of colleges and universities are often vigorously contested. To its defenders, advertising for recruitment is a rational, intelligent response to a difficult position. To its opponents, such advertising is wasteful, misleading, undignified, and sometimes unlawful (McAdams, 1975). Neither position has been adequately supported by research, and many unanswered questions surround university advertising.

Perhaps the most basic question deals with economics--whether or not advertising done to recruit students works. Does it bring in additional people? Does it aid the school financially?

A preliminary look at the literature suggests that it does. Almost every published report concludes with the fact that more students enrolled at a school after an advertising effort than before it. However there is no evidence to show that this increase is caused by advertising. In addition, the schools that published reports of their advertising efforts are probably unrepresentative of all schools that have used advertising. It is doubtful that schools with poor or mediocre results from advertising campaigns would publicize the results as avidly as the schools with success stories.

Some believe that advertising increases the inefficiency of the higher education system. When one school advertises, its competitors must do the same, causing a vicious circle of counter-advertising. As a result, thousands of dollars which could have been spent on classroom facilities or research are wasted on unnecessary publicity campaigns.

A final area of concern as to the economics of advertising is the fear that its use will only help the rich get richer (McAdams, 1975). The small school, as a result of its inability to fund adequate advertising programs, will suffer at the hands of the large, wealthy university. The large school can properly explain its many advantages; the small school suffers because of its proportionately small budget.

To some degree competition necessarily results in waste and duplication of effort. Nevertheless, those who favor a free market argue for the benefits of competition--a better educational product at a lower price.

But should the rules of the free market be applied to higher education? Should price and profit margins be important concepts for the university? Should dollar signs plot the course of higher education? The answers to these questions lie not so much in economics as in one's conception of the role of higher education and in one's ethics and personal beliefs.

When the subjects advertising and ethics merge, an age-old question arises: Does advertising compel us to buy that which we neither need nor want? If it does, naive high school students are surely an unethical target for college ads. Yet if advertisements merely tell us what the market has to offer, these same students are being given an invaluable service.

A 1974 Haller study reveals the attitudes many students have concerning advertising. Of a 500-student sample selected from colleges in five metropolitan areas, 45% felt that advertising is not a good information source. Eighty percent agreed that advertising makes people buy things they don't need. Students may feel just as strongly that college ads are misleading.

Clearly the public's view of advertising determines whether or not it is unethical. A Yale Law Journal looks at the public's view of advertising in general and partially explains why the American Bar Association is so concerned with its own advertising:

> Commentators maintain that the public would lose confidence in lawyers, the law, and the courts if the bar were seen as merely another commercial enterprise. . . . There is additional concern that the performance of the legal profession might be weakened by the tendency of the public to choose attorneys on the basis of their advertising programs rather than their professional competence. ("Advertising, Solicitation," 1972, p. 2237)

These same concerns are easily applied to higher education.

Many reports show Americans to be cynical about advertising, finding the practice distasteful. Others show the public to be so inured to ads that they would be unlikely to distinguish among those doing the promoting (McAdams, 1975). Engineers and bankers engage in advertising and maintain widespread respect. The pervasiveness of advertising attests to its acceptance by the bulk of the population. Is educational advertising unethical or unprofessional? Only the public can answer that question, and as the practice becomes more widespread, surely it will.

A third area of concern surrounding higher education and advertising is the law. Is advertising done by colleges and universities illegal? Is it false advertising?

That which constitutes false advertising is, at best, cloudy. In general, the law forbids false, deceptive, and unfair advertising. Thus any representation or promise is unlawful if it has a tendency or capacity to mislead. Many would say that young people are being misled when they are encouraged to earn a college degree as a passport to life-long security and happiness. Blanche Blank, professor of political science at Hunter College, comments:

> We are selling colleges to the youth group of America as a take-off pad for the material good life for which we are already infamous in that population circle. College is literally advertised and packaged as a means for getting more money through better jobs at the same moment Harvard graduates are taking jobs as taxi-drivers. This is a seriously irresponsible promotion in many ways. It is the perversion of the true spirit of a university, a perversion of a humane social ethic, and, at bottom, a patent fraud. (1972, p. 261).

The Federal Trade Commission has charged four truck driving schools with misrepresenting themselves to students and has investigated the practices of more than 300 vocational schools (Trade Regulation Reports, 1973).

Of course, the practices of these schools is not legitimate grounds for condemning all accredited four-year institutions. Still, evidence of deceptive abuses is surfacing. One midwestern college produced a promotional brochure which pictures a classroom building next to a scenic lake--yet there is no lake within miles of the campus (Jenkins, 1974).

Other colleges are employing professional admissions assistance which makes use of misleading phone calls. The potential student receives a call leaving him with the impression that he has spoken with a member of the admissions staff of the campus in question. Actually the call is placed from a telephone bank in a professional recruiter's office (Jenkins, 1974). As the enrollment competition grows, the problem of civil and criminal wrongs on the part of overzealous or desperate colleges will be even more intensified.

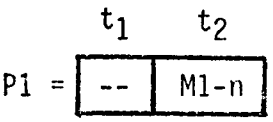
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Research Design

This study is a one-time survey of admissions officers of private four-year colleges and universities in the southeast United States (Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, and West Virginia), carried out in April of 1980. This research design was chosen because it seemed most appropriate to obtain a collection of descriptive, comparative data concerning the current use of advertising by colleges and universities. Such a design permits, in addition to pure description, explanation and a considerable amount of exploration. The relationship between variables can also be examined.

Using the notational description developed by Haskins (1967), this research design can be described as a one-shot descriptive survey of one population and is portrayed graphically in Figure 2.



P1 = four-year private colleges in the Southeast.

t_1 = time before the survey was administered.

t_2 = time in which the survey was administered.

M1-n = measurement - the elicitation of data by means of a mail questionnaire.

Figure 2. One-shot descriptive survey of one sample (Haskins, 1967).

Population and Sampling

Four-year, private colleges and universities were chosen as the subjects of this research because, generally speaking, they are having more difficulty recruiting students than less expensive public institutions and because they are free to use funds on marketing techniques such as advertising.

The survey was limited to schools in the Southeast because financial circumstances required that only a small number of questionnaires be mailed. For an exploratory design, a study conducted in one section of the country is superior to an attempt to study all schools across the nation with an inadequate sample size.

At this point, an explanation of the term "population" is appropriate. Babbie (1973) distinguishes between sample frame and population. He defines a sampling frame as the list of elements from which a probability sample is selected. Only if such lists include every member of the population are the population and sampling frame identical. In this study, a sample was not chosen from the population. Questionnaires were sent to 160 schools, or all accredited, private four-year colleges and universities in eleven southeastern states, as listed in the 1980 World Almanac and Book of Facts published by the Newpaper Enterprise Association of New York.

Questionnaire Construction

Pretesting the questionnaire a month before the actual survey revealed that some questions should be reworded for clarity and that a question should be added regarding the size of the school. For the pretest, questionnaires were mailed to all 20 private four-year

schools in Arkansas and Maryland (states not included in the sample, but believed to be similar to the population) and 13 were returned, for a response rate of 65%.

It was also determined from the pretest that the return envelope for the questionnaire should be coded in order to determine which schools were affiliated with any religious denomination or organization. Because of the difficulty in constructing an unambiguous, easy-to-answer question regarding religious affiliation, it was determined that this information could be obtained more easily and more accurately by coding the return envelope. When the questionnaire was returned, the name of the school was determined by means of the code, and the needed information--whether or not the school had any religious affiliation--was obtained from the 1980 World Almanac and Book of Facts.

Questionnaires were sent to the director of admissions at each school because through the literature review it was determined that admissions officers generally deal more directly with advertising recruitment efforts than other administrators. Individual names of each admissions director were obtained from the 1979 Fall Directory of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers and from various college catalogs. Envelopes and cover letters were both addressed to these specific individuals, thus increasing the chances for a high response rate (Erdos, 1970).

The questionnaire, which consisted of sixteen main questions and several subquestions, was divided into four sections: a) enrollment status, b) use of advertising, c) advertising effectiveness, and d) budget.

Instead of numbering the questions one through sixteen, questions in each section were numbered independently of questions in other sections. That is, the first question in each section was number one, the second, two, and so on. In this way it appears to the respondent that there are fewer questions to answer. Thus the questionnaire appears easier to answer and a higher response rate results (Erdos, 1970).

Data-gathering Method

The instrument used to gather data for this study was an 8½" by 14" questionnaire, printed on back and front. The instrument was folded once to give the appearance of four short questionnaire pages.

A mail questionnaire was chosen instead of a telephone survey or face-to-face interviewing because it will yield basically the same information at less cost to the sponsoring agency (Erdos, 1970). Respondents to this survey were located across an eleven-state area, making it extremely expensive to attempt a face-to-face interview or a telephone survey.

Using a mail questionnaire, respondents may answer at their leisure. There is no interviewer bias with a mail questionnaire, and there is a better chance of getting a truthful, thoughtful reply to each question (Oppenheim, 1966).

Some limitations are associated with the mail survey method. Potential respondents are often not sufficiently motivated to answer and return the questionnaire. To partially offset this drawback, the cover letter requested respondents to return the questionnaire within one week, and a self-addressed stamped envelope was enclosed in which to return the questionnaire. Additionally, the cover letter offered a

copy of the survey results to those who returned the completed questionnaire and requested a copy. Since the nature of the study was assumed to be of interest to the respondents, this report seemed to be an appropriate reward.

In a mail survey, response may be biased because people who respond may differ from those who do not respond (Nafziger and White, 1963). In general, the more opinionated or interested may reply, while the uninterested and apathetic may not. Again, it is assumed that admissions officers have at least a moderate interest in the recent marketing efforts of colleges, and their interest will partially offset this disadvantage of mail survey research.

Another drawback of mail survey research is that the intended respondent may not be the addressee. In this study, envelopes were addressed to specific persons in an effort to reduce the number of other persons answering them. Additionally, it is possible that the director of admissions at the time of the publication of the 1979 Fall Directory of the American Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers may not be the director of admissions at the time of the survey mailing in April of 1980.

In a mail survey, incomplete answers and item omissions may occur, whereas in a telephone or personal interview, this problem can largely be avoided. However, it is still possible to get a representative sample of the larger population and a considerable amount of descriptive information with this data-gathering method.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

A 63% response rate was achieved by the cut-off date three weeks after the questionnaires were mailed out. Of the 101 questionnaires returned, one was not useable, having been returned from a school that had closed in the Fall of 1979.

Of the respondents, 67% do use some sort of mass media advertising to aid in student recruitment; 33% do not. Of the 33 schools not using mass media advertising, 66% (22) said they had never considered implementing the tool. Thirty percent (10) had considered using advertising, but rejected the idea. Five of those ten schools mentioned a poor cost efficiency as the reason for not using advertising. One school had used advertising previously, but with little response, and discontinued its use. The remaining four schools gave no reason for not implementing advertising to aid in student recruitment.

