

The Devil Did Not Make Me Do It: Understanding Factors That Influence College Choice of a
Faith-Based Institution

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Dedication

*This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Tonya,
who is my closest confidante and friend. Her
support and love are unwavering.*

*In addition, I dedicate this dissertation to my children, Meridieth Cook Palmer, Megan Cook
Chittom and Drew Cook.*

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Abstract

The process of choosing a college can be quite difficult for high school students and their families. If the student considers issues of faith in this process, it can cause additional complexity. While researchers have examined many factors that influence the college selection process (Baliyan, 2016; Espinosa, Bradshaw & Hausman, 2000; Noel-Levitz, 2012; Nurnberg, Schapiro, & Zimmerman, 2012; Perez, 2008; Tucciarone, 2007), there is little research that focuses on the factors that influence the selection of a faith-based institution. Research shows the factors that affect this process are varied and include the influence of parents (MacCallum, Glover, Queen, & Riggs, 2007), impact of guidance counselors (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011), race and ethnicity (Kouyoumdjian, Guzmán, Garcia, & Talavera-Bustillos, 2015), gender (Johanson, 2007); financial considerations (MacAllum, Glover, Queen, and Riggs, 2007), military veterans (Hill, 2016) and the actual college or university itself (Josephson, Kelly, & Smith, 2020). For many students across the US, another critical factor of college choice is the student's faith and the faith mission of the institution.

The purpose of this quantitative study was to identify the factors influencing college choice of a faith-based institution. The population for this study included 180 first-year freshmen students who just completed their initial semester of college at three member institutions of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). The institutions included had a minimum enrollment of 2,500 students. Participants completed a researcher-created instrument, the College Choice of Faith-Based Institutions Survey (CCFBI). The instrument was 30 questions. Demographics of the respondents included gender, race/ethnicity, distance from home to college, type of high school attended, enrollment in first college choice, and citizenship.

The results revealed the factors most influential in the choice of a faith-based college

include academic reputation and opportunities. The results also revealed significant differences on factors including the influence of others on students who traveled 6 – 10 miles or 101 – 500 miles to college. In addition, significant findings were found with students who enrolled in their first college choice on campus appearance and visit, academic reputation and opportunities, influence of others, and faith.

Table Of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction to the Study	1
Statement of the Problem	5
Purpose of the Study.....	7
Research Questions	7
College Choice Theory	7
Significance of the Study.....	8
Definition of Terms	10
Delimitations of the Study.....	10
Summary.....	11
Organization of the Study.....	12
Chapter 2 Review of the Literature.....	13
Research Questions	13
The Search Process.....	14
College Choice Models	14
Student Characteristics	20
Influence of Parents	22
Influence of High School Guidance Counselors	24
Impact of Race and Ethnicity	27
Influence of Gender.....	29
Military Veterans.....	30
Financial Impact and Influence	30
College Outreach.....	33
Faith-Based Institutions.....	36
Summary.....	39
Chapter 3 Methodology	41
Purpose of the Study	41
Research Questions	41
Rationale for the Design.....	41
Population and Sample.....	43
Instrumentation.....	43
Data Collection.....	46
Data Analysis.....	46
Limitations.....	47
Role of the Researcher.....	48
Summary.....	48
Chapter 4 Results	49
Purpose of the Study	49
Research Questions	50
Demographics.....	50
Descriptive Statistics	51
Analysis of Research Questions	52
Question 1.....	53
Question 2.....	55
Summary.....	59

Chapter 5 Discussion and Recommendations.....	60
Summary of the Study.....	60
Discussion.....	62
Question 1.....	62
Question 2.....	69
Implications.....	72
Limitations.....	75
Recommendations for Further Study.....	76
Conclusion.....	78
References.....	79
Appendices.....	93
Appendix A.....	94
Appendix B.....	97
Appendix C.....	98
Appendix D.....	99
Vita.....	106

List of Tables

Table 2.1. Theories of College Choice.	99
Table 4.1. Gender – Descriptive Statistics.....	99
Table 4.2. Race/Ethnicity – Descriptive Statistics.....	100
Table 4.3. Distance From Home to College – Descriptive Statistics.....	100
Table 4.4. Kind of High School – Descriptive Statistics.....	101
Table 4.5. Enrolled in First College Choice – Descriptive Statistics.....	101
Table 4.6. Citizenship – Descriptive Statistics.	101
Table 4.7. Subscale Factors.	102
Table 4.8. Means and Standard Deviations of Factors Influencing College Choice.	103
Table 4.9. Subscale – Descriptive Statistics.	104
Table 4.10. Means and Standard Deviations of Factors Influencing College Choice Ranked Highest to Lowest.	105

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Each year, hundreds of thousands of high school seniors across the United States struggle with the decision of where to attend college. During this phase of the educational cycle, students complete applications, write essays, and request recommendations. College choice is often the first significant decision a student will make (Bouse & Hossler, 1991) and is arguably one of the most important decisions an individual will make in life. For some students, the decision is a foregone conclusion with the only unknown components being the arrival date of the acceptance letter and how much money parents will be required to pay. For others, it is a complicated process fraught with anxiety over ACT or SAT scores, grade point averages, scholarship applications, and financial aid forms. These students not only have the pressure of choosing a school, but they are concerned about being accepted and if they can afford their number one choice. For a smaller number of students, the decision also involves an additional facet: their faith. In addition to the elements that most students must consider, some high school seniors integrate faith into this complicated decision progression. To some, the element of faith is not just one aspect among many in the decision-making process; it is the most important. Higher education has long been associated with institutions of faith as many of the first private colleges and universities began at the behest of Christian denominations (Mixon, Lyon, & Beaty, 2004). Although some of those institutions have since altered their mission and no longer embrace their inception as faith-based campuses, others continue to espouse the pedagogical benefits of academic excellence and the Christian faith, and many more faith-based institutions have been established in the interim.

Faith-based colleges and universities exist in various forms, but all have a common

mission of academic training and faith development (Daniels & Gustafson, 2016). Faith-based colleges in the United States originated in religious traditions including Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. In addition to academic training, these institutions also offer spiritual development rooted in religious traditions. More often than not, colleges and universities offer a wide variety of academic majors – not just in fields that correlate with religious pursuits – while also providing students with opportunities for corporate worship in a temple, synagogue, mosque or church. As a general consensus, faith-based institutions aspire to develop within their students moral and ethical values stemming from their respective faith or religious traditions. Some faith-based colleges require students to be part of a certain religious tradition while other schools do not require the students to be religious at all. Although the extent to which religion is included in curriculum and student-life on faith-based campuses varies widely, faith-based institutions are defined as such because of a commitment to the integration of faith and instruction (CCCU, 2019).

Of the more than 4,700 degree-granting institutions of higher education in the United States, just over 1,000 define themselves as religiously affiliated or faith-based (College Stats, 2018). Of those, 150 have found common cause in the mission of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), a global higher education association for Protestant Christian institutions (CCCU, 2019). There are currently over 520,000 students enrolled in CCCU institutions in the United States. Globally, CCCU schools maintain 3.6 million alumni and employ over 90,000 faculty and staff – a large portion of whom reside in the United States and are at or from U.S. schools (CCCU, 2019). Enrollment at CCCU institutions has increased in recent years. From 2005 – 2016, the total students enrolled increased from 399,125 to 428,507 – an average increase of 7.3% per year or 29,382 students total (CCCU, 2019). Additionally, in

only the past three years, the total enrollment at CCCU institutions has increased from 428,507 to over 520,000 students – an average growth of around 1.5% per year, totaling 16,493 students. Not only do CCCU institutions enroll a significant number of students each year, the demand for this type of education continues to grow. While overall enrollment among all colleges and universities has declined in recent years, the number of students attending CCCU institutions has increased (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019; CCCU, 2019). CCCU institutions experienced 18% growth in first time, full time enrollment from 2003 – 2015, and the numbers continue to climb (CCCU, 2018). In contrast, the number of students enrolled at 4-year public and 4-year private schools has declined from 2015 – 2019, and significant decreases were seen at 4-year for profit and 2-year public institutions (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). Indeed, private liberal arts colleges (faith-based or not) are struggling to maintain market share of the decreasing number of high school graduates, while some faith-based colleges and universities continue to grow. In particular, larger faith-based schools, those with more than 3,500 students are flourishing. Over the past 15 years, the schools that have grown the most in first-time, full-time enrollment are all faith-based institutions (Powell, 2017).

The overall number of students enrolled at faith-based colleges in the United States is elusive and difficult to pinpoint. This is due to the various methods of classifying faith-based or religious schools and inability to calculate the total number of students enrolled at each. A current estimate, based on self-reported enrollment numbers, is that after accounting for seminaries, Bible colleges, Mormon institutions and other higher education institutions that identify as faith-based, approximately 1.9 million students are enrolled in faith-based institutions across the United States with the overwhelming majority in Christian (Catholic or Protestant) schools (CCCU, 2019). Catholic schools make up the largest non-public educational system in

the country. In the United States, over 900,000 students attend 247 Catholic colleges and universities. Catholic institutions of higher learning account for more than half of all students in the US who are enrolled in faith-based colleges and universities (Association of Catholic Colleges & Universities, 2017). In 1956, approximately 300 Catholic colleges and universities in the United States served roughly 400,000 students. Since 1956, the overall number of Catholic colleges and universities has decreased from 300 – 247 – averaging about one closure a year – yet, the total number of students enrolled has increased by around 125% from 400,000 to 900,000 (Update, 2018).

Despite the unique growth and recent stability in a time of declining enrollment, college choice of faith-based institutions has not been researched in the same manner as other sectors of higher education. There is, indeed, a gap in the literature regarding this issue. We know much more about students' choice of research institutions and private, selective institutions (Baliyan, 2016; CCCU, 2019; Nurnberg, Schapiro, & Zimmerman, 2012), college choice based on socioeconomic factors like income, race or ethnicity, and academic preparation (Hayden, 2000; Kouyoumdjian, Guzmán, Garcia, & Talavera-Bustillos, 2015; Perez, 2008), enrollment based on military experience (Hill, 2016) and college choice based on institutional financial aid and marketing strategies (Noel-Levitz, 2012; Olson, 2018; Rutledge, 2020; Tucciarone, 2007) than about the impact of a students' faith on their college choice. Much has also been done on the subject of college choice based on the influence of other individuals including high school guidance counselors (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Espinosa, Bradshaw & Hausman, 2000; MacAllum, Glover, Queen, & Riggs, 2007) and parents (MacCallum, Glover, Queen, & Riggs, 2007). The field of college choice studies needs objective, quantitative research on this question as it will contribute to the body of literature

while providing empirical evidence to guide faith-based institutions on their recruitment efforts.

Statement of the Problem

The process of choosing a college can be quite difficult for high school students and their families. If the student considers issues of faith in this process, it can cause additional complexity. While researchers have examined many factors that influence the college selection process (Baliyan, 2016; Espinosa, Bradshaw & Hausman, 2000; Hayden, 2000; MacAllum, Glover, Queen, & Riggs, 2007; Noel-Levitz, 2012; Nurnberg, Schapiro, & Zimmerman, 2012; Perez, 2008; Tucciarone, 2007), there is little research that focuses on the factors that influence the selection of a faith-based institution in particular.

Student college choice is a subject that has been researched by higher education professionals for many years, and the accessible information is vast. Research shows the factors that affect this process are varied and include the influence of parents (MacCallum, Glover, Queen, & Riggs, 2007), impact of guidance counselors (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Espinosa, Bradshaw & Hausman, 2000; MacAllum, Glover, Queen, & Riggs, 2007), race and ethnicity (Esters & Bowen, 2004; Kelp Kern, 2000; Kouyoumdjian, Guzmán, Garcia, & Talavera-Bustillos, 2015; Smith 2001; St. John, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005; Urbanski, 2000), gender (Johanson, 2007); financial considerations (CCCU, 2019; MacAllum, Glover, Queen, and Riggs, 2007; McDonough, Calderone, & Purdy, 2007; St. John, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005), military veterans (Hill, 2016) and the actual college or university itself (Josephson, Kelly, & Smith, 2020; LeFauve, 2001; Olson, 2018; Tucciarone, 2007). For many students across the US, another critical factor of college choice is the student's faith and the faith mission of the institution. Yet the research that focuses specifically upon the choice of faith-based colleges or universities is limited to the factors noted above.

The need for studying and understanding how high school students choose to enroll at a faith-based institution has been emphasized in contemporary literature. In particular, various researchers have indicated the need for further study on the topic (Davignon, 2018; Farrow, 2019; Leigh, 2019). Authors have suggested further study is needed as students consider college choice based on Christian identity and faith development (Blount, 2018; Davignon, 2018), religion, ethnicity and gender (McGuire, Casanova, & Davis, 2016; Rowan, 2019), faith development and faculty impact (Alleman, 2015), and college choice of a specific denomination (Leigh, 2019). Recognizing the lack of quantitative data on the subject, this study will seek to explore the factors that influence the college choice of a faith-based institution.

This study will answer the call of Davignon (2018), Farrow (2019), and Leigh (2019) by investigating the factors that affect high school students' choice of a faith-based college or university. Furthermore, this research will build upon the work of Alleman (2015), Blount (2018), and Rowan (2019) who seek greater understanding of the factors that influence students in their selection of a faith-based college or university. This research will add to the college choice literature of how faith influences this decision-making process and has the potential to impact how both faith-based and non-faith-based institutions connect with potential and current students of faith. This research is necessary because it will inform faculty and administrators at both public and private institutions. Students of faith are enrolling every year and this research could assist institutions in their understanding of the phenomenon of college choice. Such information may have a significant impact on how colleges and universities of all classifications reach out to religious students. The financial implications of college choice make this research important as well. Tuition revenue and state appropriations drive the fiduciary well-being of college and universities so the factors that influence college choice are even more critical. Most

faith-based institutions have budgets that are largely dependent on student tuition dollars, and as the endowments of many private schools continue to experience losses in recent years, enrollment numbers become an even more critical component of collegiate fiscal planning. The financial challenges facing institutions make this study both timely and important to higher education today.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study is to identify the factors influencing college choice of a faith-based institution.

Research Questions

1. What are the factors that influence student choice of faith-based institutions?
2. To what extent do these factors influence student choice?

College Choice Theory

A number of models for the study of college choice have been advanced. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) offered the seminal model of student college choice that depicts three stages: predisposition, search, and choice. The first stage in Hossler and Gallagher's model, predisposition, discusses factors related to whether or not students develop, or have developed, the disposition to go to college. The second phase of the model, the search process, is the stage where information is sought about colleges, and potential college choices are evaluated. The last stage of the process, choice, involves evaluating and choosing an institution from among the options which leads to matriculation at the institution. Hossler and Gallagher also identified factors and persons, individual and organizational, relevant to and influential at each stage in the process. In the predisposition phase, aspects of the students' backgrounds and experiences play a major role in setting this predisposition, and parents, peers, high schools, and the colleges

themselves are all major influences.

Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith (1989) described three types of college-choice models which include econometric, sociological, and combined. Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith focused their research on the individual student and found two options for students who had completed high school. One choice was enrolling at an institution of higher learning, while the other was to pursue a non-college future including the military or employment. Ultimately, this model explored how students made this choice while weighing the perceived benefits of enrolling in an institution of higher learning versus a non-college alternative. Hossler, Braxton, and Coppersmith's work also advanced sociological models and their impact upon the college selection process. This model purported that family socioeconomic background and student academic ability have a joint positive effect on aspirations for college. Further, parental encouragement and the influence of significant others—including students, parents, teachers, and peers—have been added as refinements to the original model of college choice. Finally, their third model of college choice offered a combined approach to this process.

Significance of the Study

While previous research has explained the influence that parents (Kelp Kern, 2000; MacAllum, Glover, Queen, & Riggs, 2007; Smith, 2001; Spaulding, 2001), high school counselors (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Espinosa, Bradshaw & Hausman, 2000; MacAllum, Glover, Queen, and Riggs, 2007), race and ethnicity (Esters & Bowen, 2004; Kelp Kern, 2000; Kouyoumdjian, Guzmán, Garcia, & Talavera-Bustillos, 2015; Smith 2001; St. John, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005; Urbanski, 2000), gender (Johanson, 2007), military veterans (Hill, 2016), financial concerns including tuition cost, financial aid, and scholarships (CCCU, 2019; MacAllum, Glover, Queen, and Riggs, 2007; McDonough,

Calderone, & Purdy, 2007; St. John, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005), and the colleges themselves (Josephson, Kelly, & Smith, 2020; LeFauve, 2001; Olson, 2018; Tucciarone, 2007) have on college choice, there has been little research on the decision-making experience of students who choose to enroll at faith-based institutions. This presents a noteworthy gap in the college choice literature as it relates to the selection of faith-based institutions. To date, this notion has yet to be explored and this study seeks to create an empirical foundation from which further knowledge can be built.

Given the increase in student enrollment at faith-based institutions during the past two decades (CCCU, 2019), this study will be of interest to administrators and faculty from colleges and universities of all Carnegie classifications. Such information could have a significant impact on how colleges and universities of all classifications reach out to religious students. Faith-based institutions will consider this an important issue, but public institutions may also find it pertinent in light of their own enrollment goals, marketing plans, and curriculum decisions. One goal of this study is to provide information that may assist other institutions in their understanding of the phenomenon of college choice at faith-based institutions.

Additionally, with the current economic climate in the United States and the uncertainty of student enrollment facing colleges each fall, the factors that influence college choice are even more critical. Public universities face budgetary concerns as a result of the declining state appropriations, and understanding how to attract a new demographic of students could prove fiscally valuable. Meanwhile, many faith-based institutions have budgets that are largely dependent on student tuition dollars, and as the endowments of many private schools continue to experience losses in recent years, enrollment numbers become an even more critical component of collegiate fiscal planning. The financial challenges facing institutions make this study both

timely and important to higher education today. Faith-based institutions also have a major economic impact. For example, CCCU affiliate institutions alone are responsible for over \$60 billion in economic impact per year (CCCU, 2019). They also draw \$470 million annually in federal grant aid and provide institutional aid totaling \$2.46 billion through grants and scholarships. Yet there is a dearth of information on why students choose faith-based institutions over secular ones and what factors affect that decision. This study seeks to rectify that.

Definition of Terms

To ensure clarity for the reader, the following terms are defined, for purposes of this study.

Faith-Based Institutions – Protestant, Christian institutions located in the United States, unless otherwise indicated, are the institutions included in this research.

College Choice - The use of the term “college choice” in the context of this study is derived from Hossler & Gallagher’s discussion of choice in their seminal essay “Studying Student College Choice: A Three-Phase Model and the Implications for Policymakers” (1987). In the work, the authors situate “choice” as the third and final phase of a students’ college enrollment decision.

Student - In the collection of this study’s data, individuals currently enrolled in CCCU institutions will be surveyed. For the purposes of this research, all reference to “student” will be first-year, undergraduate freshmen.

Delimitations of the Study

The main delimitation of the study is the sample of students, all of whom were enrolled at CCCU institutions. All respondents are college students enrolled at the time of the research collection. Students are being asked about college choice in hindsight, rather than as they go

through the process, so the study is limited by respondents' subjectivity and sometimes corrective memory of the college choice experience.

Summary

Ultimately, college choice is a multi-faceted and complicated experience, both for the student and for those who choose to research it as a discipline. It is this multiplicity of stages, influences, and driving factors that make the study of college choice an active field. However, there is one element of the process that has, until now, been largely overlooked. That element is the "faith-based" designation of many colleges and universities. There is a historically rooted relationship between faith and higher education in the American system, and that continues today with hundreds of faith-based institutions across the country, many of which boast growing enrollment numbers. In particular, the affiliate institutions of the CCCU play a significant role, both in terms of economic impact and student enrollment, in United States' higher education. It is critical, then, to understand the process students go through and the criteria they apply when choosing to matriculate at a faith-based institution.

This study seeks to fill a gap in the research by determining the factors that drive students to enroll in faith-based schools such as what persons influence that decision, and what role faith in particular plays. The study's results will not only serve as a needed addition to the field of college choice study, it has the potential to impact recruitment policies for both faith-based and secular institutions. Further, the study's results may affect the ways in which institutions of all sorts reach out to and interact with the "of faith" demographic of students—a group with a significant economic impact.

When students integrate issues of faith in the college choice process, the decision-making can become additionally complex due to the additional influencing factor. For school's whose

classification is “faith-based” how does this distinction affect the process? Using theories of college choice as a guide, I seek to identify the factors that affect students’ choice of a faith-based college or university. I consider the ways in which students make this choice and how they are influenced by other individuals throughout this process.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. The opening chapter provides the background and context for the study as well as establishes the need for research in this area. The second chapter contains a critical review of the literature relevant to this study, including research related to college choice. The third chapter documents the methods and procedures used in the conduct of this study. The fourth chapter presents the findings of the study, while the fifth and final chapter provides a summary, discussion of the findings, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the purpose, research questions, and significance of this study. The purpose of this study was to identify the factors influencing the college choice of faith-based colleges or universities. The following research questions guided this study:

Research Questions

1. What are the factors that influence student choice of faith-based institutions?
2. To what extent did faith influence the college choice of faith-based institutions?

This chapter begins with an overview of the search process used to locate topics of literature pertinent to this study. This section will be followed by a review of literature regarding the leading college choice models developed to understand the college selection process. Further research will be examined in light of student characteristics and their readiness for college. Additionally, a review of the literature describing the factors influencing college choice will be considered. Empirical research from the literature detailing the individuals who influence students in the college selection process will be examined in addition to the impact of race and gender on this process, the financial implications of this decision, and the college outreach. Finally, a review of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) seminal model of student college choice will be detailed to explain its relevance to the study and how the framework will be used to investigate the factors that influence students' selection of a faith-based institution.

It is important to note that nearly all of the robust literature on college choice is theory-driven. As a result and in alignment with the field of college choice, this review also positions theory and related outcomes at the center of the reviewed research to inform variable selection and model-building for the study.

The Search Process

When searching for literature for this study, the University of Tennessee and Lee University online education databases were used to retrieve articles and reports from EBSCO host, including Academic Search Premier, ERIC, and JSTOR. In addition, searches were conducted through the university search engine that resulted in articles from *Journal of Research on Christian Education*, *Journal of Academic Administration in Higher Education*, *Journal of College Student Development*, *Journal of Higher Education*, *Christian Higher Education*, *Higher Learning Research Communications*, *Journal of College Admissions*, *Journal of Career and Technical Education*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Sociology of Education*, *Journal of Physical Therapy Education*, *College and University Journal*, *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *Journal of Negro Education*, *Economics of Education Review*, *Journal of African American Men*, *Journal of Labor Economics*, and various unpublished doctoral dissertations. Google Scholar was accessed to locate information from the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities and additional peer-reviewed articles. Key words used in these searches included *college choice*, *faith-based institutions*, *institutional fit*, *college persistence*, and *student retention*. Most sources provided additional resources considered for this study in articles' reviews of literature and references section.

College Choice Models

In recent years, much has been written regarding the undergraduate college-selection process, and research has offered important considerations. A number of models for the study of college choice have been advanced. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) offered the seminal model of student college choice that depicts three stages: predisposition, search, and choice. The first stage in Hossler and Gallagher's model, predisposition, discusses factors related to whether or

not students develop, or have developed, the disposition to go to college. This stage determines whether or not students decide to pursue a formal education beyond high school. The second phase of the model, the search process, is the stage where information is sought about colleges, and potential college choices are evaluated. This stage determines the attributes and values that characterize postsecondary education alternatives. In addition, students must identify the institutional attributes that are most important to them. The last stage of the process, choice, involves evaluating and choosing an institution from among the options which leads to matriculation at the institution. Hossler and Gallagher also identified factors and persons, individual and organizational, relevant to and influential at each stage in the process. In the predisposition phase, aspects of the students' backgrounds and experiences play a major role in setting this predisposition, and parents, peers, high schools, and the colleges themselves are all major influences.

Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith (1989) described three types of college-choice models which include econometric, sociological, and combined. Within the econometric model of college choice, two components are prevalent. One analyzed the non-student factors including institutions, states, and the United States in general, while the other component focused on the student as primary source of analysis. Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith focused their research on the individual student and found two options for students who had completed high school. One choice was enrolling at an institution of higher learning, while the other was to pursue a non-college future including the military or employment. Ultimately, this model explored how students made this choice while weighing the perceived benefits of enrolling in an institution of higher learning versus a non-college alternative. This decision is likely to be made with five models of choice affecting the individual student. These include expected costs, future

earnings of college attendance or a non-college alternative, high school characteristics, college characteristics, and college admissions requirements.

Hossler, Braxton, and Coppersmith's work also advanced sociological models and their impact upon the college selection process. The aspirations of individual students are an integral element in status attainment and, therefore, an important consideration of college choice. Education was found of utmost importance in gaining prestige or status within society. This model purported that family socioeconomic background and student academic ability have a joint positive effect on aspirations for college. Further, parental encouragement and the influence of significant others—including students, parents, teachers, and peers—have been added as refinements to the original model of college choice. Finally, their third model of college choice offered a combined approach to this process. Although both econometric and status-attainment models focused on the student decision, neither of these conceptual approaches provided explanation of the entire college selection process. This final model paralleled the longitudinal approach of a student's decision-making process by offering sequential stages of college choice. The major distinction between the combined model and the econometric and sociological models is that the combined version attempts to identify those factors affecting the decision-making process from a policy analysis perspective; that is, the models attempted to describe the various economic and social forces that affect decision making in order to find opportunities for intervention. Those forces included constraints upon the decision that the researcher and policy-maker should know and institutional activities that can be undertaken to achieve the desired results. Since combined models approach the conceptual framework of college choice as applied research, they can be much more useful to policy makers and institutions who are eager to find ways to impact the college selection process.

Bouse and Hossler (1991) further researched the college selection process by examining the first and second stages of the original Hossler and Gallagher model—student predisposition and search. Most of the subsequent research done on college choice has focused on the third stage of the Hossler and Gallagher model. This has been performed mostly by colleges and universities who are eager to understand why students enroll where they do. This allows for more increased, strategic and targeted marketing plans to be enacted by these institutions. This study provided a progress report on a five-year longitudinal study of college choice which followed the selection process of 5,000 high school students from the ninth grade to one year after high school graduation. At the time of publication, this research was in its fourth year and reported on findings from the students' first three years of high school. Specifically, this study addressed the following questions:

1. What factors are associated with student predisposition?
2. How much do students and their parents know about costs of postsecondary education and financial aid? How does their knowledge change between the ninth and the eleventh grades?
3. Does student and parental knowledge of costs and aid influence their financial planning for postsecondary education?

The study considered student gender and race, family background characteristics, student GPA, high school activities, and parental expectations as potential influences during the predisposition stage. The findings indicated that gender was positive and significantly correlated with predisposition. Women had higher GPAs, were more involved in high school activities, and were more likely to plan to attend a postsecondary education institution. Income was not correlated with student plans to continue their education and parental expectations or

encouragement was the best predictor of predisposition for the entire sample of students. Student and parent knowledge of financial aid varied between the ninth and eleventh grade years. It was clear, however, that both groups' knowledge increased as they got closer to graduation and that students expected their parents to know more about that process. Finally, a surprisingly large number of parents (50%) and students (51%) had been saving for college for the previous several years. The characteristics that most closely correlated with family savings were income, father's education, gender, cost sensitivity, and knowledge. This study of predisposition demonstrated that parents play a very important role in the formation of students' education aspirations.

Research into the predisposition stage of the Hossler and Gallagher model continued with a keener eye toward the experiences of racial and ethnic minorities (Pitre, 2006). With an increasing emphasis on college attendance and the changing demographics of the college-age population, colleges and universities are in need of more specific information regarding student college choice and this broader student demographic. This research proposed a theory that broadens college choice to include a consumer focus that introduced student behavior into the discussion. The authors contend that an aspirations/achievement paradox exists that although African American students have been found to have some of the highest aspirations to attend college, they score low on measures of academic achievement that would make them more competitive for college admissions. Previous studies suggested that parental education has a strong effect on students' in the predisposition stage (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith 1989). Parents of African American students attained less education than white students (Hayden, 2000; Muhammad, 2008) which can lower education aspirations.

Other contributing factors to this aspirations/achievements paradox, according to Pitre, included parental involvement, student academic ability, and high school curriculum. These factors caused African American students to have a different experience in the predisposition stage of the college choice process. The researchers operationalized the Theory of Reasoned Action within a college choice framework, focusing on the predisposition stage, to better predict students' actual disposition for college attendance. Pitre built upon the models offered by Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith (1989) to add a behavioral aspect of the predisposition stage. To provide a more accurate description of aspiration for college, evidence of a student's behavioral intentions (attitudes and subjective norms) must also be measured. This integrated approach suggests a college choice model that broadens the predisposition stage to include a rapidly changing demographic of prospective student by taking into account the diverse experiences of student behaviors.

Various researchers have utilized Hossler and Gallagher's college choice theory in their own work. Hill (2016) developed a theory of military veteran enrollment decisions and transfer matriculation based on Hossler and Gallagher. The three stages of the model were designed to assess traditional student college choice and Hill found entirely different factors to influence military veterans and their decision-making process. The model began as the source of Hill's work, but ultimately led the research to alternative findings. Baliyan (2016) explored the factors that influenced college choice of private colleges and universities in Botswana. This research built upon the models put forth by Hossler & Gallagher and Perna (2006). Considering the strengths and weaknesses of those theoretical perspectives, Baliyan proposed a model that integrated constructs from both economic and sociological perspectives. Perna's (2006) work served as the theoretical framework for the study because it contained layers that included many

factors of influence designed for the study.