Eighty-five of the one hundred respondents believe that colleges nationwide are generally experiencing a shortage of students (see Figure 3). Of the twelve respondents who do not believe there is an overall shortage of students, two gave unsolicited comments stating that the high quality student is in short supply.

Fifty-nine respondents said they did not expect a shortage of students at their schools in the next three years (see Figure 4), and gave a variety of reasons for their optimism. Twelve respondents do not believe they face a shortage of students because of good

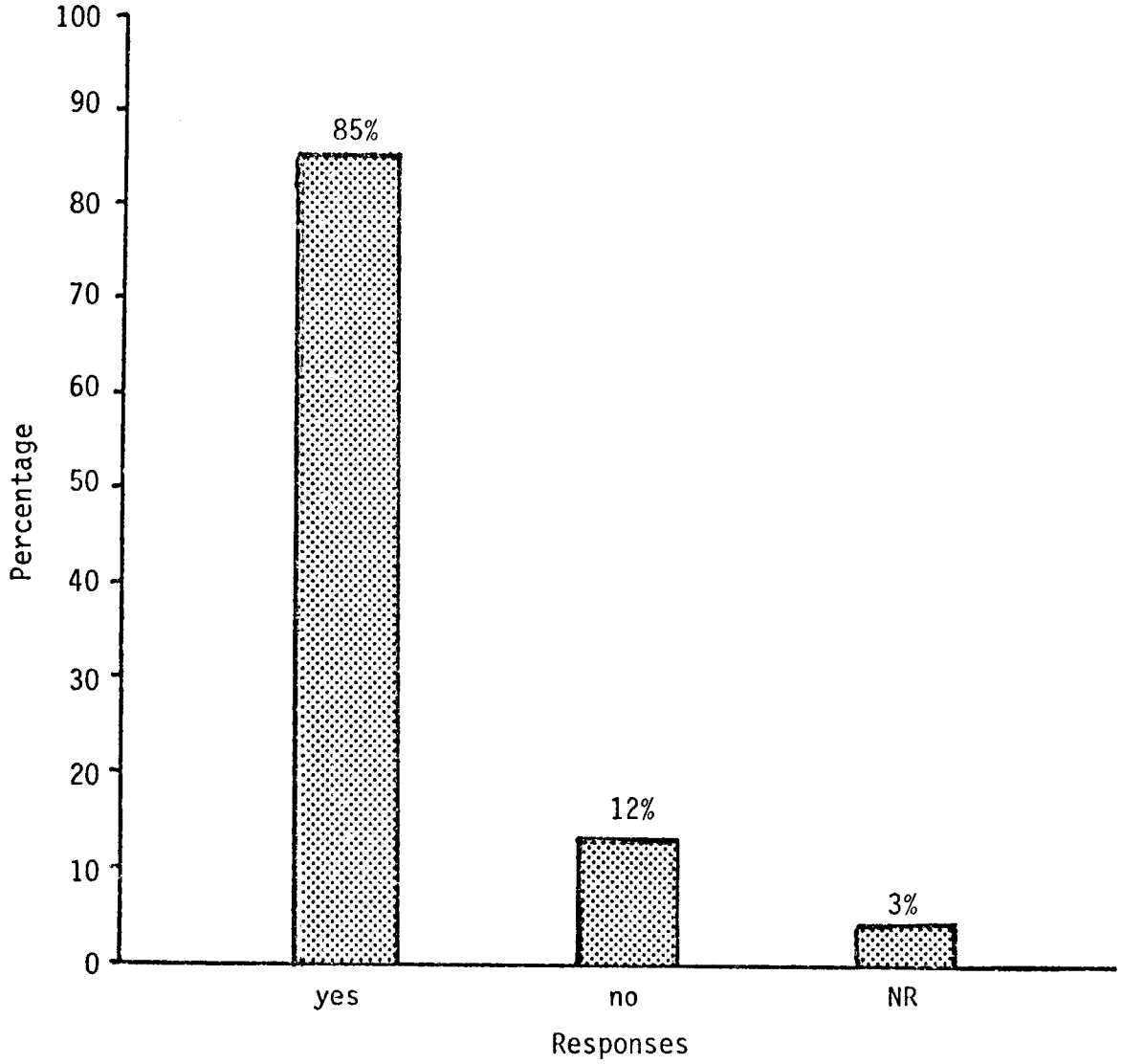


Figure 3. Distribution of responses to the question, "In your opinion, are private schools nationwide generally experiencing a shortage of students?"

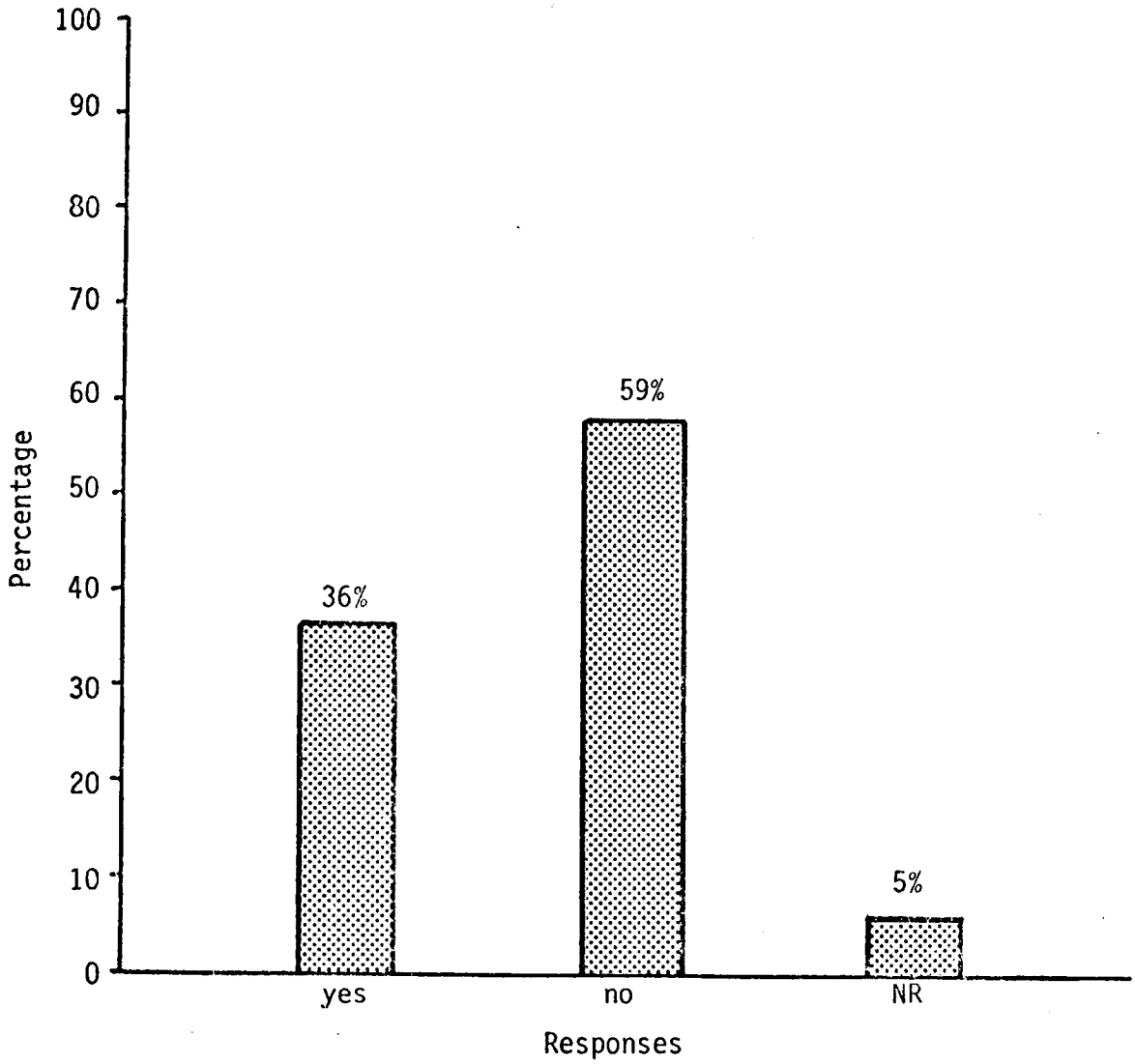


Figure 4. Distribution of responses to the question, "Do you believe your school will experience a shortage of students in the next three years?"

recruiting methods and hard work; nine attributed their outlook to special programs of study at their schools; nine others mentioned the good locations of the schools; seven mentioned the support of their church; and seven others mentioned a strong reputation as the reason the schools do not expect a shortage of students in the near future.

Although 85% of the respondents stated they believed schools nationwide are experiencing a shortage of students, only 11% reported a decline in the number of students applying to their schools. Sixty percent reported an increase in the number applying in the past three years, and 26% reported the number had stayed constant (see Figure 5).

Of the 67 schools that use advertising, 15% (10) gave a negative response to one or more parts of the question, "Generally speaking, do you believe advertising for students is ethical? tasteful? necessary? beneficial for students? beneficial for the college?"

Of the 33 schools that do not use advertising as a student recruitment tool, 54% gave a negative response to one or more parts of the question. Five schools, none of whom use mass media advertising, answered "no" to each of the five parts of the question (see Figure 6).

Though approximately three-fourths of the respondents feel the practice is ethical, tasteful, and beneficial, some admissions officers have strong reservations about the use of advertising by colleges and universities. One admissions officer wrote, " It (advertising) would lower the image of the school. Parents would definitely question the strength of a school that must advertise to attract students."

Another said, "We do not approve of such practices under any circumstances."