The theories of college choice summarized above were all developed to provide the framework researchers utilized to determine the factors that influence college choice. These factors are categorized in the following ways: student characteristics, institutional commitments, sociological stimuli, and persons of influence. They are summarized in the table 2.1 (Appendix D). A detailed review of the literature for each factor follows the table and provides the historic and contemporary research available.

Student Characteristics

Prior to the seminal work done by Hossler and others, there was a dearth of research conducted on theories of college choice. This was due, in large part, to the increasing enrollment of colleges and universities around the United States in the 1960s and 1970s. College administrators, and higher education professionals in general, were not particularly worried about influences on students' college choice. The emphasis was on selectivity rather than recruitment. One particular model of college choice offered at this time suggested that to understand students' choice of a college to attend, it is necessary to consider characteristics of the student, the student's family, and the characteristics of the college itself (Chapman, 1981). The model suggested that college choice is affected by student characteristics in combination with a series of external influences. These external influences were grouped into three general categories:

1. The influence of significant persons;
2. The fixed characteristics of the institution; and
3. The institution's efforts to communicate with prospective students (Chapman, 1981).

The student characteristics were delineated to include socioeconomic status, aptitude, level of educational aspiration, and high school performance. The characteristics of the college itself were also integral to college choice and those criteria included location, costs and financial aid, campus environment, and available of desired programs. Given the timing of this study, the most important outcome was the innovative idea that the institution's efforts to communicate with the prospective student were critical to effective student recruitment. This marketing approach of the college choice process was based upon:

1. Research on current and prospective students
2. Research on the institution's market position
3. Development of a marketing plan
4. Development of new strategies involving both communication plans and the communication process

While these things are commonplace in today's competitive student recruitment and college choice process, Chapman's model of college choice provided the foundation for the groundbreaking research that followed in the 1980's.

McDonough, Antonio, and Horvat (1997) offered a model of college choice suggesting that students' decisions can be related to perceived "capital conversion" benefits. This research focused on two populations of students, those attending elite colleges and those attending less selective colleges. The authors posited that students select colleges according to how they perceive their college opportunities and how the conversion capacity of their degree will impact their further educational and employment attainment. McDonough argued that the students' cultural capital will affect the quality of education, while the students' college choice will make sense in the context of their habitus. That is to say, the students' deeply internalized system of

world view, experiences, and beliefs that are developed from the immediate environment.

Ultimately, this research provided:

1. A profile of students at the most selective colleges and universities in the United States and insights into their college selection process
2. A perspective on the role and impact on cultural capital and habitus in the individuals' cultural investment and reinvestment practices
3. A new model for conceptualizing the college choice process as a critical component of the educational and occupational attainment process.

Influence of Parents

As stated previously, parents play a very important role in students' educational aspirations. Parental influence has been corroborated in many other studies (Kelp Kern, 2000; MacAllum, Glover, Queen, & Riggs, 2007; Smith, 2001; Spaulding, 2001, Stage & Hossler, 1989). There is further evidence suggesting that parents are the most influential in the college-decision process apart from the student. Hendricks (1981) found that parents were perceived to exert some influence at all stages of the college decision process. This research was conducted with the input of both students and their parents. The stage where they were seen to have the most influence involved the money available from the family. Further, other family members agreed that parents had the most influence of anyone on student choice of college, even more than the student. The factor having the highest degree of consonance among all family members was the amount of money parents planned to contribute to the education expenses incurred by the student. Hendricks' work found that parents considered the academic reputation of the institution and perceived quality of faculty more so than the students. Conversely, there was a significantly higher number of students who considered the social atmosphere, campus

appearance, and college size to be more important than parents. Both parents and students reported that a visit to campus, and meeting with a current student, was most important of all the recruitment activities in which they participated.

The impact parents have on the college selection process was supported in a study by Thomas Flint (1992). In it, he found that parent-child discussions about college occur throughout the high school years. His research noted that parents will, implicitly or explicitly, convey information about colleges or universities' characteristics that will ultimately guide the students in their college selection process. Flint's findings resulted in a consistent discovery of parental influence across various data including gender, race, family income, parental education levels, degree aspirations, number of colleges in the choice set, and selectivity. However, the parental aspirations were emphasized in that it seemed to push outwards all other kinds of boundaries that may have limited the student's selection process. As observed in other studies, parents' educational levels did impact their perceptions of the kind of school the student should consider. Their bias toward institutions with advanced degree offerings, selectivity, and reputation was strongly evident. This study was further proof that of the seminal role that parents play in the college choice process.

The findings from a study conducted by MacCallum, Glover, Queen, and Riggs (2007) also supported the idea of parental influence in college selection. They emphatically stated that for traditional aged students, across ethnic and racial categories and regardless of socioeconomic status, parents played the strongest role in the college choice and decision-making processes. However, for low-income and/or first-generation students, parents primarily provide encouragement to the college-bound children. Delaney (1998) offered findings from research that parental income has a direct effect upon the perceptions that families maintain of academic

quality, concerns of cost, and opportunities for job placement. Students whose parents had higher incomes attributed more importance to the college's surroundings and quality of life while enrolled. However, students with lower income from parents placed more importance on issues such as internships, academic program, and cost. Further, students who came from higher income homes made their college choice based upon academic reputation, quality of faculty, and majors of interest. Students who came from lower income families made their college choice based upon social life, extracurricular activities, surroundings, and cost.

Influence of High School Guidance Counselors

Outside of parental influence, the role of the high school guidance counselor is critical to the prospective student. The counselor is clearly integral to college selection and can affect the choice made by students. The perception of institutional quality that the counselor communicates, both to the students and the parents, impacts the college selection process. Ray (1992) found that almost all of the students surveyed in his research had used a guidance counselor as a source of information about college choice and indicated high ratings of satisfaction (Espinosa, Bradshaw & Hausman, 2000; MacAllum, Glover, Queen, & Riggs, 2007). Johnson, Stewart, and Eberly (1991) researched to what extent high school students relied on guidance counselors for college information. Specifically, they attempted to determine:

1. The points in a student's life when the choice of a college was first considered and a final choice made
2. The factors considered and their relative importance in making a college choice
3. The information resources used by high school students in considering colleges they might attend

The authors surveyed 3,708 college freshmen during new student orientation with responses from more than 50% of the freshman class. They found that students began their college search well before their senior year, academic reputation and quality of available programs were considered by more than 90%, cost was a factor considered by 80%, and slightly more than half reported that their offer of financial aid was considered. The most often identified sources of information for students in the college selection process were college students, friends, and high school guidance counselors. In this research, high school counselors were identified more often as a source of information than parents or teachers. Minority students were more likely to use guidance counselors than white students, with African American students citing the counselor as the most frequent source of information. In addition, students who scored lower on the ACT exam were more likely to rely on friends and high school counselors and somewhat more frequent use of college publications and alumni by students with the highest ACT scores.

Important implications for school counselors were noted in this study including:

1. Counselors should be aware of the relatively brief time interval in the life of students from their first exploration of colleges to their final choice of institution.
2. Counselors are important source of information, especially for minorities and low-ACT scorers.
3. Counselors should be aware of sources of financial aid for all students, but in particular they should note programs available to minority students. This information should be readily available to students early in their college selection process.

Research has shown varying degrees of impact from guidance counselors on high school students' selection of a college (Erdmann, 1983). Erdmann surveyed both high school seniors and guidance counselors and found that the impact of counselors varied. Those data showed:

1. The recommendations of guidance counselors are more important to students in small, private and Northeastern schools than they are to students in large, public, and non-Northeastern schools. In the latter category, parent influence was more significant than counselor recommendation.
2. Counselors tend to overestimate the importance of reputation and underestimate the availability of specific academic programs. Private school counselors underestimated the importance of academic programs to a greater degree than their public school counterparts.
3. Public school counselors outside the Northeast tend to overestimate the importance of cost of an institution in the selection process.

The impact guidance counselors have on college application rates has also been studied. Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines & Holcomb-McCoy (2011) used social capital theory as a framework and they found that in addition to some college-related variables, the number of school counselors and student contacts were significant predictors of college application rates. Further, the authors found gender, academic achievement, parental involvement, and school size were significant predictors of applying to college. In general, female students were more likely to apply to college than were male students. They found students who attended a school with more counselors were more likely to apply to college than not. Their findings included data that students who contacted counselors by the 10th grade were more likely to apply for college than those who had no contact. They noted high school students were less likely to see school counselors for college information when they believed school counselors did not expect them to attend college (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011).

Impact of Race and Ethnicity

Another important factor that influences college selection is the role of race and ethnicity. It has been suggested that aspects of the college selection process can be heightened or minimized within the community of minority students. There is clear evidence that students of color are more likely to enroll at institutions where they are comfortable, and recent research shows that misinformation in the African American community regarding college costs, access, and the benefits of a college education abound (Muhammad, 2008). Counseling from a trustworthy, supportive school counselor can make a difference in stemming African American talent loss, especially among young Black men. Further, African American students' understanding of their counselors' expectations for their future education positively influenced college predisposition at a magnitude comparable to fatherly support. As mentioned previously, African American students rely more heavily on the high school guidance counselor as a source of information than their white counterparts (Johnson, Stewart, & Eberly, 1991).

A detailed study of the factors that influence college choice of African American students found four primary issues to consider in this process (Hayden, 2000). Hayden surveyed freshman students from both a primarily white institution and a historically black institution and found from that four primary issues with which African American students must contend. These issues included academic, social, personal, and financial. The academic issues faced by African American students include availability of major, academic reputation, quality of faculty, and academic resources at the institution. At primarily white institutions, Hayden noted that African American students felt challenged by the academic workload. If faculty members were not supportive of the students in assisting with coursework, students became discouraged. Students at the historically black institution experienced greater gains in their academic pursuits. The

atmosphere and environment of this institution—including the presence of more African American faculty members—made students feel more comfortable about approaching faculty members for assistance. Social issues are also very important to African American students in the college selection process. The specific social issues include the student environment of the university, racial demographics of the student body, residential life, and campus organizations. Hayden found that African American students reported more incidents of being isolated from the rest of campus, racial tensions, and culture shock than students at the historically black institution. Further, students at the historically black institution report feelings of satisfaction, competent adjustment to college life, and increased levels of involvement on campus. Personal issues including family influences, psychological or social barriers, and cultural influences also impact the selection of a college by African American students. The role of parent and family encouragement was seen as a critical aspect of successful enrollment in the college of choice by these African American students. Finally, financial issues are also a critical aspect of the college selection process. Higher costs and availability of financial aid were cited as the most important aspect of the college selection process.

In the Latino community, the impact of influential individuals is also apparent. Research from Perez and McDonough (2008) has shown that as primarily first-generation college students, Latinos and Latinas rely heavily on siblings, peers, relatives, and high school contacts for purposes of postsecondary planning (Esters & Bowen, 2004; Kelp Kern, 2000; Smith 2001; St. John, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005; Urbanski, 2000). This is further illustrated in research conducted upon Chicana students and their families (Ceja, 2006). This study explored the choice process of first-generation Chicana students by examining the information sources available to these students within their home environment. To be exact, the issue of parental familiarity with the

college choice process and the parents' ability to assist their daughters in the college selection process was examined. The study also examined the role of other family members, specifically older siblings, and their assistance in the college selection process. The author's findings were instructive. First, it was determined that parental familiarity with the college selection process was greatly limited. Almost all of the Chicana students interviewed stated that their parents lacked an understanding of the college choice process. Second, for those students who had older siblings who had entered college, these siblings proved to be great sources of information for the younger student. However, this did not ensure that the parents of these students were aware of the complexities of the college application process. Third, these Chicana students embraced the dual responsibility of learning about the college selection process for themselves, while at the same time teaching and instructing their parents. While this was very difficult and taxing experience for these Chicana students, they accepted this duty as a means to improve the lives of their parents and younger siblings.

Influence of Gender

Research has also indicated that gender has an impact upon the college-selection process. In research undertaken to explore the factors that influence the choice of a specific academic program, Johanson (2007) found that location, cost, availability of financial aid, and campus environment were more important to women than to men, while reputation of the faculty was more important to men. Stage and Hossler (1989) researched the impact families had upon male and female high school students. They found that the effects of the father's and mother's education varied for male and female high school students. Their results suggested that parents may be less committed to post-secondary education for their daughters than for their sons and that there could be subtle differences at work within the family which differentially affect male

and female students.

Military Veterans

The experience gained serving in the military has influenced the choice of a college or university. Hill (2016) studied the college choice and transfer decisions of student veterans who chose to enroll at a private for-profit institution. Hill developed a theory of military veteran enrollment decisions and transfer matriculation based on Hossler and Gallagher's original theory. However, the three stages of the model were designed to assess traditional student college choice and Hill found entirely different factors to influence military veterans and their decision-making process. The model began as the source of Hill's work, but ultimately led the research to alternative findings. Participants provided multiple reasons for attending the for-profit institution including location, program offerings, academic credit given for military experience, daycare services, and quick time to degree completion (Hill, 2016). Reasons for transferring to the community college included change in degree plan, good fit, location, job opportunities, financial reasons, and program offerings. Hill discovered five themes emerged from the research including security, ease of transition, convenience, convenience and affordability, and support and reputation (Hill, 2016).

Financial Impact and Influence

The financial considerations of a college education—cost of tuition, financial aid, scholarships, and so forth—are also an important factor for many prospective students and high school families in the college-selection process. For many, it is the most important consideration (DesJardins, Ahlburg, & McCall, 2006; MacAllum, Glover, Queen, & Riggs, 2007; McDonough, Calderone, & Purdy, 2007; St. John, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005). Spaulding (2001) found that family concerns about college costs were varied according to the students who applied

for aid and those who did not. The study found that families who place greater importance on college expenses are less likely to select a four-year college. However, families that place greater importance on college reputation and set higher expectations for degree attainment are more likely to select a four-year college. In general, Spaulding's work determined that application for financial aid had a strong influence on the selection of a four-year college.

Additional studies have considered the impact financial aid has on students' college choice. Specifically, state grant aid has been trumpeted by politicians and educators alike as a means to increase accessibility for students (McDonough, Calderone, & Purdy, 2007). In this research, the authors explored the grant-aid programs of eleven states in various detail. Several recommendations resulted from this research and the authors admitted the data available drove the report in a direction that was less about students' choices and more about the policy environments that gave rise to the programs in each state. Their recommendations included:

1. States need to work together with the federal government and institutions to mitigate the increasing cost of college.
2. States should learn from other states and their experiences about state grant-aid programs.
3. States should conduct empirical studies of their aid when possible.

Several states' successful grant-aid programs were highlighted, including Tennessee, which was illustrative of the impact financial aid can have on the college selection process. However, many students from low socioeconomic backgrounds still do not have the information or means to know how to access the financial aspects of attending college. The history of financial aid has been marked by efforts to balance need and merit-based awards. According to this research, it is clear that the rising cost of higher education must be countered by thoughtful and intentional aid

programs that allow for students to enroll in, and graduate from, a college of their choice. The impact this has on the college selection process is paramount.

Student financial aid is endogenic to college selection process rather than exogenous (DesJardins, Ahlburg, & McCall, 2006). The authors in this research contended that students' financial aid plays a critical role in establishing their expectations that they can enroll at a particular institution. Any change in this award can, according to the research, alter the enrollment decision of the student. This research employed a sophisticated model of complex statistical analysis to estimate probabilities about application and enrollment and how financial aid affects both in the college selection process. The authors concluded that the most important finding is that disappointing students with regard to their aid expectations can have serious negative effects on matriculation. This research makes the case for jointly modeling application, admission, financial aid, and enrollment in the college selection process.

More recent studies continue to cite cost and financial aid as the most important factors influencing college choice (Noel-Levitz, 2017). According to this research completed by 118 colleges and more than 55,000 students, this is true regardless of Carnegie classification. The schools surveyed provided a cross section of the student experience. The focus of the data was from the fall semester since that is when enrollment factors are likely to be most current in the minds of students, especially first-year students. In all categories—four-year private, four-year public, community college, and career colleges—cost and financial aid were in the top three factors that influenced the college choice of first-year students. Clearly, economic issues—how much will their educations cost, how will they pay for it—weigh heavily on the minds of students.

College Outreach

Finally, the colleges and universities themselves play a role in the college-choice process. Their marketing, recruitment, and web presence are perceived to communicate important messages about the institution to the prospective students and their families. Tucciarone (2007) found considerable evidence that the web-based recruitment is becoming an imperative aspect of the college choice process. Advertising and initiatives by colleges and universities have the potential to attract attention and ultimately to persuade prospective students if the advertiser understands students' needs and wants. The marketing approach taken by colleges and universities must also carefully weigh the impact of the student influencers such as parents, siblings, counselors, and friends. According to LeFauve's (2001) study of web-based marketing and recruitment, prospective students perceive a college's materials differently depending on the vehicle used to present them, and they look to different methods of presentation for specific kinds of material. These differences are further highlighted by the finding that there seems to be a ready vocabulary for students to discuss websites, whether they are talking about when or how they use them, how they react to material in them, or what the material means. It is also a shared vocabulary, allowing them to work together as a group on navigation tasks and to carry on discussions that include common experiences. The research done by MacAllum, Glover, Queen, Riggs (2007) revealed that online resources are the preeminent source of information among current high school students when making their college choice. Josephson, Kelly, & Smith (2020) found colleges invested significant resources to produce recruitment materials that use a combination of images and text. This steady drip of marketing information—visual-verbal redundancy—served as the primary conduit of information to the prospective student and their

families. Their results provided initial evidence this can be used as a message design strategy to directly influence students' decision-making process (Josephson, Kelly, & Smith, 2020).

The type of institution has an impact upon the college selection process (Kellaris & Kellaris, Jr., 1988; Nurnberg, Schapiro, & Zimmerman, 2012). Nurnberg, Schapiro, and Zimmerman researched the college decision process at a highly selective private institution while Kellaris and Kellaris, Jr. researched the college decisions at a small private institution. Both studies provide data that were instructive to the college choice researcher. Nurnberg offered an econometric analysis of matriculation decisions at one of the most highly selective colleges in America. They were able to identify strong predictors of student matriculation based upon the following criteria:

1. Applicant quality as measured by standardized tests and high school GPA
2. Net price (total cost of enrollment minus institutional financial aid)
3. Applicant race and geographic origin
4. Student artistic, athletic, or academic interests

The model developed by the authors considered data provided by the institution over a five-year period of enrollment. Statistical analysis of these data predicted a 98.4% probability of matriculation for an applicant who had the following characteristics: white, lives 10km from college, male, local attribute, public high school, politically active, religious, top-tier athlete, institutional connection, development attribute, legacy applicant, hard science academic interests, visited the Admissions Office, attended a school visit by a college staff member, full-tuition payer, highest academic rating, highest non-academic rating. By contrast, 5.6% of these applicants were predicted to matriculate: African American, low socioeconomic status, lives 1,000km from campus, urban home, male, public high school, studio art attribute, intellectual

vitality attribute, visual arts academic interests, net price of \$7500, average academic rating, highest non-academic rating. Kellaris' research was conducted by way of a questionnaire to 188 new students at a small private college. Their research found the most influential variables on the selection process included:

1. Contacts which require more proactivity on the part of the student are perceived as being more influential on the selection decision.
2. Recruitment stimuli which have a higher probability of selective screening are perceived as less influential.
3. Admissions practitioners may choose to scrutinize the goals and content of communications by groups and individuals traveling off campus to recruit students.
4. Activities which serve multiple purpose and/or audiences, such as broadcast advertising, church appearances, etc. ought to be recognized for what they are: tangential influences on students' decisions at best.
5. Unsolicited direct mail and telemarketing rank high in terms of perceived influence.

Kellaris noted that a variety of decision factors indicate that prospective college students, even for the type of college represented in this research, are differentially responsive to marketing stimuli. A key decision factor of one student may be of little or no import to another in today's increasingly heterogeneous environment.

The work done by Admissions Offices in the college selection process has always been cited as critical to the success of universities with growing enrollments. Olson (2018) conducted a case study at a small university in Texas that focused on interactions between prospective students and college recruiters. The scope of the research included taking on the role of the recruiter, translating the college message, linking across organizational barriers, teaching critical

mindset and application-related skills, talking with parents, and transforming future college students. Interviews focused on identifying the skills and competencies possessed by successful recruiters, and participants highlighted knowledge of:

1. Student learning and development
2. A commitment to equity and diversity
3. Helping skills
4. Experience related to assessment, evaluation, and research (Olson, 2018).

In addition, the findings revealed such skills such as organization, time management, communication, and political savvy to be crucial to the job (Olson, 2018).

Faith-Based Institutions

Faith-based colleges or universities exist in various forms, but all have a common mission of academic training and faith development. The most predominant faith-based colleges in the United States are found in religious traditions including Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity (Ringenberg, 2006). These institutions all have a commitment to academic training and offer spiritual development founded in their religious traditions. It is not uncommon for these colleges and universities to provide academic majors of all kinds while also providing opportunities for corporate worship in a temple, synagogue, mosque, or church. It is also not uncommon for these colleges and universities to have behavioral standards or expectations regarding alcohol, drugs, and interpersonal relationships. All faith-based institutions aspire to develop in their students morals, ethics, and values that flow from their respective faith or religious traditions. The academic head knowledge and education their students receive should be equal to the spiritual matters of the heart that motivate their students to serve others and work for the common good of their families and society (Alleman, 2015).

At most faith-based colleges, faith is not a perfunctory or obligatory aspect of campus life. Religion and faith are interwoven into multiple aspects of the college and not just a chapel or synagogue at one end of the campus. For example, some colleges may have a daily prayer session before class commences, others may conduct Bible studies in the residence halls once a week, and still others may have mandatory courses on religion and faith (Daniels & Gustafson, 2016). Another component of faith-based campuses is the opportunity to be surrounded by people who share a similar faith and value system. This can provide members of the college or university a common experience and can create a community that is difficult to replicate at large, secular colleges. Some faith-based colleges require students to be part of a certain religious tradition while other schools do not require the students to be religious at all. Class sizes tend to be smaller at faith-based colleges as compared to public colleges, so students expect personal attention from professors and a high level of interaction with classmates. With the smaller class sizes, lecture courses may often evolve into a lively interactive classroom discussions and group activities. For many faith-based colleges, the entire campus community shares the same values and beliefs. This forges strong bonds between individual members and can produce a tight-knit community. The faculty in these colleges are intentional in their encouragement of students to stay connected through religious services and activities as well as various projects and assignments related to their specific programs (Daniels & Gustafson, 2016).

Faith-based colleges or universities in the United States mostly consist of Buddhist, Jewish, Islamic, and Christian (Catholic and Protestant) traditions. There are a small number of Buddhist, Jewish, and Islamic colleges or universities in the United States, but the majority are Christian. In total, there are less than forty Jewish colleges or universities who enroll a little more than 17,000 students (College Stats, 2018). The number of Buddhist and Islamic colleges in the

United States is even less and their enrollments are quite small.

In recent years, the term “faith-based institution” has become synonymous with Christian institutions. In higher education today, a faith-based college or university is most often understood to be a Christian college or university (Council For Christian Colleges and Universities, 2018). Catholic colleges or universities have evolved into their own category and are recognized as such. Catholic schools today make up the largest non-public educational system in the country. In the United States, over 720,000 students attend 221 Catholic colleges and universities. Catholic institutions of higher learning account for more than half of all students in the US who are enrolled in faith-based colleges and universities (Update, 2018).

Most of the remaining students in the United States who are studying at a faith-based institution attend a college connected to the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), a Bible school, or a seminary. There are more than 4,700 degree-granting institutions of higher education in the United States. These include nearly 3,100 private institutions, just over 1,000 of which define themselves as religiously affiliated or faith-based. Of those, 140 have found common cause in the mission of the CCCU (Council for Christian Colleges, 2018). The CCCU aggregate institutional data include:

1. 140 affiliated colleges or universities
2. Located in 20 countries
3. 520,000 students enrolled worldwide
4. 445,000 students enrolled in the United States
5. 3.5 million alumni around the world
6. 72,000 faculty and staff employed around the world

Faith-based institutions are unique in their mission, pedagogy, and values. They “often

“have missions that are inextricably interconnected with service and community engagement. With these missions, faith-based colleges and universities are distinctively positioned to address social issues, engage in service to the local and global community, and to involve students, faculty, and administrators in this shared purpose” (Daniels & Gustafson, 2016). Faith-based institutions seek to educate their students not only in matters of the academy, but also in the practice of living out their commitments to serve society at large. They distinguish themselves in higher education by a faith commitment that informs their academic discipline and policy, but also motivates the desire for the greater good.

Summary

In recent years, much has been written regarding the undergraduate college-selection process, and research has offered important considerations. Several models for the study of college choice have been advanced. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) offered the seminal theory which has served as the primary model upon which college choice has been built. Others have added to this model by expanding upon their work with additional variables including econometric, sociological, institutional, and individual factors. These factors include the student’s educational aspirations, academic preparation, and high school curriculum. The socioeconomic status of the student’s family, along with the financial aid available, are instructive factors in college choice. Further, factors influencing this decision include other individuals such as parents, teachers, guidance counselors, and friends. Race, ethnicity, and gender are also critical factors that influence choice of college. The institutional influence of the colleges themselves by way of their marketing, website, academic offerings, interactions and mission value proposition are a critical factor to many in the choice of a college or university. In this research, focus will be given to the influence of other individuals including parents, family,

and counselors. In addition, the study will consider financial impact and influence, the college outreach and promotion, and the academic/spiritual reputation of the campus.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to identify the factors influencing college choice of a faith-based institution.

Research Questions

1. What are the factors that influence student choice of faith-based institutions?
2. To what extent do these factors influence student choice?

This chapter details the method and procedures used to conduct this study. Included are discussions of the rationale for the design, site and population, instrumentation, procedures, data analysis, role of the researcher and conclusion.

Rationale for the Design

A quantitative and exploratory approach was chosen to examine the factors influencing college choice of a faith-based university. According to Meyers, Gamst, and Guarino (2017), “Exploratory research adopts the inductive strategy of determining the factor structure empirically. Simply put, researchers allow the statistical procedure to examine the correlations between the variables and to generate a factor structure based on those relationships” (p. 539). Further, exploratory research intends to consider the research questions. This type of research is usually conducted to study a problem and, as such, quantitative design works well for this study. The literature is limited as to why high school students elect to enroll at a faith-based institution and researchers have recommended additional study. There is much written and studied about college choice in general, but little has been offered regarding this more narrow scope of research. The focus is on gaining insights and familiarity for later investigation or undertaken

when research problems are in a preliminary stage of investigation. Exploratory designs are often used to establish an understanding of how best to proceed in studying an issue or what methodology would effectively apply to gathering information about the issue (Stebbins, 2001).

Quantitative research is most appropriate for this topic and research questions because it will provide more broadly based data. The larger sample size will allow for more participants, more input and more information from which data can be gathered. The research will be based on statistics and numerical data. The data from this research will be measurable and the results will be clear through the data. A survey design will be utilized as it provides a numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population (Creswell, 2008). An advantage of the survey design is efficiency design and the rapid turnaround of the data collection. The data will be collected at one point in time and not over a period of time with a self-administered questionnaire. The population in the study will be first-time freshmen at various faith-based institutions across the United States. The participants will be selected at random with each individual having an equal probability of being selected from the population (Creswell, 2008).

Weaknesses of this approach include criticism that exploratory research is a thin or introductory precursor to more vigorous research (Stebbins, 2001). It is not regimented, burdened by epistemological biases, or preconceived conclusions. This makes it superficial to some critics who do not consider an exploratory design a vested member of social science research. A weakness of quantitative research is that it cannot be used to explain social phenomena. Quantitative data will present data, but it does not provide insight into why something is occurring. Conducting quantitative research limits accounting for non-numerical

information and does not always shed light on the full complexity of human experience or perceptions (Creswell, 2008).

The validity of a quantitative survey design should be noted. The researcher does not anticipate issues of internal validity given there are no procedures, treatments or experiences in this research. The questionnaires are administered at one point in time so the participants will not change their perceptions or answers. However, there will be issues of external validity if incorrect inferences are made from the data to other persons, settings, or future experiences (Creswell, 2008). The statistical analysis performed might lead to incorrect assumptions or conclusions by the researcher. Construct validity may be threatened if the researcher uses inadequate techniques in the development of the survey or interpretation of the variables (Creswell, 2008).