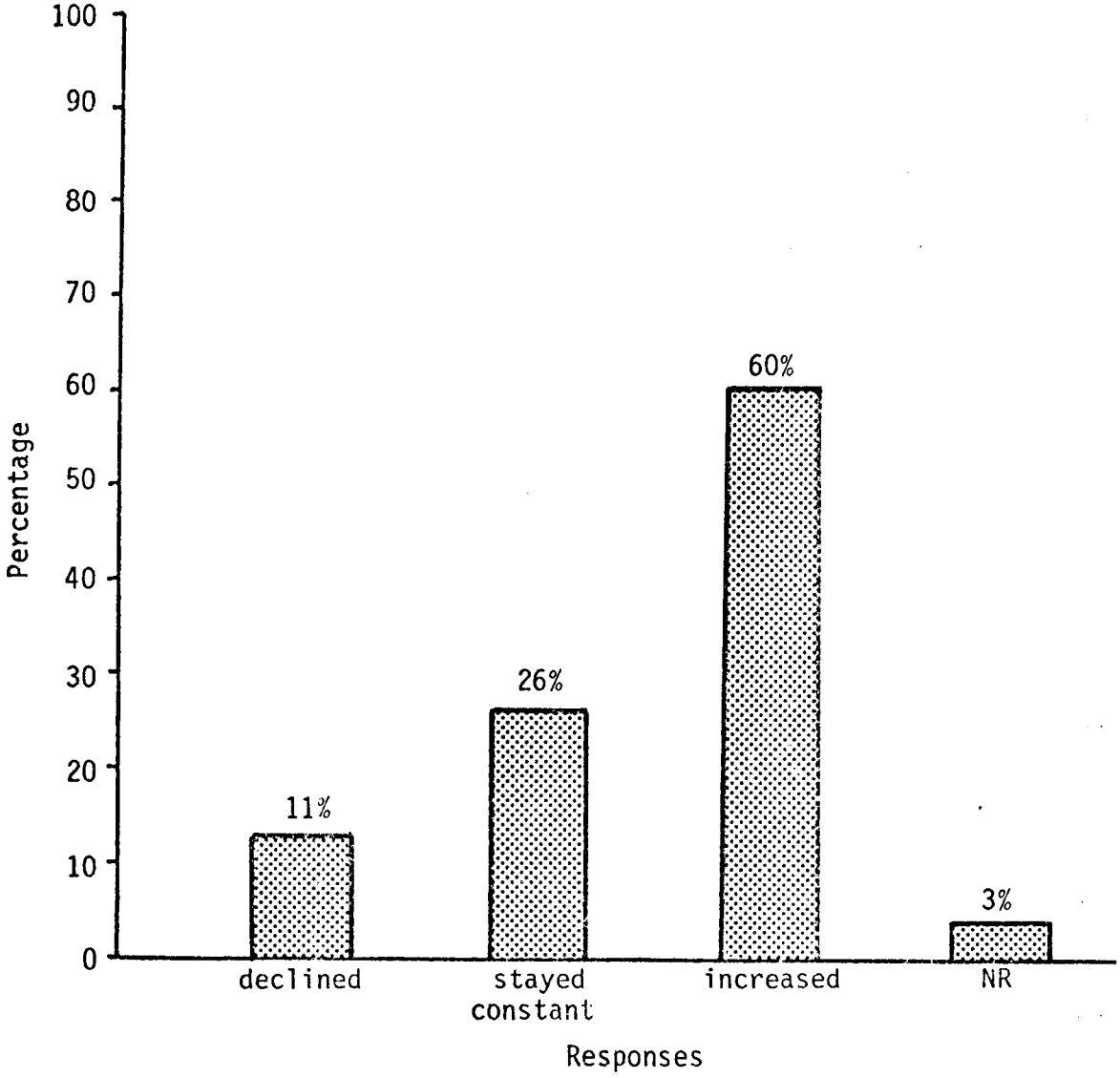


Figure 5. Distribution of responses to the question, "In the past three years, has the number of students applying to your school declined, stayed constant, or increased?"

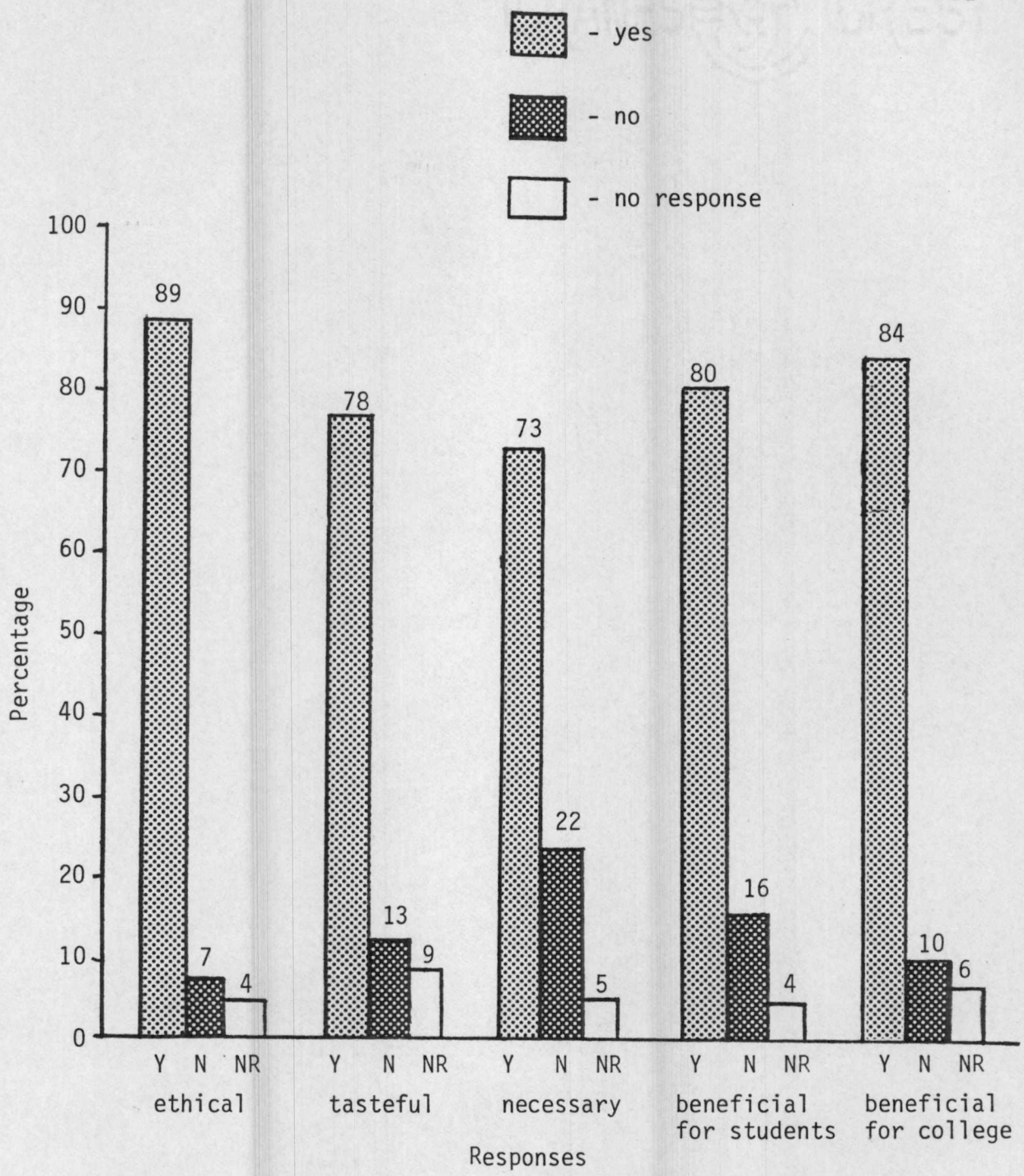


Figure 6. Distribution of responses to the question, "Generally speaking, do you believe advertising for students is ethical? tasteful? necessary? beneficial for students? beneficial for the college?"

A third voiced concern over the economics of college and university advertising, writing, "I would hate to see a recruiting war begun in which only the rich would survive."

Thus, even though many schools now employ advertising, a few are not convinced of its usefulness or tastefulness.

Seventy-two percent of respondent schools stated that advertising is either very useful or somewhat useful as a student recruitment tool. Twenty-six percent felt it has little use, while one stated it has no use at all (see Figure 7).

Of the 24 schools who believe advertising is very useful as a student recruitment tool, 67% (16) do use advertising and 33% (8) do not. Of the 48 schools stating that advertising is a somewhat useful tool, 79% (38) do use advertising, while 21% (10) do not. Twenty-six schools believe advertising has little value; 42% (11) of those use advertising while 58% (15) do not.

Fifty-eight percent (39) of the schools that use advertising believe it to be a somewhat useful recruitment tool, compared to 26% (9) of the schools not using advertising that believe it is somewhat useful.

Seventeen percent (9) of the schools implementing advertising believe it has little use as a recruitment tool. Forty-one percent (14) of the schools not using advertising believe it has little use (see Figure 8).

Over 80% of the schools that use mass media advertising have begun their programs in the past ten years; 52% have used advertising only in the past five years. The average length of time schools have used advertising is 6.9 years. The mode is three years, and the median,

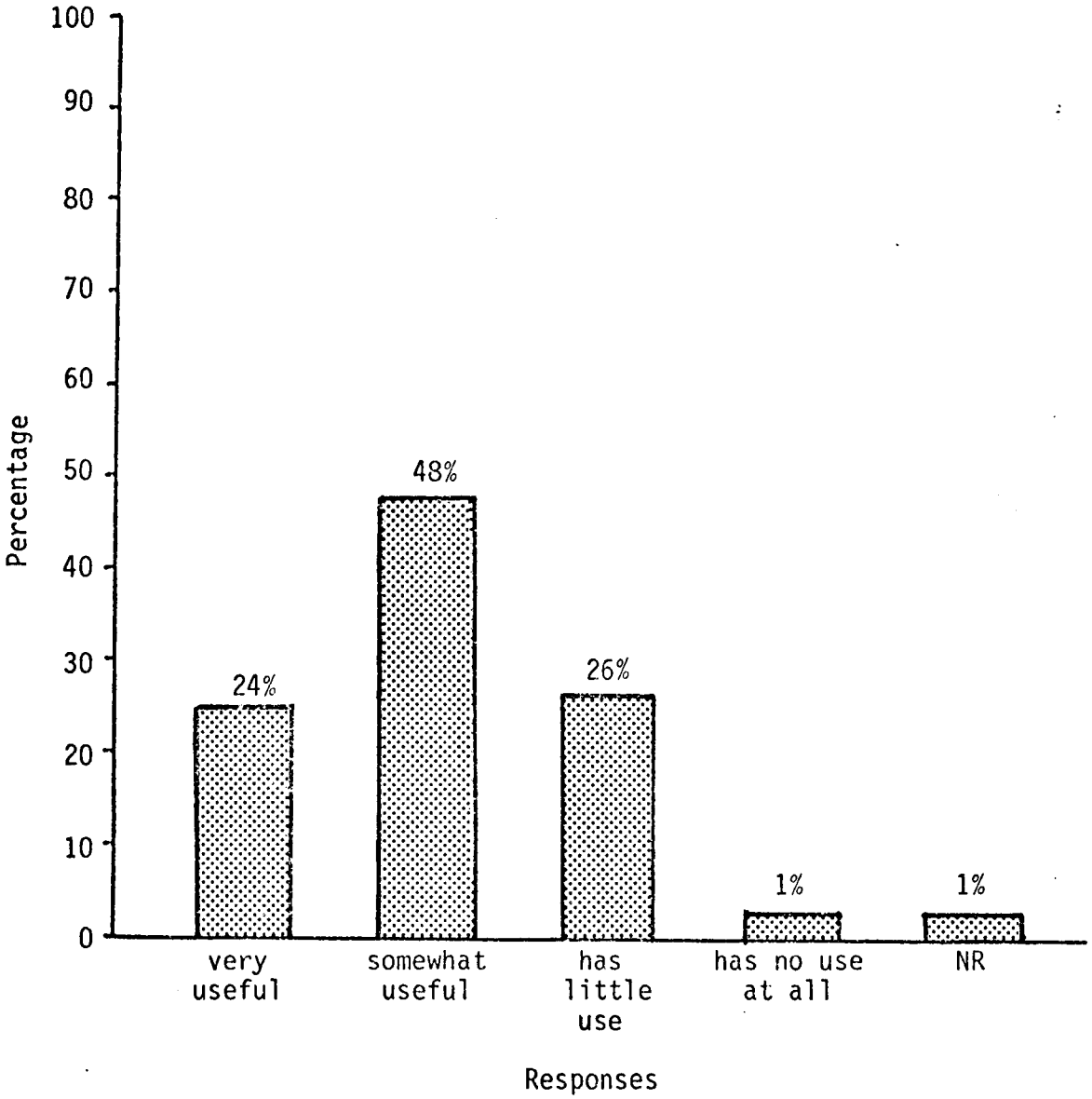


Figure 7. Distribution of responses to the question, "What is your opinion of mass media advertising's usefulness as a student recruitment tool?"

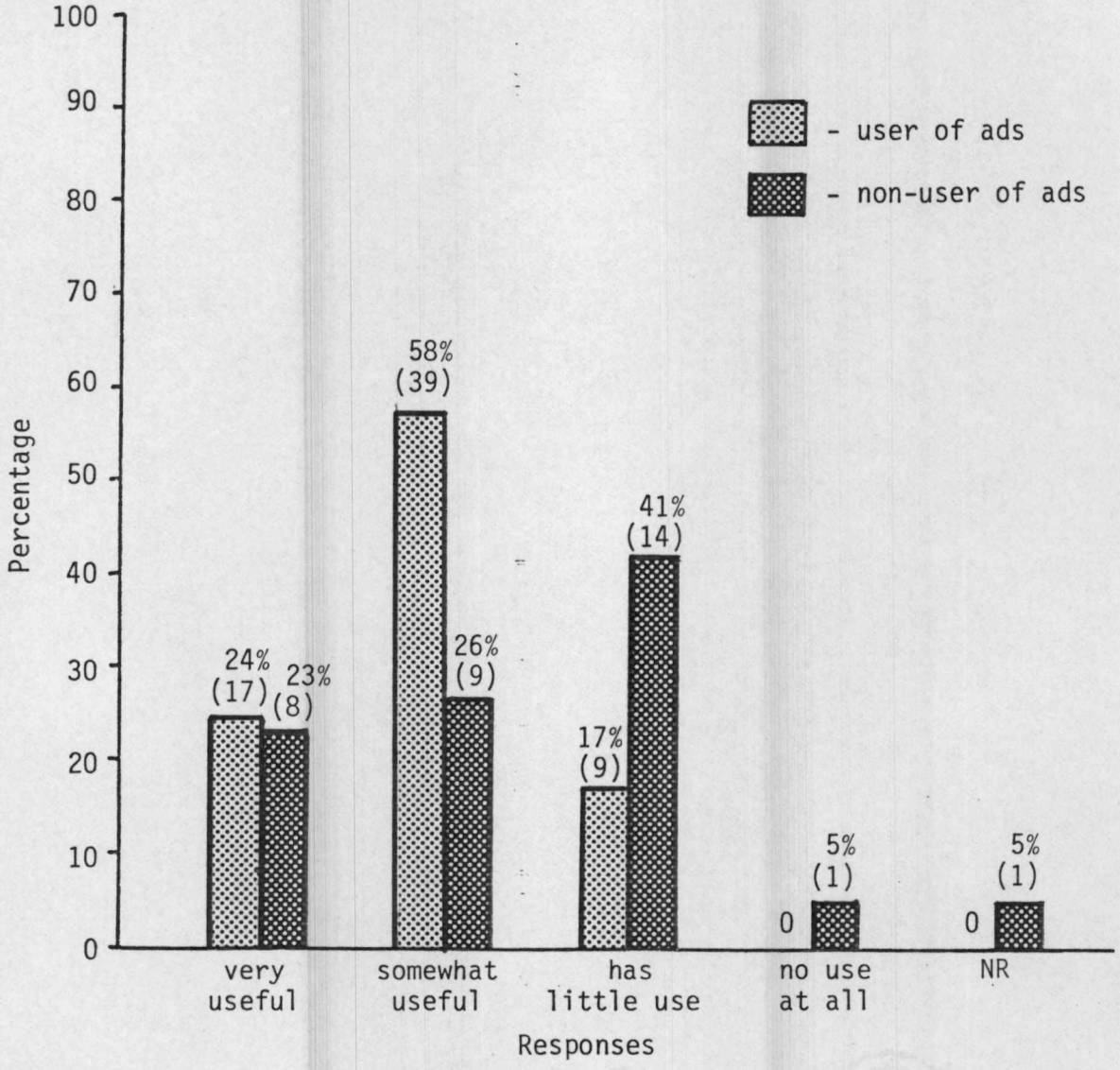


Figure 8. Comparison of perceived usefulness of advertising between schools using advertising and schools not using the tool.

five years (see Figure 9). No relationship was found between the length of time schools have used advertising and how effective the schools judged the tool.

Ninety-three percent (58) of the schools that advertise direct ads toward high school students. Of those 58 schools, an average of 75% of their ads are directed toward the high school student group.

Sixty-two percent (39) of schools that advertise direct ads toward parents of students. Of those 39 schools, an average of 26% of their ads are directed to parents of students.

Sixty-one percent (38) direct ads toward other groups. Of those 38 schools, 34% of the ads are aimed at these other groups (see Figure 10). Other groups mentioned were the adult education market (12 schools), junior college or transfer students (6 schools), pastors and high school counselors (5 schools), the community (2 schools), and alumni (2 schools).

Thirty-one percent (21) of the schools use an outside agency for help in preparing advertisements. All judged their ads as very (14%) or somewhat (86%) effective. Of the 46 schools not using an outside agency, 11% (5) judged their ads as not effective, 75% (35) considered them somewhat effective, and 14% (7) considered them very effective.

Sixteen of the twenty-one schools (76%) who use an outside agency get help with creative services. Ten schools (47%) get help with media placement, while three schools (14%) are aided in the research area (see Figure 11).

Of the 67 respondents that implement advertising to aid in student recruitment, 58% (39) formally evaluate the effectiveness of their programs. Forty-two percent (28) do not have a formal evaluation program.

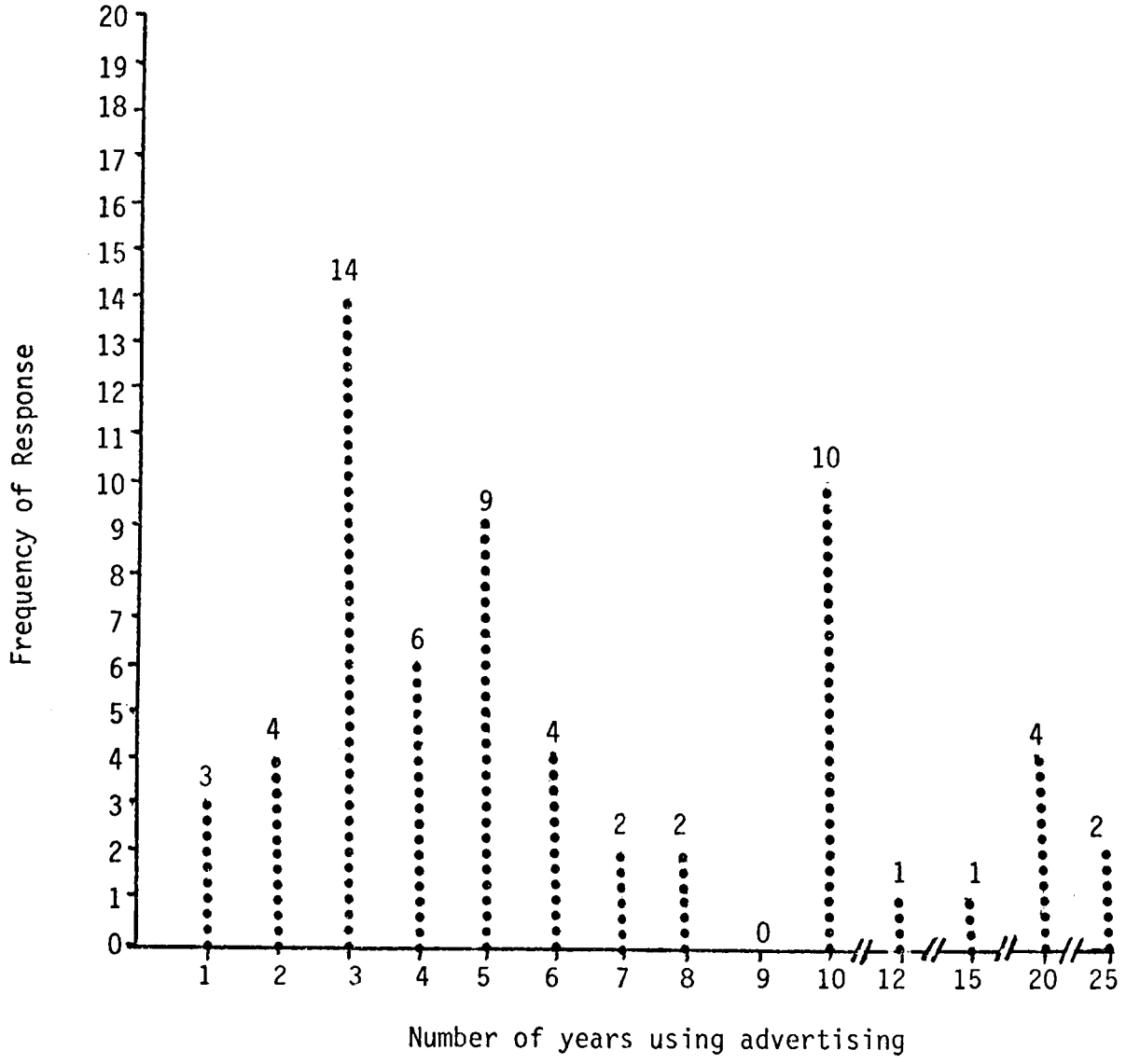


Figure 9. Distribution of responses to the question, "How long has your school used advertising for student recruitment?"