Population and Sample

The research was conducted at faith-based colleges and universities across the country. The population for this study included first-year freshmen students who just completed their first year of college at three member institutions of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). Those institutions were randomly selected with consideration given to geographic location, enrollment size, and denominational affiliation. Each institution selected was chosen from a major denomination including Baptist, Pentecostal and Wesleyan. The institutions included possess a minimum enrollment of 2,500 students. Additional demographic information for the participants is included in chapter 4.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument for this study was developed through a multi-step process. First, a thorough review of college choice theory was conducted resulting in an extensive list of factors

influencing the selection process. The literature review showed the factors that affect this process are varied and include the influence of parents (MacCallum, Glover, Queen, & Riggs, 2007), impact of guidance counselors (Espinosa, Bradshaw & Hausman, 2000; MacAllum, Glover, Queen, & Riggs, 2007), race and ethnicity (Esters & Bowen, 2004; Kelp Kern, 2000; Smith 2001; St. John, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005; Urbanski, 2000), gender (Johanson, 2007); financial considerations (MacAllum, Glover, Queen, and Riggs, 2007; McDonough, Calderone, & Purdy, 2007; St. John, Paulsen, & Carter, 2005), and the actual college or university itself (LeFauve, 2001; Tucciarone, 2007). Table 2.1 shows the identification predictors as influenced by specific theories in the literature.

Next, three seminal college and university student surveys were reviewed and analyzed for common themes regarding college choice. The three surveys were the Admitted Student Questionnaire (ASQ) developed by The College Board, the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey (TFS) developed by the Higher Education Research Institution (HERI) at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), and the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) developed by the Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana University. All three instruments have been validated by years of research and analysis. The ASQ (The College Board, 2017) specifically includes items related to college characteristics about academic experience, involvement, social life, athletics, cost, and geographic region. The CIRP Freshman Survey (HERI, 2020) specifically includes influence of parents and teachers, college reputation, geographic location, and college rankings. The BCSSE (Indiana University, 2020) contains similar college characteristics, including academics, diversity, social involvement, and learning support.

After reviewing the three instruments' college choice items, a comprehensive list of

distinct items was generated to create the bulk of the College Choice of Faith-Based Institutions Survey (CCFBIS), which is included in Appendix A. Five additional questions were developed based on their suggestions to measure the extent faith had on the college selection process of first-year, freshman undergraduate students. An email inquiry was posed to the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) chief enrollment officer listserv asking specifically for suggested faith-based questions. These enrollment professionals collectively maintain more than 100 years of enrollment leadership at faith-based institutions.

In the CCFBIS, students were asked to rate the level of importance by using a five-point Likert-type scale from Strongly Disagree (a score of 1) to Strongly Agree (a score of 5). This scaling option was utilized to allow students to discriminate meaningfully among options and to allow for them to respond in a way that perhaps may have indicated that a certain characteristic may have been undesirable as indicated by a response of Disagree or Strongly Disagree. The questionnaire consisted of 30 characteristics of institutions and the college choice process. In addition, various demographic data were collected.

Before administering the survey in the study, the instrument was reviewed by assessment experts at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville and Lee University with minor modifications made to the final version. It then was piloted by administering it to 15 Lee University students who just completed their freshman year. After they completed the instrument, the researcher contacted the respondents to determine if the instructions or any items needed modification. In addition, their responses were entered into SPSS, and means and standard deviations were generated by item to determine if the response set allowed for respondents to differentiate adequately among the characteristics.

To determine the reliability of the CCFBIS, the survey was administered to the set of 15

Lee University students who recently completed their freshman year on campus as part of the pilot study. It then was readministered to the same set of students two weeks later. The respondents' scores on both administrations were correlated by using a Pearson product-moment correlation analysis. The newly developed instrument was found to be reliable with an r value of .974.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted in several phases. The researcher contacted the Institutional Research or Chief Enrollment Office of each campus to request permission to conduct research and to secure help in conducting the study. Additional contacts were made to the various directors in the Admissions and First-Year Programs offices to request permission to conduct the research and to secure their help in conducting the study. Upon gaining verbal approval, an email was sent to each program director with a request for formal approval. Copies of these email messages are found in Appendix B.

In the second phase, potential student participants were emailed an invitation to participate in this study. The email introduced the research and invited students to complete the survey. The expected time to complete was approximately 15 minutes. All ethical guidelines submitted and approved by the IRB were followed. Data is stored in a password protected computer and will be destroyed in three years. Qualtrics survey software collected data and then SPSS was used to conduct statistical analyses.

Data Analysis

Data were entered into SPSS and analyzed using several techniques. Frequencies were reported for demographic items. Means and standard deviations were reported for the scores on each of the factors influencing college choice. The item means were ranked from highest to

lowest mean to show the relative levels of importance of each characteristic. In addition, the following six subscales were created by adding the items together that fall under the respective category: cost and/or financial aid, campus appearance and visit, academic reputation and opportunities, co-curricular activities, influence of other individuals and faith. Means and standard deviations were generated for each subscale to test for comparisons. To assess the level of importance of faith-based characteristics, the faith subscale mean was compared to the means from the other subscales by using an analysis of variance (ANOVA) test to determine if there were any statistically significant differences among the six scales. Additional inferential statistics will be used to answer each of the research questions. Specific statistical techniques will be determined after data collection.

Limitations

Limitations may be related to the difficulty of controlling variables and the limited types of data available to the researcher and the methodology. The sample size of the data limited the ability to find significant relations among the data and to generalize findings. The study was limited in trying to contact gatekeepers as they were not always available to serve the purpose of this research. This may have been caused by limited time, resources, or a general disinterest in the topic. The study elicited self-reported data from first year students who were enrolled in college and not high school students who are currently engaged in the college selection process. The respondents may not recall the process as clearly given it occurred while they were in high school. Students may not be able to attribute enrollment decisions accurately. They may recall positive influences in one manner and negative experiences in another. They may, in fact, embellish the recollections of the factors that influenced their choice of a college. Finally, the study was limited by potential bias of the researcher in the manner in which the literature was

reviewed, the survey was created, or the data interpreted.

Role of the Researcher

As the author of this study, I bring to it decades of observation as an admissions officer and university vice president of enrollment. Through my career and experience, I have collected some understanding of the choices high school students make to study at private, Christian institutions. My work has afforded me the opportunity to visit dozens of faith-based colleges and universities. It is my professional observation that at most faith-based schools, faith is neither perfunctory nor obligatory. Instead, religion and faith are interwoven into multiple aspects of the college and are represented by more than a chapel or synagogue at one end of the campus. The centering of faith within an institution can provide members of the college or university with a common experience and can create a community that is difficult to replicate at large, secular colleges. It is common that at faith-based colleges the campus community shares values and beliefs that assist in forging strong bonds between individual members and that can produce a tight-knit community. It is commonplace that the faculty at faith-based institutions are intentional in their encouragement of students to stay connected to both the central faith and to the institutional community through religious services, faith-based and school-organized activities, and projects and assignments that relate faith to their specific programs.

Summary

This chapter included the purpose of the study, research questions, rationale for the design, site and population, instrumentation, procedures, data analysis, and role of the researcher. A literature review and a quantitative survey expert analysis were conducted to create the survey instrument and establish content validity and reliability.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this quantitative study was to identify the factors influencing college choice of a faith-based institution. The population for this study included first-year freshmen students who just completed their initial semester of college at three member institutions of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). Those institutions were randomly selected with consideration given to geographic location, enrollment size, and denominational affiliation. Each institution selected was chosen from a major denomination including Baptist, Pentecostal and Wesleyan. The institutions included had a minimum enrollment of 2,500 students. At two of the institutions, survey emails were sent to participants by the Director of Admissions and Associate Provost respectfully. The emails were sent in two-week intervals. At the third institution, the Chair of the IRB committee approved the survey being sent by the researcher. Based on the researcher's former employment at that university, it was determined participants were more likely to respond.

From the 1,964 email invitations distributed, 180 responses were received. This chapter incorporates the results from investigating the factors that influence student choice of faith-based institutions by key student demographics. The results include participant demographics, reliability of the instrument, as well as findings for the two research questions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to identify the factors influencing college choice of a faith-based institution.

Research Questions

1. What are the factors that influence student choice of faith-based institutions?
2. To what extent do these factors influence student choice?

DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographic characteristics in this study included gender, race/ethnicity, college choice distance from home, type of high school attended, college first choice and citizenship status. The sample included only first-year freshmen who had just completed their first semester at three faith-based universities in the United States.

As shown in Table 4.1 (Appendix D), respondents' gender classified as female was 75.56% (n = 136) of the sample and 24.44% (n = 44) were male.

As shown in Table 4.2, students who identified as White/Caucasian made up 78.33% (n = 141) of the sample; 5.0% (n = 9) were African American/Black, 0.55% (n = 1) were American Indian/Alaska Native, 0.55% (n = 1) were East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese), 1.11% (n = 2) were Filipina/o/x, 1.11% (n = 2) were Southeast Asian (Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong), 1.11% (n = 2) were South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lankan), 0.55% (n = 1) were Other Asian, 0.55% (n = 1) were Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 5.55% (n = 10) were Mexican American/Chicana/o/x, 1.11% (n = 2) were Puerto Rican, 2.70% (n = 5) were Other Latina/o/x, and 1.60 (n = 3) were Other.

As shown in Table 4.3, respondents' distance from home to college as 5 miles or less was 6.15% (n = 11) of the sample, 9.49% (n = 17) were 6 – 10 miles, 22.90% (n = 41) were 11 – 50 miles, 13.40% (n = 24) were 51 – 100 miles, 32.97% (n = 59) were 101 – 500 miles, and 15.09% (n = 27) were over 500 miles.

As shown in Table 4.4, respondents' type of high school attended classified as

public school was 71.11% (n = 128) of the sample, 18.34% (n = 33) was private religious school, 0.55% (n = 1) was private independent school, and 10.00% (n = 18) was homeschool.

As shown in Table 4.5, respondents who enrolled in their first college choice included 76.66% (n = 138) of the sample and respondents who did not enroll in their first college was 23.34% (n = 42).

As shown in Table 4.6, respondents' citizenship classified as U.S. Citizen was 97.76% (n = 174) of the sample, 1.68% (n = 3) were Permanent Residents, and 0.56% (n = 1) were international.

The demographics of the respondents included gender, race/ethnicity, distance from home to college, kind of high school attended, enrollment in first college choice, and citizenship. Most of the respondents were female (75.56%), white/Caucasian (78.33%), enrolled at a college 101 – 500 miles away from their home (32.97%), attended a public high school (71.11%), enrolled in their first college choice (76.66%) and a citizen of the United States (97.76%). In all but one of the majority demographic categories, participation percentages were more than 70%. The only majority demographic with more variance was the distance from home to college. There was a greater variety of responses to this question with students traveling a range of miles to their campuses. Some of the demographic data are similar to those of the three participating institutions. These include gender, race/ethnicity, kind of high school attended and enrollment in first choice of college. The data were not similar enough to approximate the populations of the individual institutions surveyed.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Data for this study were collected using a researcher-created survey, the College Choice of Faith-Based Institutions Survey (CCFBI). In the CCFBIS, students were asked to rate the

level of importance of questions using a five-point Likert-type scale from Strongly Disagree (a score of 1) to Strongly Agree (a score of 5). This scaling option was utilized to allow students to discriminate meaningfully among options and to allow for them to respond in a way that perhaps may have indicated a certain characteristic may have been undesirable as indicated by a response of Disagree or Strongly Disagree. The questionnaire consisted of 30 characteristics of institutions and the college choice process. Six subscales were created by adding the college choice factors together that fall under each respective category. Those subscales include 1) cost and/or financial aid, 2) campus appearance and visit, 3) academic reputation and opportunities, 4) co-curricular activities, 5) influence of other individuals and 6) faith. The factors and corresponding subscales are noted in Table 4.7.

As shown in Table 4.8, the means and standard deviations are reported for the scores on each of the subscales influencing college choice. Later in this chapter, the means were ranked from highest to lowest mean to show the relative levels of importance of each subscale and corresponding factors.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The results from the two research questions are displayed in this segment. Data analyzed by using SPSS are reported below. Participants submitted a survey evaluating the extent to which a statement applies to them with the scores presented on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). To assess the level of importance of faith-based characteristics, the faith subscale mean was compared to the means from the other subscales by using an analysis of variance (ANOVA) test to determine if there were any statistically significant differences among the six scales. In addition, independent samples t-tests were used to analyze gender and enrollment in first college choice since there were only two comparison groups. The ANOVA

test was used for race/ethnicity, permanent home miles from college, and kind of high school. The citizenship data were not analyzed due to low participant responses.

Question 1

What are the factors that influence student choice of faith-based institutions?

The factors that influence student choice of a faith-based institution were analyzed and the means and standard deviations were presented in Tables 4.8, 4.9 and 4.10. The item means were then ranked from highest to lowest mean to show the relative levels of importance of each characteristic. Those data are in Table 4.10.

The means and standard deviation results offered relative levels of importance for each factor. The means ranged from a high of 4.37 (availability of intended major) to a low of 2.26 (high school guidance counselor). The standard deviation ranged from 1.24 (religious leaders or mentors) to .82 (campus appearance).

There were eight individual items with means above 4.0 including availability of intended major (4.37), personal faith (4.29), financial aid from institution (4.21), job preparation (4.19), personal attention offered to students (4.16), religious mission of the institution (4.15), campus appearance (4.09), and academic reputation (4.05). These data begin to show the factors most influential in the choice of a faith-based college. Further, the standard deviations for these eight factors range from 1.068 to .82. All the academic reputation and offerings subscale factors had the lowest standard deviations, which suggested more consistent results for that subscale. These data suggest the relative importance of academic reputation and offerings as critical in the college selection process. The faith subscale had the highest standard deviations of the top eight results including religious mission of the institution (1.07) and personal faith (1.06). These data reveal the relative importance of faith in the college choice of a faith-based institution based on

the means; however, the standard deviations show the larger variance in the responses of students.

There were three individual items with means below 3.0 including college publications (2.90), high school faculty members (2.28), and high school guidance counselors (2.26). The standard deviations for these same three factors were college publications (1.08), high school faculty members (1.10) and high school guidance counselors (1.08). The means for these three characteristics were the lowest of all the factors, yet their standard deviations were among the highest. These data would suggest the influence of printed college publications and influence of high school staff is minimal, but there is less of a consensus among the responses.

The six factor subscales' means and standard deviations are found in Table 4.9. The frequencies for each subscale range from 176 to 180. However, the means for each subscale range from a high of 19.89 (academic reputation and opportunities) to 15.19 (influence of others). Further, the second highest subscale mean was 19.14 (faith) and the third highest was 18.66 (campus appearance and visit). These data also suggest academic reputation and opportunities are the most influential factor in choosing a faith-based college. They also affirm the individual factor responses demonstrating the importance of faith in the choice of these institutions for students. The lowest mean of the subscale data was influence of others (15.19). These data demonstrate other individuals influence the choice of a faith-based institution, but not nearly as much as academics, faith, or the actual campus itself.

The standard deviations of the six subscales reveal the highest consensus among factors included in cost or financial aid (2.84). The highest standard deviation appears in the faith subscale (4.39) and, again, reinforces the finding that responses were less concentrated toward the mean as compared to five other subscales.

Question 2

To what extent do these factors influence student choice?