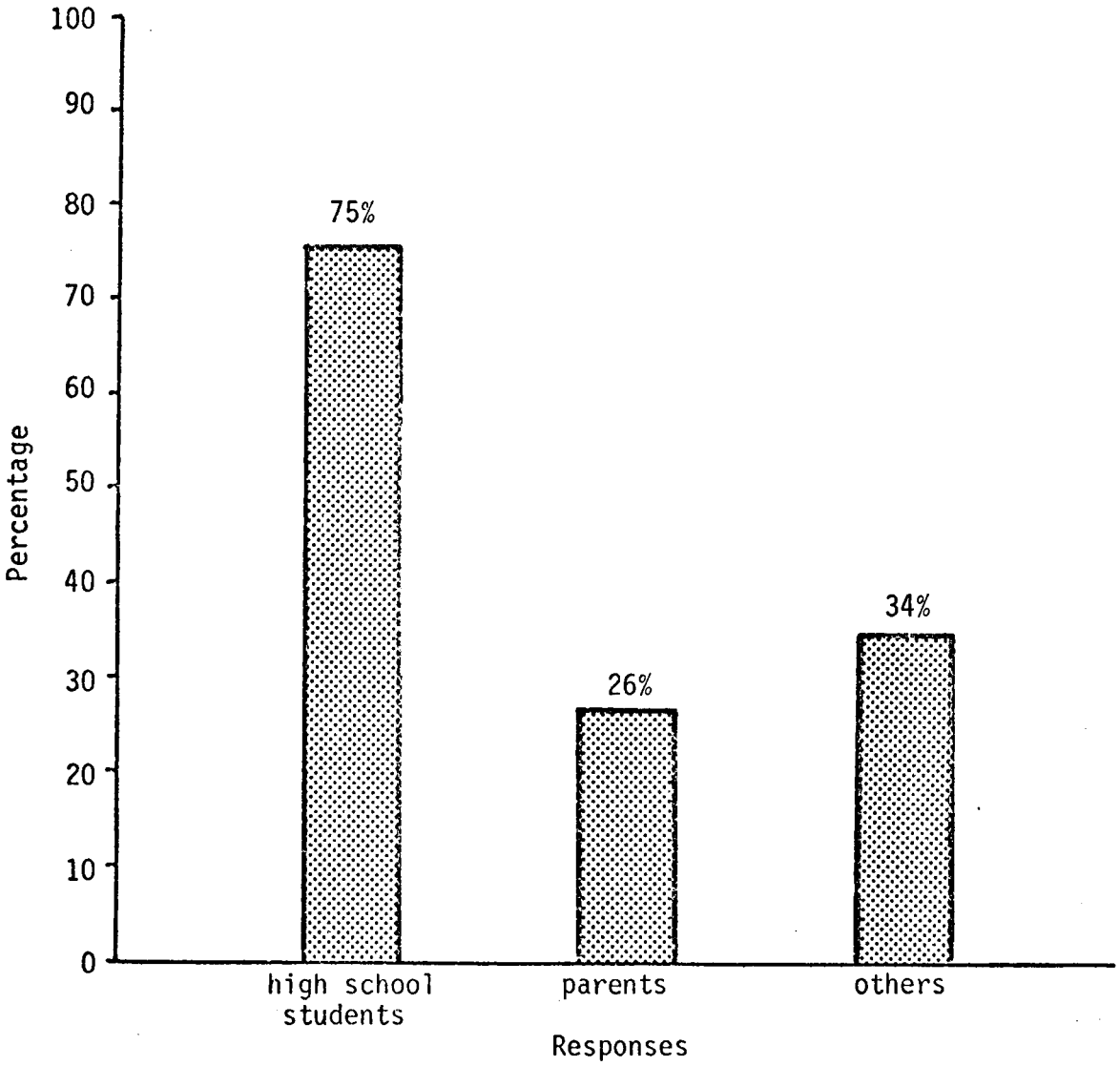


Figure 10. Distribution of responses to the question, "What percentage of your ads are directed toward each of the following groups: Toward high school students? Toward parents? Toward others?

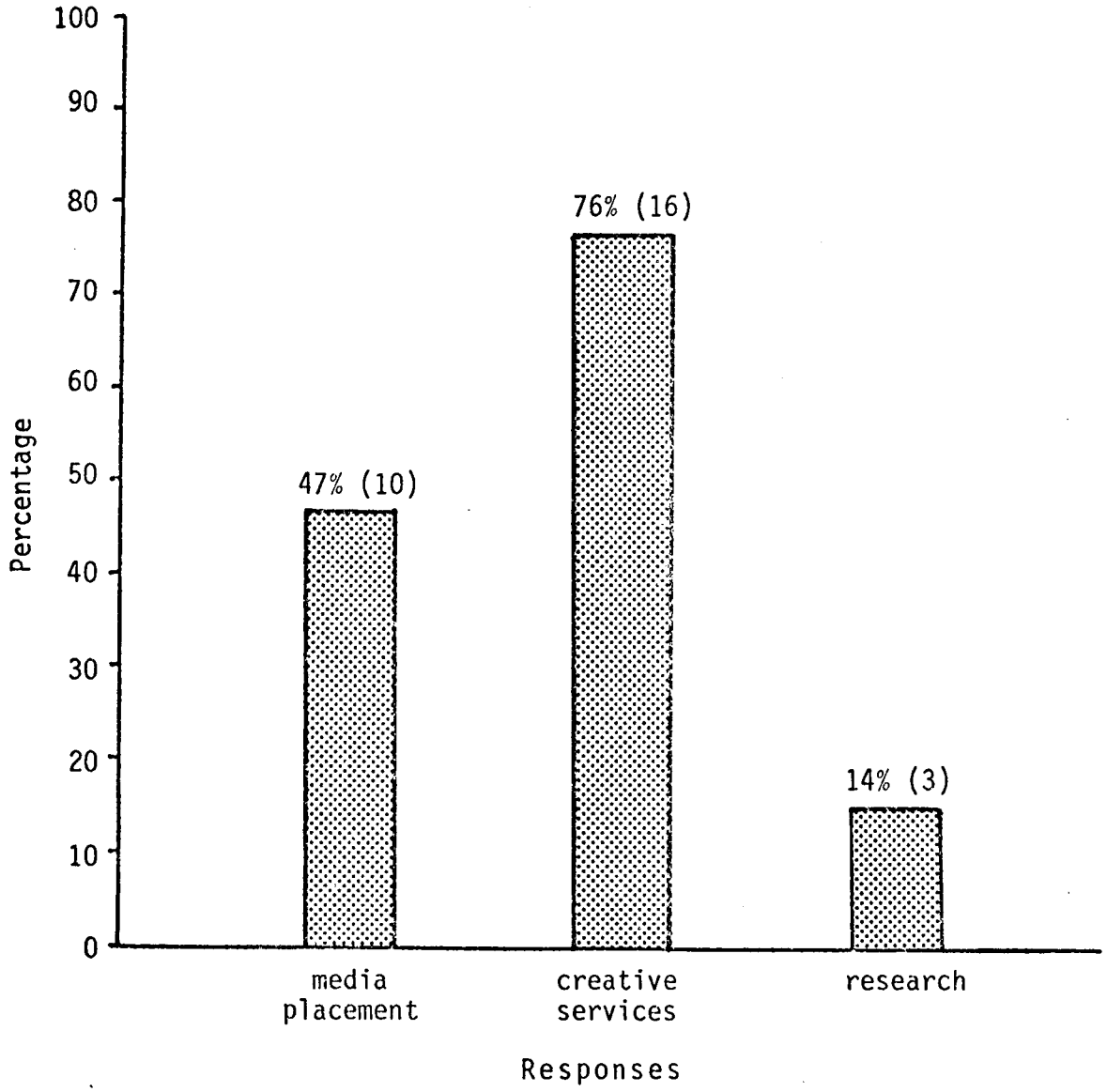


Figure 11. Distribution of responses to the question, "What type of work does the agency do for you?"

Seventy-two percent (28) of the 39 respondents that do formally evaluate their advertising program use the number of applications as the basis for judging the effectiveness of the program; 56% (22) use the number of enrollments as the basis; 77% (30) use the number of inquiries as the basis for evaluation (see Figure 12). Forty-three percent (17) use as the basis for judging the effectiveness of the program all three given criteria--the number of applications, enrollments, and inquiries.

Sixty-six percent (26) of schools that formally evaluate their advertising programs judged their programs as somewhat effective. Twenty-six percent (10) believe their programs to be very effective while 5% (2) judged their programs not effective (see Figure 13).

Of the 28 schools that do not formally evaluate the effectiveness of their advertising programs, 89% (25) believe them to be somewhat effective. Eleven percent (3) judged their programs as not effective.

Thirty-six percent (24) of advertising programs are jointly funded from more than one office or department. Aside from the admissions office, public relations office, and development office, other sources for advertising program funding are the academic dean's office (3 schools), publications department (2 schools), and continuing education office (1 school). Sixty-nine percent (46) of college and university advertising programs are funded through the admissions office alone (see Figure 14).

One-third (22) of colleges that advertise to attract students spend less than $2,499 a year (see Figure 15). Eighteen percent (4) of those 22 schools judged their programs not effective. The remaining