To assess the level of importance of faith-based characteristics, the faith subscale mean was compared to the means from the other subscales by using an analysis of variance (ANOVA) test to determine if there were any statistically significant differences among the six scales. An independent samples t-test was determined to best analyze the demographic factors including gender and enrollment in first college choice since there were only two comparison groups. The ANOVA test was used for race/ethnicity, permanent home miles from college, and kind of high school. The citizenship data were not analyzed due to participant responses. The valid number of responses received was 178. Of those, 174 were citizens of the United States, 3 were permanent residents, and 1 was international. This did not provide data for an adequate analysis.

As shown in Table 4.1, there were two gender groups in the data, including female and male. An independent samples t-test was conducted on the means of the two groups by the six subscale means. Significant statistical differences were not found where $p < .05$. The lack of statistical differences between groups was demonstrated by cost and/or financial aid $t(174) = .550$, $p = .583$ and there was no significant effect for gender despite women ($M = 17.70$, $SD = 2.73$) attaining higher scores than men ($M = 17.43$, $SD = 3.17$). Further, the lack of statistical differences between groups was demonstrated by campus appearance and visit $t(175) = .170$, $p = .865$ and there was no significant effect for gender despite women ($M = 18.68$, $SD = 3.11$) attaining higher scores than men ($M = 18.59$, $SD = 3.28$). There was no significant difference in academic reputation and opportunities $t(176) = 1.65$, $p = .101$ and there was no significant effect for gender despite women ($M = 20.20$, $SD = 3.25$) attaining higher scores than men ($M = 19.31$, $SD = 2.60$). There was no significant difference in co-curricular activities $t(178) = -1.18$, $p = .236$

and there was no significant effect for gender despite men ($M = 18.45$, $SD = 3.25$) attaining higher scores than women ($M = 17.65$, $SD = 4.05$). There was no significant difference in influence of others $t(178) = -1.23$, $p = .902$ and there was no significant effect for gender despite men ($M = 15.25$, $SD = 3.84$) attaining higher scores than women ($M = 15.16$, $SD = 3.78$). There was no significant difference in faith $t(177) = .164$, $p = .870$ and there was no significant effect for gender despite women ($M = 19.17$, $SD = 4.68$) attaining higher scores than men ($M = 19.04$, $SD = 3.32$). In summary, there were no significant differences in the gender of participants when compared to six subscales.

As shown in Table 4.2, there were many race/ethnicities in the data from this research including: White/Caucasian, African American, Indian/Alaska Native, East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese), Filipina/o/x, Southeast Asian (Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong), South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lankan), Other Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Mexican American/Chicana/o/x, Puerto Rican, South American, or Other Latina/o/x. The analysis of race/ethnicity was conducted on any group with five or more responses; however, three groups were eliminated due to missing values. Thus, the five race/ethnicities used for analysis included White/Caucasian, African American, Mexican American/Chicana/o/x, Other Latina/o/x and All Other.

An ANOVA was conducted on the means of the six groups and the six subscale means and significant statistical differences were not found where $p < .05$. The lack of statistical differences between groups was demonstrated by cost and/or financial aid ($F(6, 162) = 2.577$, $p = .021$); campus visit/appearance ($F(6, 163) = .222$, $p = .969$); academic reputation and opportunities ($F(6, 163) = .222$, $p = .120$); co-curricular activities ($F(6, 166) = 2.141$, $p = .051$); influence of others ($F(6, 165) = .559$, $p = .763$); and faith ($F(6, 164) = .534$, $p = .782$). There were no

significant differences in race/ethnicity when compared to six subscales.

As noted in Table 4.3, there were six different responses from participants regarding how many miles their permanent home was from college including: 5 miles or less, 6-10, 11-50, 51-100, 101-500 and over 500. An ANOVA was conducted on the means of the six groups and the six subscale means and one significant statistical difference was found where $p < .05$. There was a significant difference between groups as demonstrated by influence of others ($F(6, 173) = 4.318$, $p = .001$). Post Hoc analysis revealed influence of others ($M = .51$, $SD = .90$, $p = .001$) significantly impacted students who traveled 6 – 10 miles to college or 101 – 500 miles to college. Students who traveled 101 – 500 miles were not influenced by others.

There was a lack of significant statistical difference on five of the subscales as demonstrated by cost and/or financial aid ($F(6, 169) = .830$, $p = .530$; campus visit/appearance ($F(6, 170) = .848$, $p = .517$; academic reputation and opportunities ($F(6, 171) = 1.768$, $p = .122$; co-curricular activities ($F(6, 173) = .543$, $p = .744$; and faith ($F(6, 172) = 1.186$, $p = .318$). There was one significant difference in the miles the participants home was from college when compared to six subscales. The data analysis revealed the influence of others mattered for students who lived six to ten miles from their college. However, students who lived 101 – 500 miles from their college were not influenced by others.

As noted in Table 4.4, there were four kinds of high schools in the data from this research including: public, private religious, private independent and homeschool. Only one participant attended a private independent school, so the data analysis was based on the three other schools. An ANOVA was conducted on the means of the three groups and the six subscale means and significant statistical differences were not found. The lack of statistical differences between groups was demonstrated by cost and/or financial aid ($F(2, 172) = 2.061$, $p = .130$; campus

visit/appearance ($F(2, 173)=.264, p=.768$; academic reputation and opportunities ($F(2, 174)=.703, p=.496$; co-curricular activities ($F(2, 176)=1.000, p=.370$; influence of others ($F(2, 176)=.937, p=.394$; and faith ($F(2, 175)=.298, p=.743$). There were no significant differences in the kind of high school attended when compared to six subscales.

As noted in Table 4.5, there were two responses for participants regarding enrollment in their first college choice. Students selected either yes or no. An independent samples t-test was conducted on the means of the two groups and the six subscale means. Three significant statistical differences were found where $p<.05$ and one statistical difference was found where $p<.001$. There was a significant difference between groups as demonstrated by campus appearance and visit $t(175)=2.37, p=.019$ and this significant effect was achieved with more students enrolling at their first choice college ($M = 17.42, SD = 2.72$) than not ($M = 18.31, SD = 3.14$). There was also a significant difference between groups as demonstrated by academic reputation and opportunities $t(176)=2.22, p=.028$ and this significant effect was achieved with more students enrolling at their first choice college ($M = 20.27, SD = 2.86$) than not ($M = 19.04, SD = 3.75$). There was also a significant difference between groups as demonstrated by influence of others $t(178)=2.06, p=.041$ and this significant effect was achieved with more students enrolling at their first choice college ($M = 15.50, SD = 3.50$) than not ($M = 14.14, SD = 4.47$). Finally, there was a significant difference between groups as demonstrated by faith $t(177)=3.87, p=.000$ and this significant effect was achieved with more students enrolling at their first choice college ($M = 19.81, SD = 3.63$) than not ($M = 16.92, SD = 5.76$).

In summary, for students who enrolled in their first choice college campus appearance and visit, academic reputation and opportunities, and influence of others are important factors in the selection of a faith-based college. The subscale of faith ($p=.000$) showed significance at a

higher level than the other significant subscales ($p=.019$, $p=.028$, $p=.041$). These data suggest students who decide to attend a faith-based college as their first choice value their faith as the highest factor while still considering campus appearance, academics offerings and influence of others.

Summary

In chapter four, descriptive statistics related to demographic questions were provided to determine the factors that influence student choice of a faith-based institution. To assess the extent these factors influence student choice, the faith subscale mean was compared to the means from the other subscales by using analysis of variance (ANOVA) and t-tests to determine if there were any statistically significant differences among the six scales. Statistically significant differences on factors included the influence of others on students who traveled 6 – 10 miles or 101 – 500 miles to college. In addition, significant findings were found with students who enrolled in their first college choice on campus appearance and visit, academic reputation and opportunities, influence of others, and faith. A discussion focused on these findings, implications for practice, and future research recommendations are provided in chapter five.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 5 provides discussion and recommendations for future research. This study's purpose was to identify the factors influencing college choice of a faith-based institution and to what extent those factors influence student choice. Identifying possible connections between faith and the college selection process were considered in light of various demographic categories including gender, race/ethnicity, distance from home, type of high school attended, and first choice of college and citizenship. Chapter 5 will summarize and discuss these findings, as well as give implications and recommendations involving the findings and future research.

Summary of the Study

Chapter 1 introduced the problem, purpose, research questions and significance of the current study. Chapter 2 reviewed the literature regarding the broader topic of college choice including factors such as the student's educational aspirations, academic preparation, high school curriculum; the socioeconomic status of the student's family, along with the financial aid available; the influence of other individuals such as parents, teachers, guidance counselors, and friends; race, ethnicity, and gender; the institutional influence of the colleges by way of their marketing, website, academic offerings, interactions, and mission. Upon completion of the literature review, it was determined little research on the decision-making experience of students who choose to enroll at faith-based institutions had been conducted. Therefore, this study has the potential of making contributions to institutions of various Carnegie classifications. Chapter 3 provided the methodology of the study including the rationale for the design, site and population, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, and role of the researcher. Chapter 4 described the results of the study emerging from the survey administration and data analysis.

The survey was sent to 1,964 first-year college students who had just completed the first semester of their freshmen year at three faith-based institutions across the United States in fall 2021. An email requesting participation in the study began the recruitment process and was sent to the institutional chief enrollment officer, director of first-year programs, or Provost's Office (Appendix B). After receiving approval from the institutional IRB designee, a separate email was sent to the first-year students. The original email was comprised of general information along with a secured web link providing access to the online survey (Appendix C). One other subsequent email reminder was distributed to the students over a two-week period. The results included 180 responses for a response rate of 9.16%. Participants completed a researcher-created instrument, the College Choice of Faith-Based Institutions Survey (CCFBI) found in Appendix A. The instrument was 30 questions. Demographics of the respondents included gender, race/ethnicity, distance from home to college, type of high school attended, enrollment in first college choice, and citizenship. Most of the respondents were female (75.56%), white/Caucasian (78.33%), enrolled at a college 101 – 500 miles away from their home (32.97%), attended a public high school (71.11%), enrolled in their first college choice (76.66%) and a citizen of the United States (97.76%). In all but one of the majority demographic categories, participation percentages were more than 70%.

To assess the level of importance of faith-based characteristics, the faith subscale mean was compared to the means from the other subscales by using an analysis of variance (ANOVA) test to determine if there were any statistically significant differences among the six subscales. In addition, independent samples t-tests were used to analyze gender and enrollment in first college choice since there were only two comparison groups. The ANOVA test was used for race/ethnicity, permanent home miles from college, and kind of high school.

The results began to reveal the factors most influential in the choice of a faith-based college. The six factor subscales' means and standard deviations also begin to reveal the factors most influential in the choice of a faith-based college. These data suggest academic reputation and opportunities are the most influential factor in choosing a faith-based college. The results also reveal statistically significant differences on factors including the influence of others on students who traveled 6 – 10 miles or 101 – 500 miles to college. In addition, significant findings were found with students who enrolled in their first college choice on campus appearance and visit, academic reputation and opportunities, influence of others, and faith.

Discussion

The factors determined to influence the choice of a faith-based institution as related to the two research questions are included in this discussion. The individual items and subscale factors are identified. The relationships between the demographic subscale factors and the faith subscale will also be included in this discussion. Those demographic subscales include cost and/or financial aid, campus appearance and visit, academic reputation and opportunities, co-curricular activities, influence of other individuals and faith.

Question 1

What are the factors that influence student choice of faith-based institutions?

Research question one explored the factors that influence choice of a faith-based institution. Prior research of the college selection process provided the framework for this study and the seminal theories are instructive. Chapman's model of college choice (1981) provided the genesis of the college search literature and stated that to understand students' choice of a college to attend, it is necessary to consider characteristics of the student, the student's family, and the characteristics of the college itself. The model suggested college choice is affected by student

characteristics in combination with a series of external influences including the influence of significant persons, the fixed characteristics of the institution, and the institution's efforts to communicate with prospective students (Chapman, 1981). This study supported Chapman's second characteristic of college choice as seen in the highest individual college choice factor means. There were eight individual factors with means above 4.0 including availability of intended major (4.37), personal faith (4.29), financial aid from institution (4.21), job preparation (4.19), personal attention offered to students (4.16), religious mission of the institution (4.15), campus appearance (4.09), and academic reputation (4.05). Seven of these factors could be categorized as "fixed characteristics of the institution" supporting Chapman's theory of college choice. The only factor not included in these top eight factors was personal faith. This is an important new finding to add to the college search literature and it is consistent with my observations of the past twenty-five years as an enrollment leader at a faith-based institution. Students in this study who enrolled at faith-based institutions do consider faith an important factor in the college selection process.

Three of the top eight individual factors for this study fall into the academic reputation and offerings subscale. Further, the highest ranking means for each subscale included academic reputation and opportunities (19.89), faith (19.14) and campus appearance and visit (18.66). These data suggest academic reputation and opportunities are the most influential factor in choosing a faith-based college. They also affirm each individual factor response demonstrating the importance of faith in the choice of these institutions for students. All the academic reputation and offerings subscale factors had the lowest standard deviations, which suggested more consistent results for that subscale. These data suggest the relative importance of academic reputation and offerings as critical in the college selection process. While faith is important to

students at faith-based institutions, it is not as important as the academic offerings, major, graduate school preparation and job placement. From my observation, this trend has become more apparent than when I first began work as an admissions officer in 1997. It was more common at that time for students to rely on their faith to make these decisions without fully considering the return on the investment as it relates to their academic discipline. However, the primary importance of academic preparation and career prospects has been increasing on college choice, as seen in the historic literature (Hossler & Gallaher, 1987) and more recent research (Pitre, 2006). This study confirms these aspects are most influential in the college selection process at faith-based institutions.

Chapman's (1981) first external influence on the student's choice of college – the influence of significant persons – was not corroborated by this research. To the contrary, there were three individual items with means below 3.0 including college publications (2.90), high school faculty members (2.28), and high school guidance counselors (2.26). The means for these three characteristics were the lowest of all the factors and these data would suggest the influence of printed college publications and influence of high school staff is minimal. Foundational research from Flint (1992), Delaney (1998), and MacCallum, Glover, Queen, and Riggs (2007) found parents to be most influential on the college selection process. Flint (1992) noted that parents will, implicitly or explicitly, convey information about colleges or universities' characteristics that will ultimately guide the students in their college selection process. His findings resulted in a consistent discovery of parental influence across various data including gender, race, family income, parental education levels, degree aspirations, number of colleges in the choice set, and selectivity. Delaney (1998) found parental income has a direct effect upon the perceptions that families maintain of academic quality, concerns of cost, and opportunities

for job placement. MacCallum, Glover, Queen, and Riggs (2007) also supported the idea of parental influence in college selection. They emphatically stated that for traditional aged students, across ethnic and racial categories and regardless of socioeconomic status, parents played the strongest role in the college choice and decision-making processes.