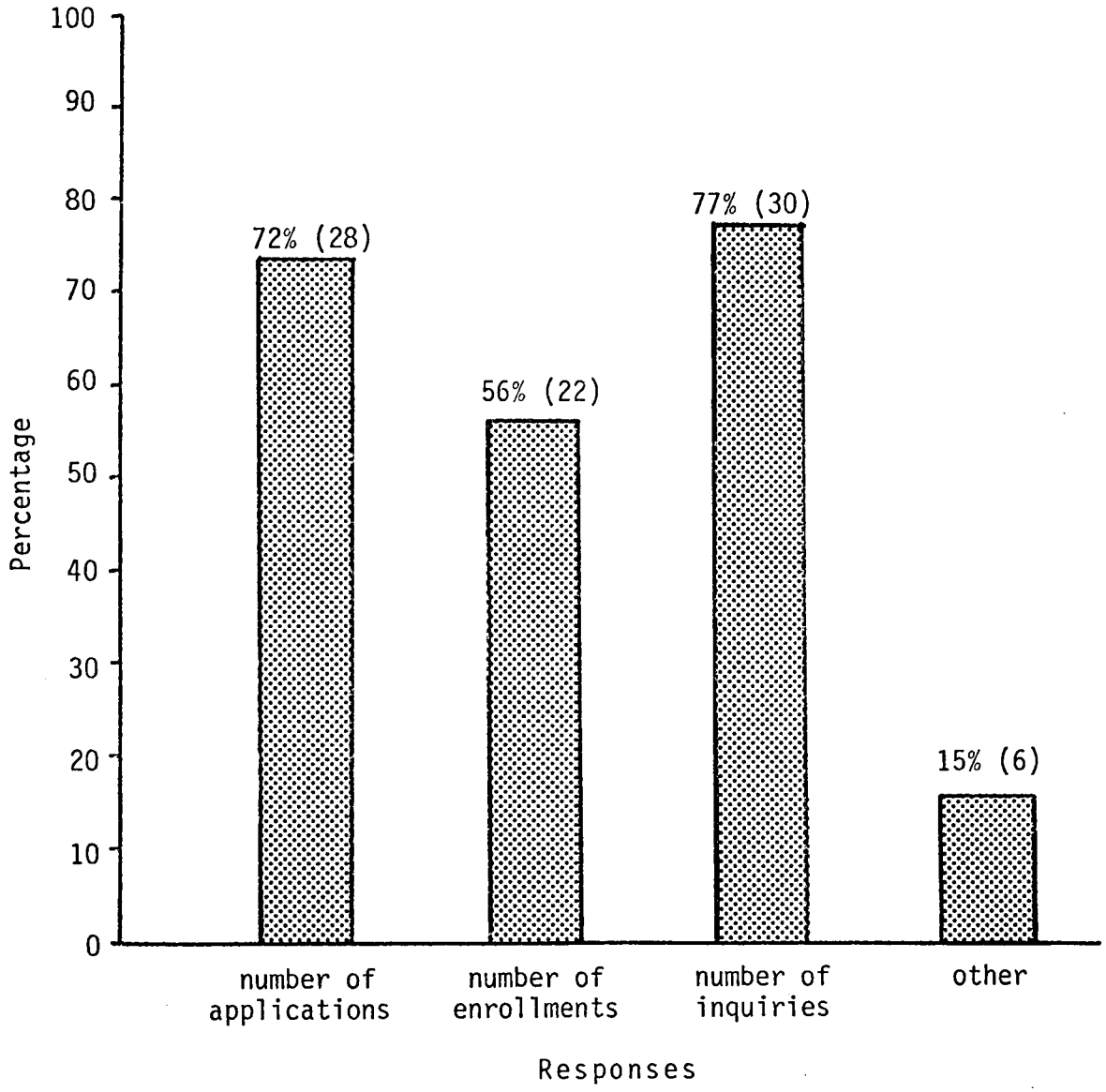


Figure 12. Distribution of responses to the question, "What is the basis for judging the effectiveness of your advertising program?"

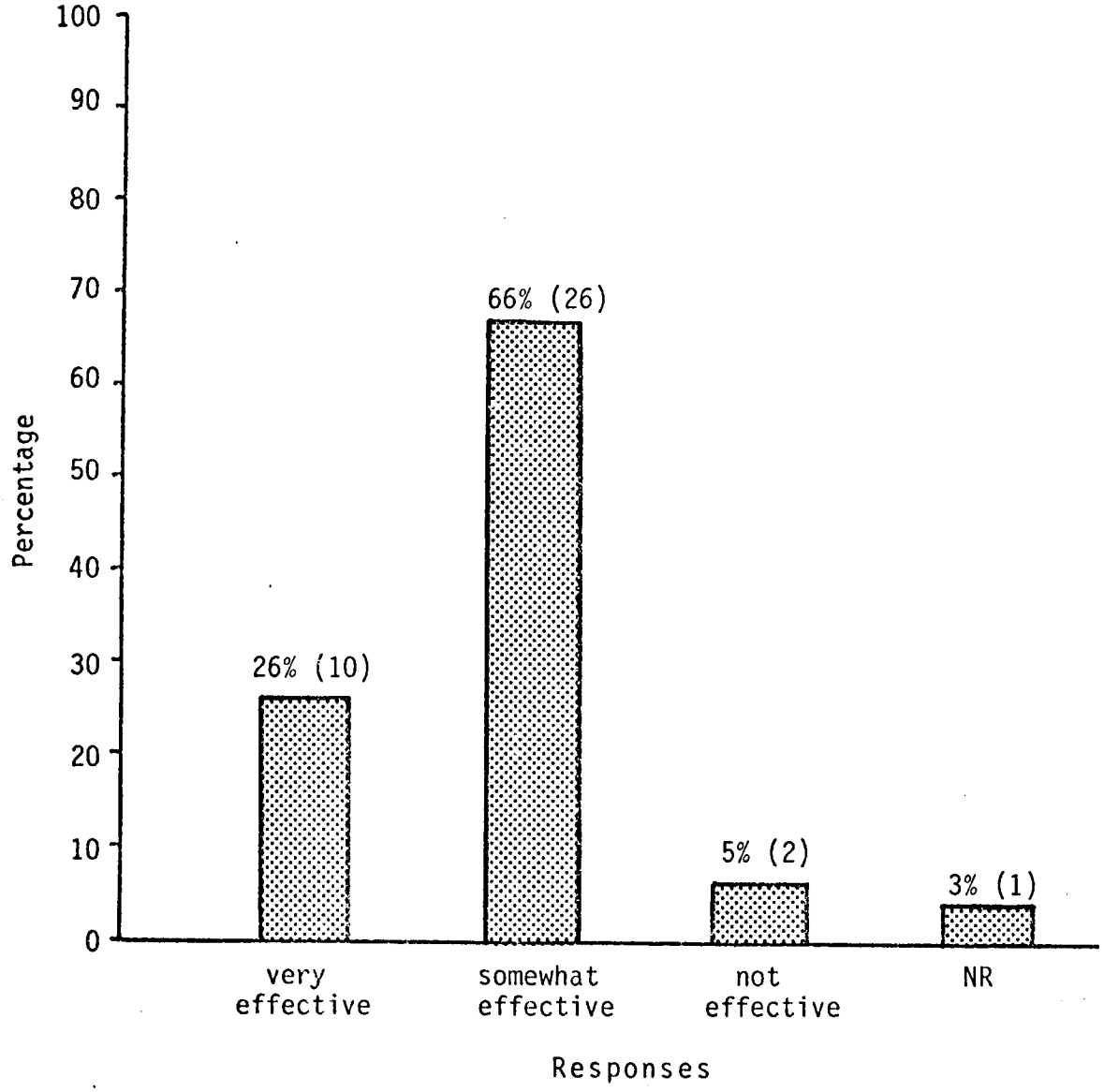


Figure 13. Distribution of responses to the question, "On the basis of this evaluation, how effective would you say your advertising program is?"

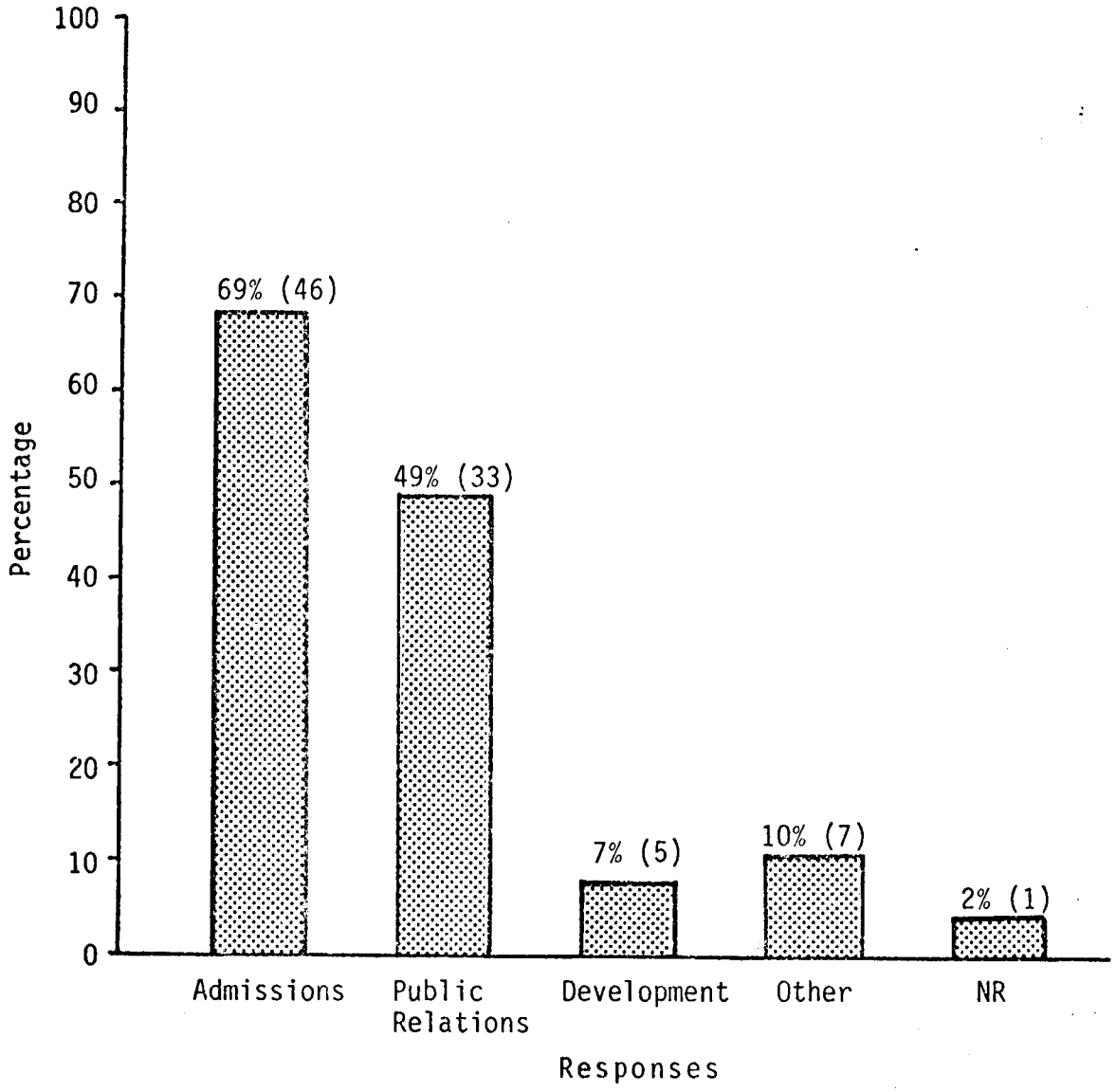


Figure 14. Distribution of responses to the question, "Through what office or department is your advertising program funded?"

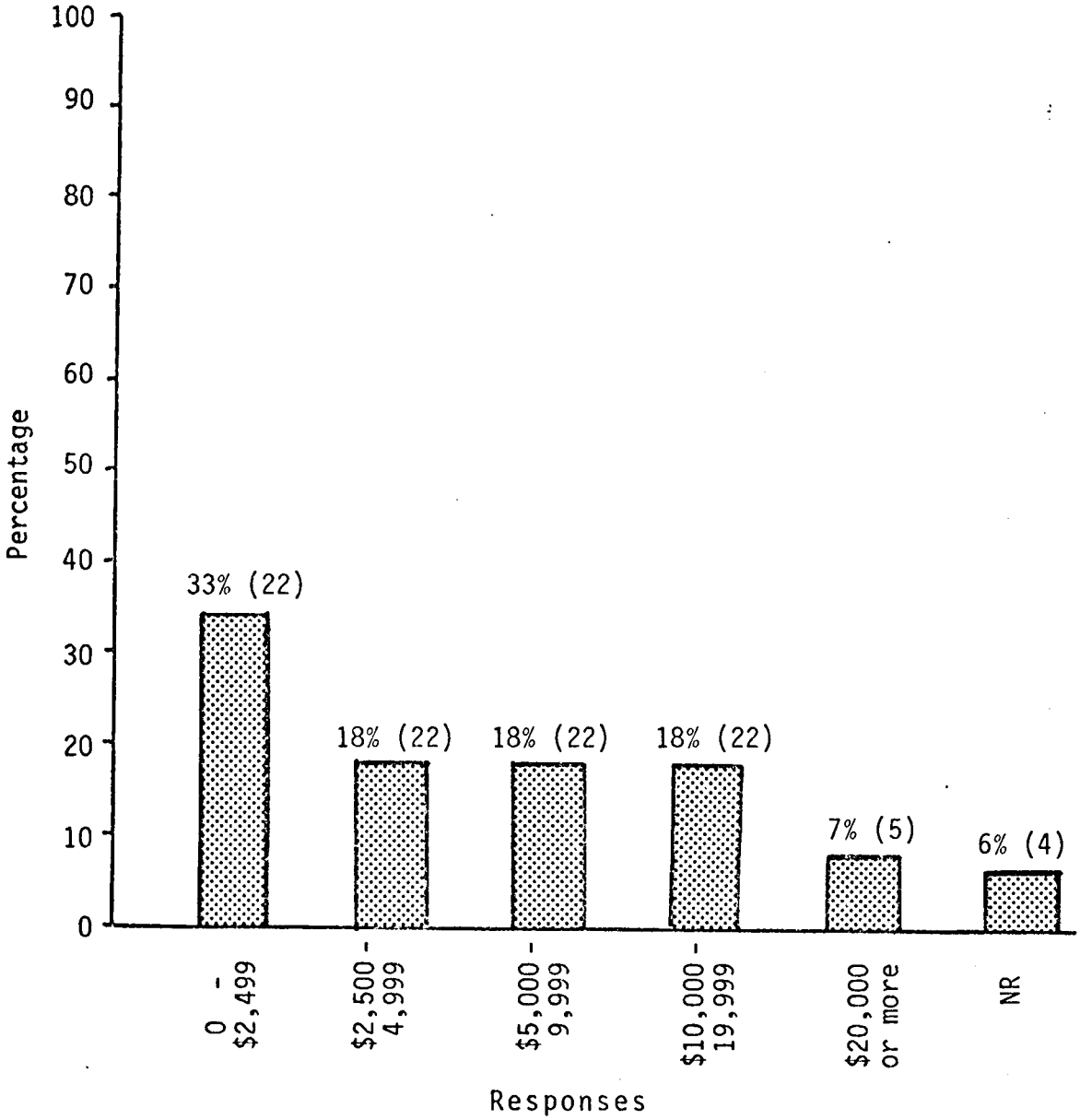


Figure 15. Distribution of responses to the question, "What is your approximate total annual advertising budget?"

82% (18) judged their programs somewhat effective. Of those spending over $20,000, all seven schools judged their programs somewhat (60%) or very (40%) effective. Generally speaking, as the amount of money funded to the advertising program increased, the judged effectiveness increased.

Sixty-eight percent (46) of schools that advertise use the newspaper as an advertising vehicle. Of those 46 schools, the average percentage of budget used in newspapers is 43%. Sixty-four percent (43) of schools that advertise use magazines as a medium. Of those 43, the average percentage of the advertising budget spent in magazines is 53%. Twenty-four percent use television as a vehicle, spending an average of 29% of the advertising budget in that medium. Thirty-seven percent (25) use radio to aid in student recruitment. Of those, the average percentage spent in that medium is 22%. Nine percent (6) use outdoor as an advertising tool, accounting for an average of 18% of the total advertising budget (see Figure 16).

Eighty-nine percent (60) of the schools using advertising have a smaller advertising budget than their budget for the production and distribution of printed materials. Eleven percent (7) have a larger advertising budget. Thirty-one percent (21) spend over $20,000 a year for the production and distribution of printed promotional materials (see Figure 17).

A comparison of Figures 15 and 17 reveals that, generally speaking, college budgets for printed promotional materials are larger than their budgets for mass media advertising.

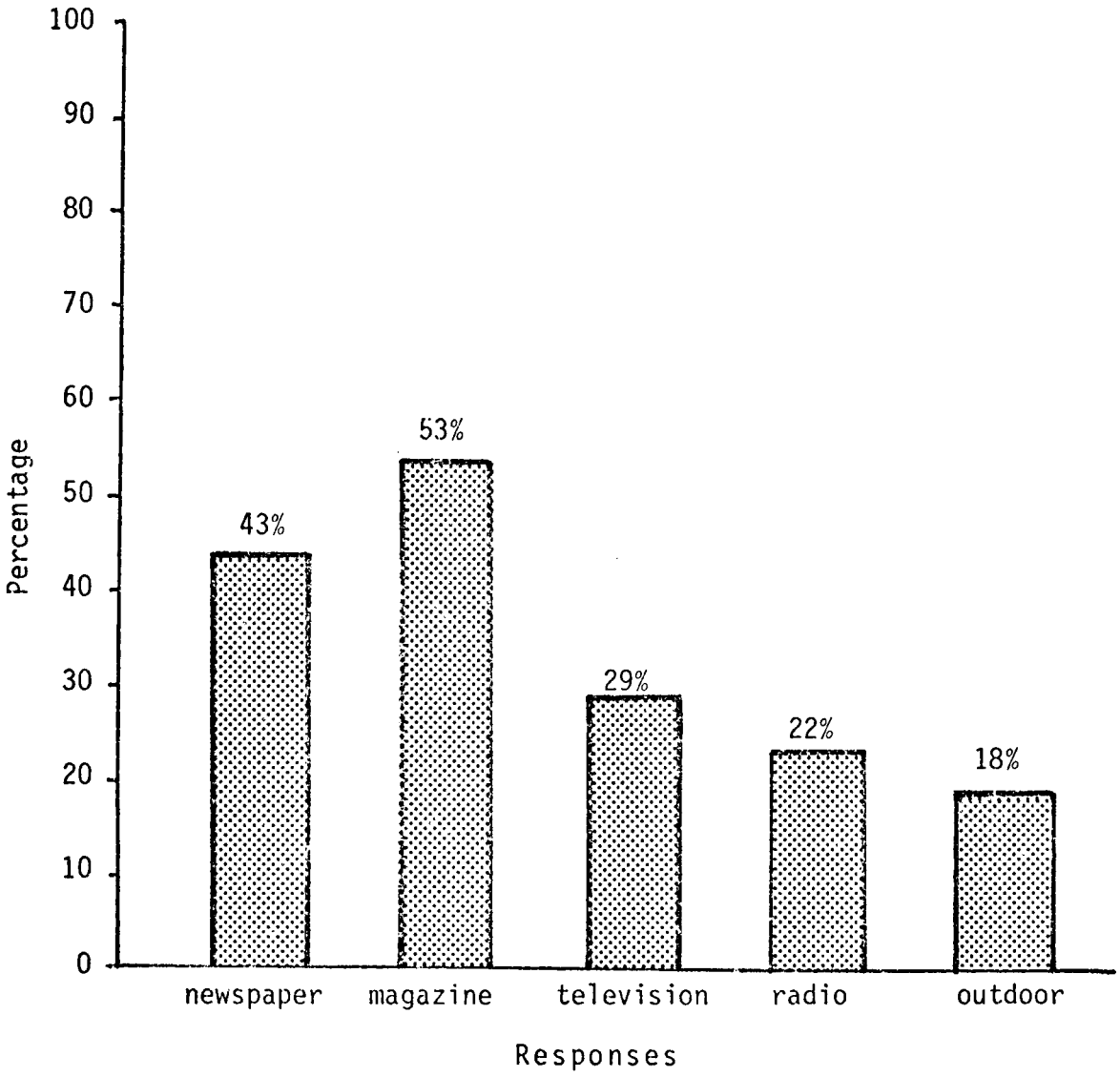


Figure 16. Distribution of responses to the question, "Approximately what percentage of your advertising budget is spent in each of the following media?"