Outside of parental influence, the role of the high school guidance counselor has been critical to the prospective student. Previous research revealed counselors were integral to college selection and can affect the choice made by students. The perception of institutional quality that the counselor communicates, both to the students and the parents, impacts the college selection process. Ray (1992) found that almost all students surveyed in his research had used a guidance counselor as a source of information about college choice and indicated high ratings of satisfaction. Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines and Holcomb-McCoy (2011) used social capital theory as a framework and they found that in addition to some college-related variables, the number of school counselors and student contacts were significant predictors of college application rates. In spite of this consensus in the research literature, the influence of others was seen as least influential in the college choice of a faith-based institution for this research. This is vastly different from college search literature and presents findings contrary to conventional wisdom in the student enrollment profession. One reason for this disparity may be how respondents rated their experiences with faith. Parents are still understood to be quite influential in the college selection process and high school counselors are not far behind. In fact, it is widely held that many students enroll at faith-based institutions with strong influence from parents. This has been my observation as well. However, the data in this study revealed parents, high school counselors, and others were not as influential as academic offerings, faith, and the campus itself.

Chapman's (1981) third external influence on the student's choice of college – the institution's efforts to communicate with prospective students – was not corroborated by this research. As stated above, there were three individual items with means below 3.0 including college publications (2.90), high school faculty members (2.28), and high school guidance counselors (2.26). The means for these three characteristics were the lowest of all the factors and these data would suggest the influence of printed college publications and influence of high school staff is minimal. Josephson, Kelly, and Smith (2020) found colleges invested significant resources to produce recruitment materials that use a combination of images and text. This steady drip of marketing information—visual-verbal redundancy—served as the primary conduit of information to the prospective student and their families. Their results provided initial evidence this can be used as a message design strategy to directly influence students' decision-making process. At the inception of website development, LeFauve's (2001) study of web-based marketing and recruitment, prospective students perceive a college's materials differently depending on the vehicle used to present them, and they look to different methods of presentation for specific kinds of material. In research conducted by Karani, Thanki, and Achuthan (2021), the structural equation model of their study revealed the four dimensions of website usability were positively associated with student satisfaction. Content, organization and readability criterion had the most influence on satisfaction followed by user interface design, performance and effectiveness, and navigation and links. The study recommends universities should maintain up-to-date content and ensure ease of understanding with all programs, policies and requirements the students in order to maximize the satisfaction of the website.

For this study, the college website factor did not rank relatively as high as other factors with a mean of 3.31. This, too, was one of the lower means when compared to the other factors

included in the research. The survey used in this study did not specifically identify the use of electronic communication, images, and text as an influential aspect in the choice of a faith-based institution. Had it been included, I suspect the individual and subscale means would have fared better. This is the most current and contemporary approach to student recruitment seen on college campus of all types. This includes research universities, private universities, community colleges, and faith-based institutions. The marketing, drip campaigns, electronic communication and social media influence has become the primary focus of many recruitment strategies around the country (Terwilliger, 2019).

Much of the literature on college choice points to the impact of race/ethnicity, gender, and financial impact and influence. There is clear evidence that students of color are more likely to enroll at institutions where they are comfortable, and recent research shows that misinformation in the African American community regarding college costs, access, and the benefits of a college education abound (Comeaux, Chapman, & Contreras, 2020; Muhammad, 2008). African American students rely more heavily on the high school guidance counselor as a source of information than their white counterparts (Bridgeman, 2021; Johnson, Stewart, & Eberly, 1991). Research from Perez and McDonough (2008) as well as Mariscal (2021) has shown that as primarily first-generation college students, Latinos and Latinas rely heavily on siblings, peers, relatives, and high school contacts for purposes of postsecondary planning. The literature has also indicated that gender has an impact upon the college-selection process. In research undertaken to explore the factors that influence the choice of a specific academic program, Johanson (2007) found that location, cost, availability of financial aid, and campus environment were more important to women than to men, while reputation of the faculty was more important to men. Spaulding (2001) found that family concerns about college costs were

varied according to the students who applied for aid and those who did not. The study found that families who place greater importance on college expenses are less likely to select a four-year college. Easter (2012) also found the impact of financial aid and scholarship policies were critical to the college selection process when federal grants and loans, state scholarships, tuition dollars, and endowment monies are difficult to acquire.

Unfortunately, this research did not reveal race/ethnicity, gender, or financial impact and influence to be influential on student choice of a faith-based institution as seen in the literature. The data did not show significant statistical impact upon the participants in this study. The impact of gender and race/ethnicity is clearly an issue faith-based institutions must consider. Today, there are more women than men enrolled at faith-based institutions and a growing number of non-Caucasian students select faith-based institutions. Cost, financial aid, and scholarships dominate the time and conversations of many faith-based enrollment leaders. The lack of financial impact and influence on the choice of a faith-based institution in this study was most surprising. However, when compared to academic offerings, faith, and the campus itself, financial impact and influence were not as influential.

In this study, the factors influencing the choice of a faith-based institution were consistent with some of those seen in the literature. The influence of the academic programs and opportunities on student choice of a faith-based institution is evident when considering individual and subscale means. Further, the individual and subscale standard deviations are strengthened by the consistency of responses. The relative influence of faith on student choice of a faith-based institution is evident when considering individual and subscale means. However, the individual and subscale standard deviations do not reinforce the influence as seen with academic offerings and opportunities. Students consider their faith when making this decision,

but not before their academic and potential career prospects. The data would also suggest the influence of others on student choice of a faith-based institution was not as relatively strong as the five other subscales.

Question 2

To what extent do these factors influence student choice?

The second research question examined to what extent do these factors influence student choice. To assess the level of importance of faith-based characteristics, the faith subscale mean was compared to the means from the other subscales by using an analysis of variance (ANOVA) test to determine if there were any statistically significant differences among the six scales. An independent samples t-test was determined to best analyze the demographic factors including gender and enrollment in first college choice and the ANOVA test was used for race/ethnicity, permanent home miles from college, and type of high school.

Of the six subscales comparisons, only two – distance traveled from home and enrollment in first college choice – were found to have statistically significant results. This was surprising based upon the college choice literature and three schools surveyed. Among those three schools, there were distinct denominational organizations, geographic locations, and one school is a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) with an enrollment of at least 25 percent Hispanic undergraduate full-time equivalent students. There was an expectation to see a greater significance from the subscales including gender, race/ethnicity, and type of high school attended. The lack of significant results could be due to limited participants, timeframe of the study, or too narrow of a scope with the demographic responses in the survey. A discussion of these factors based on previous research in the literature was offered above in question one. The data analysis in the findings for question two reveal the lack of significance for these

demographics on student influence in the choice of a faith-based institution.

There was a statistically significant difference in the miles the participants home was from college when compared to the subscale, influence of others. The data analysis revealed the influence of others on students who lived six to ten miles from their college. These students did weigh the influence of others in making their college choice. However, students who lived 101 – 500 miles from their college were not influenced by others. This finding is difficult to explain or interpret. Prior research did not designate miles from home in the same manner as this study. While distance from home is often mentioned as a factor in the choice of a college, little research has been offered in the same detailed fashion as this study. It may offer some insight into the influence others have on students who are choosing a faith-based institution in close proximity to the student's home; however, it would be with little certainty.

The second, and most significant finding of this study, was for students who enrolled in their first college choice. For these students, campus appearance and visit, academic reputation and opportunities, and influence of others are important factors in the selection of a faith-based institution. In addition, the subscale of faith ($p=.000$) was significant at a higher level than the other significant subscales ($p=.019$, $p=.028$, $p=.041$). These data suggest students who decide to attend a faith-based college as their first choice value their faith as the highest factor with campus appearance, academics offerings and influence of others also impacting the decision. For these students who enrolled in their first choice college, faith was significant at a higher level than the other subscales. Campus appearance, academic reputation and opportunities, and influences of others were statistically significant having an impact on the selection process for students who enrolled in their first choice college, but not as much as their faith.

The finding of faith as influential in student choice of a faith-based institution is unique

as it does not have a foundation in the literature. The idea of faith as an influential factor in the college selection process does, in fact, fill a gap in the literature. A reminder of college choice theory from the literature is instructive as we interpret these findings. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) offered the seminal model of student college choice that depicts three stages: predisposition, search, and choice. The first stage in Hossler and Gallagher's model, predisposition, discusses factors related to whether or not students develop, or have developed, the disposition to go to college. The second phase of the model, the search process, is the stage where information is sought about colleges, and potential college choices are evaluated. The last stage of the process, choice, involves evaluating and choosing an institution from among the options which leads to matriculation at the institution. Hossler and Gallagher also identified factors and persons, individual and organizational, relevant to and influential at each stage in the process. In the predisposition phase, aspects of the students' backgrounds and experiences play a major role in setting this predisposition, and parents, peers, high schools, and the colleges themselves are all major influences (Hossler and Gallagher, 1987). It is in the predisposition and search stages where faith is most influential. This is when students rank their choices of colleges. They develop, or have developed, the disposition to go to college. They seek information about colleges by way of campus appearance or visit and an evaluation of the academic reputation and opportunities. And they rely on the influence of others – parents and peers – prior to making the final choice. This is also the stage of life where faith development is ongoing and maturing. According to the respondents of this study, when students enroll at their first choice of college; faith, campus appearance and visit, academic reputation and opportunities, and influence of others are all significant factors. But faith is the most influential.

Implications

The current study sought to add to the body of literature regarding college choice of a faith-based institution. The process of choosing a college can be quite difficult for high school students and their families. If the student considers issues of faith in this process, it can cause additional complexity. While researchers have examined many factors that influence the college selection process (Baliyan, 2016; Hayden, 2000; Noel-Levitz, 2012; Perez, 2008; & Tucciarone, 2007), little research has focused on the factors that influence the selection of a faith-based institution. The need for studying and understanding how high school students choose to enroll at a faith-based institution has been emphasized in contemporary literature as well with multiple researchers indicating the need for further study on the topic (Davignon, 2018; Farrow, 2019; Leigh, 2019).

Statistically significant findings from this research suggest there is a relationship between students first choice of college and their faith. Further, statistically significant findings suggest there is a relationship between students first choice of college and campus appearance, academic reputation and offerings, and influence of others. The latter three reinforce the literature which established the foundation for their influence on college choice. Kellaris (1988) and Nurnberg (2012) highlighted the importance of the campus in the recruitment process. Hossler (1989) and Pitre (2006) helped to establish the importance of academic reputation and opportunities. Smith (2001), Spaulding (2001) and Stage (1989) provided empirical evidence of the influence of others on the college selection process.

The finding of faith as statistically significant to students choice of a faith-based institution is new to the literature. This result is the novel finding of the research and offers insight into the college selection process for faith-based institutions. Faith-based colleges and

universities should find a way for students to categorize their institution as first choice and enhance the recruitment strategies of campus appearance, academic offerings, and influence of others. At the same time, they should acknowledge the role faith plays in this process and engage prospective students and their families throughout the recruitment process in this manner. All faith-based institutions are tuition dependent and their enrollment is the primary source of revenue. It is, in essence, the most critical fund raising work of the institution. The onset of a global pandemic has magnified this imperative with declining enrollments around the country. To that end, this research and implications are critical to the success of faith-based institutions of all sizes.

Another important implication is that faith needs to be added to college choice models when used with a faith-based institution. The survey instrument for this study was developed through a multi-step process. First, a thorough review of college choice theory was conducted resulting in an extensive list of factors influencing the selection process. Next, three seminal college and university student surveys were reviewed and analyzed for common themes regarding college choice. The three surveys were the Admitted Student Questionnaire (ASQ) developed by The College Board, the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey (TFS) developed by the Higher Education Research Institution (HERI) at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), and the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) developed by the Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana University. The ASQ (The College Board, 2017) specifically includes items related to college characteristics about academic experience, involvement, social life, athletics, cost, and geographic region. The CIRP Freshman Survey (HERI, 2020) specifically includes influence of parents and teachers, college reputation, geographic location, and college rankings. The BCSSE (Indiana University,

2020) contains similar college characteristics, including academics, diversity, social involvement, and learning support.

After reviewing the three instruments' college choice items, it was determined a survey of college choice should be developed and a comprehensive list of distinct items was generated to create the bulk of the College Choice of Faith-Based Institutions Survey (CCFBIS). Five additional questions were developed based on their suggestions to measure the extent faith had on the college selection process of first-year, freshman undergraduate students. An email inquiry was posed to the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCCU) chief enrollment officer listserv asking specifically for suggested faith-based questions. These enrollment professionals collectively maintain more than 100 years of enrollment leadership at faith-based institutions.

The survey was successful in providing a general framework for students to offer a respond to the factors that influence college choice of a faith-based institution. The number of questions (30) was manageable and not too time consuming for participants, but future iterations could remove the co-curricular activities items and subscale. Those data were not as germane to the college selection process as originally intended. The demographic data collected should be altered to include additional gender expressions, denominational affiliations, and college attended. The distance from home information should be changed to offer larger mileage increments. The options provided were too narrow and limiting. Regarding the faith items and, ultimate subscale, the five selected were important to the findings of the study. However, those faith designations or items could be expanded to gather more data. In addition, open ended questions further defining issues of faith would be instructive. This would allow for additional descriptive data to strengthen the findings of the research.

Limitations

Limitations may be related to the difficulty of controlling variables and the limited types of data available to the researcher and the methodology. From the 1,964 email invitations distributed, the total sample response rate was calculated to be 9.16% ($n = 180$). The respondents in the study could have influenced the results because they were from the same kind of faith-based institutions. All survey items were susceptible to the respondents personal understanding and perceptions. The sample size of the data limited the ability to find significant relationships among the data and to generalize findings. The current study included freshmen participants from three faith-based institutions in the United States during one term (fall 2021). Findings may not apply to a broader population of students who enroll at faith-based institutions. The nonrespondents could have potentially added a different perspective to the results of the study.

Another limitation of the study was the number of faith-based institutions participating in the research. Additional colleges or universities from other denominations, regions of the country, and academic offerings would have provided additional data and perspectives to enrich the study. With hundreds of other faith-based institutions around the country, the number of institutions participating was a limitation of the study.

The study elicited self-reported data from first year students who were enrolled in college and not high school students who are currently engaged in the college selection process. The respondents may not recall the process as clearly given it occurred while they were in high school. Students may not be able to attribute enrollment decisions accurately. They may recall positive influences in one manner and negative experiences in another. They may, in fact, embellish the recollections of the factors that influenced their choice of a college.

Finally, the study was limited by potential bias of the researcher in the manner in which the literature was reviewed, the survey was created, or the data interpreted. As the author of this study, I bring to it decades of observation as an admissions officer and university vice president of enrollment. Through my career and experience, I have collected some understanding of the choices high school students make to study at private, Christian institutions.