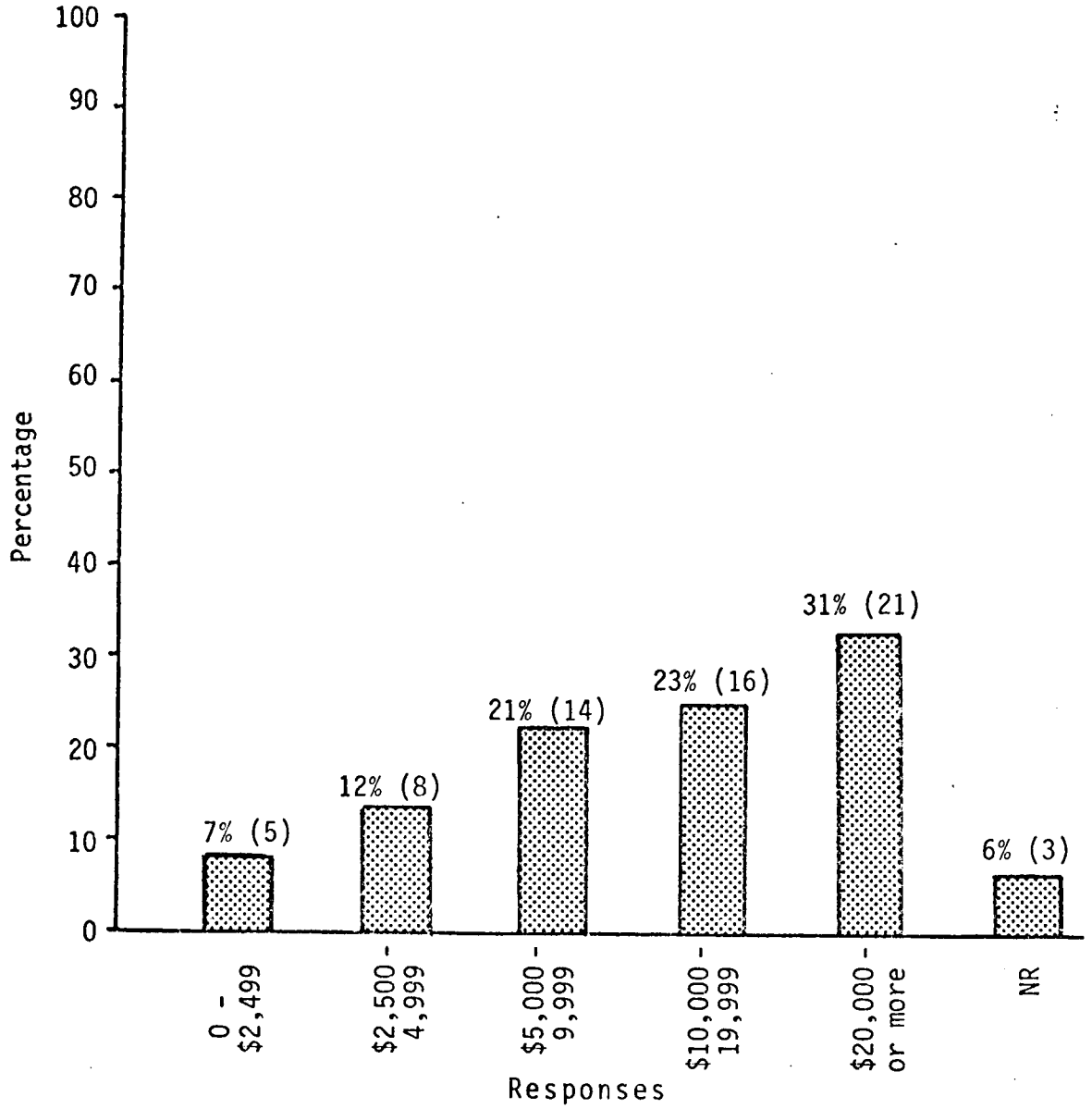


Figure 17. Distribution of responses to the question, "In the admissions department, what is your approximate total annual budget for the production and distribution of printed promotional materials (brochures, pamphlets, etc.)?"

Survey data was cross-tabulated according to two variables: religious affiliation and enrollment figures of the school. Results show that schools that are officially affiliated with religious denominations or groups (66) do not differ from those schools not religiously affiliated (34) with respect to the use of advertising.

For example, 67% (23) of church-affiliated schools do use some form of mass advertising, while 32% (11) do not. Eight-five percent (29) of schools with a religious affiliation believe private schools nationwide are generally experiencing a shortage of students, while 13% (4) of those schools do not believe that this is the case. These figures are virtually identical to the percentages for the entire sample. The similarity of percentages between church-affiliated schools and those with no such affiliation hold up through each item on the survey.

The results of the cross-tabulation using enrollment figures are much the same. No significant differences exist between schools of differing sizes with respect to the use of advertising. One exception was found: As enrollment figures increased, the amount spent on advertising and on promotional efforts increased.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The large majority of admissions officers at private four-year colleges and universities in the Southeast believe schools nationwide are experiencing a shortage of students. Over two-thirds use mass media advertising to help attract students, and approximately three-fourths feel the practice is ethical, tasteful, and beneficial.

Data indicates that most advertising for students has begun in the past decade. Eighty percent of the schools that advertise to attract students have begun their programs since 1970. Over half have used advertising for five years or less. This increase in the number of schools using advertising will likely continue: As the number of college-age young people decreases, the use of advertising to attract these young people will likely increase.

Future research on college and university advertising should center on the economics of the practice. Is advertising for students effective? Is it efficient?

Perhaps one of the most interesting findings of this research project is that even though the majority of schools use advertising--some spending over $20,000 yearly--almost half of the schools have no formal evaluation program set up to judge the effectiveness of their advertising.

Generally speaking, schools which worked with an outside agency and spent more money on their advertising efforts judged their programs more effective than those working without an agency and spending

less money. Yet, on this basis alone we cannot accept the hypothesis that the more money a school spends on advertising, the more effective its program will be.

Various questions must be addressed. Specifically, how do colleges judge the effectiveness of their advertising programs? What objectives do universities and colleges set when they begin advertising programs? What do they want to achieve and, realistically, what can they achieve by advertising?

According to this research, print media are used more than broadcast media. Is print more effective and efficient than broadcast? Does it reach specific markets better? Or is it simply more "acceptable" than broadcast media?

Finally, is money spent by colleges for advertising well-spent? Does it make prospective students and others more aware of the programs and advantages offered by a college? Is advertising a cost efficient means of recruiting students?

Cross tabulation of the data revealed that, with respect to the use of advertising, colleges which are affiliated with a religious denomination or organization do not significantly differ from those without such an affiliation. Perhaps an explanation of this is found in the fact that church affiliated schools are a very heterogenous group. Simply because a set of schools is connected to a church or religious group does not mean the set shares other common characteristics. Some may be strongly connected with a conservative, fundamentalist church while others may have a loose affiliation with a liberal religious group. The schools may differ greatly just as the churches

may. Thus, schools with a church affiliation are a diverse group, just as schools with no religious affiliation are diverse.

The only difference found between schools with fewer than 1000 students and those with more than 1000 was that larger schools tend to devote more money to advertising and promotional efforts. It seems only logical that schools with more students would have larger budgets.

Perhaps more differences would have been found on the basis of enrollment figures had the two compared groups had a wider range of enrollment figures; that is, if the compared groups had been those with fewer than 1000 students and those with more than 5000, instead of those with fewer than 1000 and those with more than 1000.

Statisticians predict and admissions officers agree that our nation's post-secondary schools face an even greater shortage of students in coming years. If competition among schools for students is to increase, advertising will likely become a more important recruitment aid and become more widespread than it is today. If so, future research must answer vital questions about the effectiveness and efficiency of college and university advertising.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

1

COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY ADVERTISING

This is a study of a carefully selected sample of colleges and universities. The "advertising" referred to here includes paid, non-personal communication through either broadcast or print mass media (radio, television, newspapers, magazines, outdoor billboards) aimed at recruiting full-time students.

A. Enrollment Status

1. In your opinion, are private schools nationwide generally experiencing a shortage of students?

   yes ☐ no ☐

2. Do you believe your school will experience a shortage of students in the next three years?

   yes ☐ no ☐

   If no, why not? _____

   _____

   _____

3. In the past three years, has the number of students applying for admission to your school declined, stayed constant, or increased?

   declined..... ☐
   stayed constant..... ☐
   increased..... ☐

4. What is your approximate total full-time equivalent enrollment?

   0 - 999..... ☐
   1000 - 1999..... ☐
   2000 - 4999..... ☐
   5000 - 9999..... ☐
   10,000 or more..... ☐

B. Use of Advertising

1. Please check either the "yes" or "no" box for each item. Generally speaking, do you believe advertising for students is...

	yes	no
ethical?	☐	☐
tasteful?	☐	☐
necessary?	☐	☐
beneficial for students?	☐	☐
beneficial for the college?	☐	☐

2. What is your opinion of mass media advertising's usefulness as a student recruitment tool?

very useful..... ☐
somewhat useful..... ☐
has little use..... ☐
has no use at all..... ☐

3. Does your school presently employ advertising via radio, television, magazines, newspapers, or outdoor billboards?

yes ☐ no ☐

If no:
- To your knowledge, has your school ever seriously considered using advertisng to aid in student recruitment?
  yes ☐ no ☐
- Why have you decided not to use advertising?

_____

_____

_____

If your answer to question 3 was "no", you have completed the survey. Please return it in the stamped envelope. If your answer was "yes", please continue the questionnaire. Thank you.

4. How long has your school used advertising for student recruitment?

About _____ years

5. Approximately what percentage of your ads are directed toward each of these groups? Note: If some portion of your ads are aimed at more than one group, total percentage may exceed 100.

Toward high school students? About _____%

Toward parents of students? About _____%

Toward other groups? About _____%

Please specify nature of other groups.

_____

6. Do you work with an outside agency in preparing your advertisements?

yes ☐ no ☐

If yes, what type of work do they do for you?

media placement.....☐
creative services.....☐
research.....☐
other (please specify).....☐

_____

_____

C. Advertising Effectiveness

1. Does your school formally evaluate the effectiveness of its advertising program?

yes ☐ no ☐

If yes, what is the basis for judging the effectiveness of the program?

number of applications.....☐
number of enrollments.....☐
number of inquiries.....☐
other (please specify).....☐

_____

_____

On the basis of this evaluation, how effective would you say your advertising program is?

very effective.....☐
somewhat effective.....☐
not effective.....☐

2. If your school does not formally evaluate the effectiveness of its advertising program, how do you personally judge its effectiveness?

very effective.....☐
somewhat effective.....☐
not effective.....☐

D. Budget

1. Through what office or department is your advertising program funded?

Admissions.....☐
Public Relations.....☐
Development.....☐
Other (please specify)....☐

_____

2. What is your approximate total annual advertising budget?

0 - $2,499.....☐
$2,500 - 4,999.....☐
$5,000 - 9,999.....☐
$10,000 - 19,999.....☐
$20,000 or more.....☐

3. Approximately what percentage of your advertising budget is spent in each of the following media?

newspapers _____% radio _____%

magazines _____% outdoor _____%

television _____% (should equal 100%)

4. In the admissions department, what is your approximate total annual budget for the production and distribution of printed promotional materials (brochures, pamphlets, etc.)?

0 - $2,499.....☐
$2,500 - 4,999.....☐
$5,000 - 9,999.....☐
$10,000 - 19,999.....☐
$20,000 or more.....☐

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP.

Please return the questionnaire in the stamped reply envelope.

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE COVER LETTER

April 8, 1980

Dear _____:

Will you do me a favor?

In recent years, many schools have begun advertising programs in an effort to attract more students. I am conducting a survey among admissions officers at private schools to determine the present state of the practice.

The name of your school appeared in a scientifically selected random sample. It will take only a short time to answer the enclosed questions and return them in the stamped reply envelope. Of course, all answers are confidential and will be used only in combination with those of other admissions officers of private schools.

If you are interested in receiving a report on the findings of this research, just write your name and address on a card and return it in the envelope. I will be glad to send you a complimentary report when ready.

Please complete the questionnaire at your earliest convenience and return it within the week so I can begin analysis of the data. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Steve Lykins

P. S. - Only a small number of schools were selected for this study, so your answers are very important to the accuracy of this research--whether or not your school presently uses advertising.

VITA

Stephen Ray Lykins was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee, on November 9, 1956. He attended elementary school in Rossville, Georgia, and graduated from Lakeview-Ft. Oglethorpe High School in 1974.

In May of 1978 he received a Bachelor of Arts degree Magna Cum Laude from Berry College, Mt. Berry, Georgia, with a major in Psychology and minors in Journalism and Spanish. The author began his graduate studies in the College of Communications, the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in September 1978. He received the Master of Science degree in June 1980.

He is a member of Kappa Tau Alpha and Alpha Chi.

The author is married to the former Kace Warren of Richmond, Virginia.