Recommendations for Further Study

Future research in this area should seek to enhance the college choice literature of faith-based institutions. To date, there remains little research into the reasons students select a faith-based college or university. To that end, the following recommendations are offered for additional study.

First, future research studies could include more diverse participants. The sample demographics of this research were female (75.56%), white/Caucasian (78.33%), enrolled at a college 101 – 500 miles away from their home (32.97%), attended a public high school (71.11%), enrolled in their first college choice (76.66%) and a citizen of the United States (97.76%). In all but one of the majority demographic categories, participation percentages were more than 70%. Additional research could be undertaken with an emphasis on gender, race/ethnicity, high school attended, and citizenship. The sample for this research was similar to that of many faith-based institutions in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, and type of school attended. However, the percentage of females for this sample was too high, the percentage of non-Caucasian students was much too low, and the percentage of students who are United States citizens was too high (Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, 2018). Future research would be strengthened with a sample that more closely mirrored the population of students currently attending faith-based institutions.

Second, future research studies could include more faith-based institutions. This research was conducted with three faith-based institutions from around the country. Additional colleges or universities from other denominations, regions of the country, and academic offerings would provide additional data and perspectives to enrich the study. Increasing the size of the study to include other colleges with a possible expanded diverse population may permit the findings to be generalizable to other schools.

Third, future research could be undertaken with students of faith at public colleges or universities. While this would not address the primary purpose of this study, it would provide insight into the factors that influence college choice for students who integrate faith into all aspects of their life. If a sample of students at faith-based institutions were surveyed along with a sample of students at public institutions, the importance of faith in the college selection process would be explored.

Fourth, future research could be conducted with an improved or new survey/instrument. The College Choice of Faith-Based Institutions (CCFBI) survey was created for this research only. Additional reliability of this instrument, or a new instrument, would provide additional findings to the factors that influence college choice of a faith-based institution.

Fifth, a qualitative study could be undertaken to explore the factors influencing college choice of faith-based institutions. This type of study would help to better understand the decision-making processes. While quantitative methodology was selected for this research, a qualitative approach could allow for, and emphasize, the construct of knowledge through other individuals rather than data alone (Creswell, 2007).

Finally, future research could consider the effect of the global pandemic, COVID-19, on student choice of a faith-based institution. The foundations of higher education have been

impacted significantly by the rapid spread of the coronavirus outbreak creating uncertainty for all aspects of the academy. The college search process has been upended and, in many ways, remains in a state of disarray. Additional research of the pandemic and the impact upon the college selection process for faith-based institutions would be instructive.

Conclusion

College choice is a multi-faceted and complicated experience, both for the student and for those who choose to research it as a discipline. It is this multiplicity of stages, influences, and driving factors that make the study of college choice an active field. However, there is one element of the process that has, until now, been largely overlooked. That element is the “faith-based” designation of many colleges and universities. This study sought to fill a gap in the research by determining the factors that drive students to enroll in faith-based schools. Hopefully, the findings from this study will provide insight into the factors that influence students in this selection process. Faith-based institutions may consider additional programs, marketing, and recruitment strategies to increase their enrollments, tuition revenue and sustainability focused on attracting students based on their faith in addition to educational offerings and career prospects. The goal is to strengthen faith-based institutions, their enrollment, their mission, and their unique impact upon higher education.

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Appendices

Appendix A

College Choice of Faith-Based Institutions Survey

Many characteristics of colleges and universities are important in making college choices. In addition, other factors influence the selection of a particular institution. Some of these factors are listed below. Using the following scale, select the responses that best represent your answers regarding the influence each had on your decision to enroll at your faith-based institution.

(5) Strongly Agree	(4) Agree	(3) Neutral	(2) Disagree	(1) Strongly Disagree
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1. Cost of attendance
2. Financial aid from institution
3. Academic reputation
4. High School Guidance Counselor
5. Campus appearance
6. Religious mission of the institution
7. Availability of intended major
8. Distance from home
9. Contact with students who attend the institution
10. Recreational facilities on campus
11. Enrollment of institution
12. Personal faith
13. Family Preference
14. Campus visit
15. Availability of special academic programs (internships, study abroad, etc.)
16. Personal attention offered to students
17. Prayer/Meditation
18. Access to off campus cultural and recreational activities
19. Quality of on campus housing
20. College website
21. Preparation for graduate or professional school
22. Job Preparation
23. Institutional commitment to sacred assemblies
24. High school faculty member
25. Religions leaders or mentors
26. Parents

27. Contact with faculty of the institution
28. College publications
29. Opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities
30. Access to off campus cultural and recreational activities

Demographics:

1. Gender
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Other
2. Race
 - a. White/Caucasian
 - b. African American/Black
 - c. American Indian/Alaska Native
 - d. East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese)
 - e. Filipina/o/x
 - f. Southeast Asian (Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong)
 - g. South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Sri Lankan)
 - h. Other Asian
 - i. Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
 - j. Mexican American/Chicana/o/x
 - k. Puerto Rican
 - l. South American
 - m. Other Latina/o/x
 - n. Other
3. How many miles from your college of choice is your permanent home?
 - a. 5 or less
 - b. 6-10
 - c. 11-50
 - d. 51-100
 - e. 101-500
 - f. Over 500
4. From what kind of high school did you graduate?
 - a. Public school
 - b. Private religious school
 - c. Private independent school
 - d. Homeschool
5. Did you enroll in your first choice college?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

6. Citizenship status
 - a. U.S. Citizen
 - b. Permanent Resident
 - c. International Student
 - d. None of the above

Appendix B
Recruitment E-Mail

Dear *Name*:

Thank you for your initial interest in my research on high school students' selection of a faith-based institution, which I am conducting for my doctoral dissertation. As much as we know about the college selection process in general, we know less about the specific factors that influence students to choose a faith-based institution. The purpose of this research is to identify the factors influencing the college choice of a faith-based college or university.

There are no risks or discomforts to students or the institution associated with this research. Participation in this study will require only the completion of a survey to be sent by email. As director of your institution's institutional research programs, I recognize the importance of having your endorsement to this project. Hence, I am soliciting your assistance and support. Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of the participants who complete this research. All the data gathered during this study will be kept strictly confidential. The results of this study may be published in educational journals or presented at professional meetings, but if this happens, the identity of your students will be kept strictly confidential.

I welcome any questions concerning the research either before agreeing to participate or during the research study. If you agree to participate in the study, would you be kind enough to respond affirmatively?

Cordially,

Phil Cook
Phone: 423.310.1149
E-Mail: philcook111@gmail.com

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

Factors that Influence Students' Selection of a Faith-Based Institution

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study was to identify the factors influencing college choice of a faith-based institution.

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to complete one electronic questionnaire that should take about 30 minutes to complete. Other students from your university have been invited to participate in this study and students from other similar colleges will take part as well.

All of your information will be kept confidential. To protect your confidentiality, each of the questionnaires you complete will not have your name on any of the scales. The completed survey, along with you consent form, will be password protected and only accessible by the principal researcher. No other person but the principal investigator will have access to your data unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. In fact, your school will not be identified in the study or any report. All data will be destroyed in three years.

There are no anticipated risks expected to be encountered while you participate in this project. The questionnaire you are being asked to complete has been used with many individuals for a number of years and are aimed at assessing the factors that influenced your decision to enroll at a faith-based institution. You may receive some benefit as a result of your participation. If so desired, you may receive feedback on your results. In addition, your participation will help this study contribute valuable information on the college selection process to faith-based institutions. In addition, your school should benefit from your participation. They will receive a final report on this project.

If you have questions at any time about the study or procedures, you may contact the researcher, Phil Cook by calling 423.310.1149. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be destroyed.

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study.

Electronic signature and confirmation

Date of signature

Appendix D

Table 2.1

Factors	Hossler & Gallagher (1987)	Hossler, Braxton & Coopersmith (1989)	Bouse & Hossler (1991)	Pitre (2006)	Baliyan (2016)
Educational Aspiration	X	X		X	
Academic Preparation	X	X	X	X	
High School Curriculum			X	X	
Socioeconomic Status	X	X		X	X
Parents	X	X	X	X	
High School Counselors	X	X			
Race/ethnicity			X	X	
Gender			X		
Financial Impact & Influence		X	X		X
College Outreach	X	X			
Military Veterans		X			

Table 4.1

Gender - Descriptive Statistics

	<i>N</i>	Percentage
Female	136	75.56
Male	44	24.44

Table 4.2

Race/ethnicity - Descriptive Statistics

	<i>N</i>	Percentage
White/Caucasian	141	78.33
African American/Black	9	5.00
American Indian/Alaska Native	1	0.55
East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese)	1	0.55
Filipina/o/a	2	1.11
Southeast Asian (Cambodian, Vietnamese, Hmong)	2	1.11
South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, SriLankan)	2	1.11
Other Asian	1	0.55
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1	0.55
Mexican American/Chicana/o/x	10	5.55
Puerto Rican	2	1.11
Other Latina/o/x	5	2.70
Other	3	1.60

Table 4.3

Distance From Home to College - Descriptive Statistics

	<i>N</i>	Percentage
5 miles or less	11	6.15
6 – 10 miles	17	9.49
11 – 50 miles	41	22.90
51 – 100 miles	24	13.40
101 – 500 miles	59	32.97
Over 500 miles	27	15.09

Table 4.4

Kind of High School - Descriptive Statistics

	<i>N</i>	Percentage
Public	128	71.11
Private Religious	33	18.34
Private Independent	1	0.55
Homeschool	18	10.00

Table 4.5

Enrolled in First College Choice - Descriptive Statistics

	<i>N</i>	Percentage
Yes	138	76.66
No	42	23.34

Table 4.6

Citizenship - Descriptive Statistics

	<i>N</i>	Percentage
U.S. Citizen	174	97.76
Permanent Resident	3	1.68
International	1	0.56

Table 4.7

	Subscale #1 Cost and/or Financial Aid	Subscale #2 Campus Appearance and Visit	Subscale #3 Academic Reputation and Opportunities	Subscale #4 Co-Curricular Activities	Subscale #5 Influence of Others	Subscale #6 Faith
Factor #1	Cost of Attendance	Campus Appearance	Academic Reputation	Contact With Students Who Attend the Institution	High School Guidance Counselor	Religious Mission of the Institution
Factor #2	Financial Aid from the Institution	Distance from Home	Availability of Intended Major	Personal Attention Offered to Students	Family Preference	Personal Faith
Factor #3	Enrollment of Institution	Recreational Facilities on Campus	Preparation for Graduate or Professional School	Access to Off-Campus Cultural Events	High School Faculty Member	Prayer/ Meditation
Factor #4	College Website	Campus Visit	Job Preparation	Opportunity to Participate in Extra- Curricular Activities	Parents	Institutional Commitment to Sacred Assemblies
Factor #5	College Publications	Quality of On-Campus Housing	Availability of Special Academic Programs	Access to Off-Campus Recreational Activities	Contact With Faculty of the Institution	Religious Leaders or Mentors

Table 4.8

Means and Standard Deviations of Factors Influencing College Choice

	<i>N</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation
Cost of attendance	180	3.96	.996
Financial aid information from the institution	179	4.21	.899
Academic reputation	179	4.05	.830
High school guidance counselor	180	2.26	1.084
Campus appearance	180	4.09	.817
Religious mission of the institution	179	4.15	1.068
Availability of intended major	179	4.37	.911
Distance from home	179	3.80	1.041
Contact with students who attend the institution	180	3.36	1.161
Recreational facilities on campus	179	3.22	1.072
Enrollment of the institution	178	3.30	1.030
Personal faith	180	4.29	1.061
Family preference	180	3.41	1.137
Campus visit	179	3.95	1.088
Availability of special academic programs	180	3.74	.987
Personal attention offered to students	180	4.16	.898
Prayer/Meditation	180	3.89	1.081
Access to off campus cultural events	180	3.17	1.162
Quality of on campus housing	180	3.52	1.121
College website	179	3.31	1.076
Preparation for graduate or professional school	180	3.67	1.076
Job preparation	180	4.19	.826
Institutional commitment to sacred assemblies	180	3.59	1.040
High school faculty member	180	2.28	1.104
Religious leaders or mentors	180	3.21	1.242
Parents	180	3.67	1.104
Contact with faculty of the institution	180	3.58	1.133
Opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities	180	3.84	1.029
Access to off campus recreational activities	180	3.32	1.203

Table 4.9 shows the means and standard deviations for the six subscale scores.

Table 4.9

Subscale - Descriptive Statistics

	<i>N</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation
Cost and/or financial aid	176	17.6364	2.84326
Campus appearance and visit	177	18.6610	3.15117
Academic reputation and opportunities	178	19.8888	3.12270
Co-curricular activities	180	17.8500	3.88303
Influence of others	180	15.1889	3.78587
Faith	179	19.1397	4.38557

Table 4.10

Means and Standard Deviations of Factors Influencing College Choice Ranked Highest to Lowest

	<i>N</i>	Mean	Standard Deviation
Availability of intended major	179	4.37	.911
Personal faith	180	4.29	1.061
Financial aid from institution	179	4.21	.899
Job preparation	180	4.19	.826
Personal attention offered to students	180	4.16	.898
Religious mission of the institution	179	4.15	1.068
Campus appearance	180	4.09	.817
Academic reputation	179	4.05	.830
Cost of attendance	180	3.96	.996
Campus visit	179	3.95	1.088
Prayer/Meditation	180	3.89	1.081
Opportunity to participate in extracurricularactivities	180	3.84	1.029
Distance from home	179	3.80	1.041
Availability of special academic programs	180	3.74	.987
Preparation for graduate or professionalschool	180	3.67	1.076
Parents	180	3.67	1.104
Institutional commitment to sacred assemblies	180	3.59	1.040
Contact with faculty of the institution	180	3.58	1.133
Quality of on campus housing	180	3.52	1.121
Family preference	180	3.41	1.137
Contact with students who attend the institution	180	3.36	1.161
Access to off campus recreational activities	180	3.32	1.203
College website	179	3.31	1.076
Enrollment of the institution	178	3.30	1.030
Religious leaders or mentors	180	3.21	1.242
College publications	180	2.90	1.078
High school faculty members	180	2.28	1.104
High school guidance counselor	180	2.26	1.084

VITA

Phillip Lowell Cook, Jr., is a doctoral candidate at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville in Higher Education Administration. He earned a Master of Divinity degree in 1996 after completing a Bachelor of Business degree in 1992. He was born on December 5, 1969 in Ronceverte, West Virginia, but was reared in Pennsylvania. He currently serves as the Executive Director of the North American Coalition for Christian Admissions Professionals. He was also employed at his alma mater, Lee University, for twenty-eight years and most recently served as Vice President for Enrollment from 2010 – 2021.