

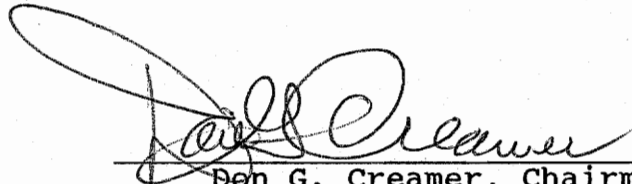
REASONS CITED BY VIRGINIA TECH HONORS STUDENTS FOR THEIR  
INSTITUTIONAL CHOICE COMPARED WITH REASONS CITED IN  
LITERATURE FOR ALL STUDENTS ENTERING HIGHER EDUCATION

by

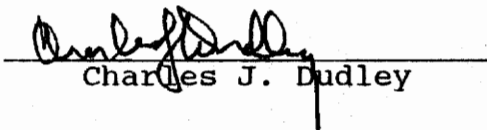
Judith M. Lynch

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic  
Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Education  
in  
Student Personnel Services

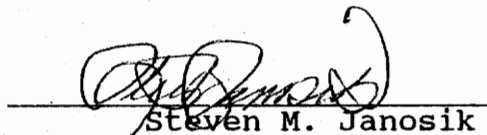
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July, 1993

Blacksburg, Virginia

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(ABSTRACT)

Understanding how prospective students make their final choices of colleges or universities is important to students, their parents, and to the institutions. When it comes to academically advanced students, or Honors students, there is a question as to whether the same factors are influential to their higher education decisions. The purpose of this study was to compare the responses of Virginia Tech Honors students with current literature to determine the influences associated with college or university selection between the two data sets.

The methodology used in this study included qualitative focus-group interviews of Virginia Tech Honors freshmen who had been admitted into the Program for the fall semester of 1992 and had remained Honors eligible for the spring semester of 1993. Six interview sessions were arranged for

50 students. An interview protocol was designed to ask six questions to the participants, focusing on how they made their final decisions to attend Virginia Tech. Thirty-six students actually participated in the interviews.

Six conceptual categories emerged from the interviews. These categories included: (1) Academic Programs; (2) Campus Atmosphere/Life; (3) Influential People; (4) Location; (5) Money; and (6) Recruitment. Seven conceptual categories were discovered in the literature. These categories were discovered included: (1) High School Grade Point Average; (2) Tuition; (3) Geographic Location; (4) Parental, Peer, and Alumni Influence; (5) Academic Reputation; (6) Job Placement; and (7) Campus Visit.

The results from the study indicated that most students, regardless of their status, consider similar factors in their choices of colleges. Most important among the factors included the cost, campus visit, and reputation.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Statement of the Problem

Understanding how prospective students make their final choices of colleges or universities is important to students, their parents, and to the institutions. All have a stake in how the decisions are made and what factors are considered in the decision. Students and their parents are invested in the decision in emotional, academic, and financial ways. Institutions are invested in the decision in ways that actually may shape the character of the institutions.

Colleges and universities have a vested interest in their student enrollments. Knowing which factors assist students with their decisions can favorably assist the institutions as well. This knowledge can help prepare the institutions for ways in which they should be attracting potential students while focusing on what they can provide for those students who choose to attend.

Students are both concerned and interested in where they will be attending college. There are many higher education opportunities for them to consider. Additionally, there are many factors involved with their considerations. Various elements are found to be of significance to students both personally and (in the near-future) professionally.

This topic has long been a subject of study of researchers. Welki and Navratil (1987) followed T.A. Deomenich's and D. McFadden's theoretical model of decision-making to determine the influences on prospective students during their college searches. Shaut and Rizzo (1991) measured factors that influenced college choice to be used by college administrators, counselors, and institutional research. To investigate the effects of demographic variables and locus of control on college choice, Martin and Dixon (1991) also studied the influential factors of college choice.

Additional types of studies were performed for similar reasons. King, Kobayashi, and Bigler (1986) researched the factors influencing students' perceptions of college recruitment activities. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) studied student college choice to assist policymakers while identifying student access to and the availability of institutions of higher education. More specific studies have investigated the relationships between student financial aid or institutional cost and college choice decisions (Tierney & Davis, 1985). Small private colleges (Kellaris & Kellaris, 1988) and two and four year colleges (Smith, 1990) also have been studies to determine the factors associated with students' choices to attend the different types of institutions which are available to them.

As much is known about the decision-making process of college choice, much remains unknown or unclear. Questions could be raised regarding the changes which time has had on the influence of college-bound students. Both educational and personal needs fluctuate over time. The importance of many issues may be affected by new technology and other changes which may take place over the years.

Has the recruiting power of some institutions changed over time? How does that relate to what is known about students' decision-making processes? As research is conducted and information revealed, the manners by which institutions address the findings can have an impact on prospective students. Are institutions addressing the needs of students which researchers may have identified or are they directing their recruitment strategies strictly towards their own institutional needs?

Additionally, with the concern of college and university enrollments, what are institutions doing to keep their enrollment numbers high while attempting to attract students? There is an obvious need for colleges and universities to maintain their student enrollments. How has the enrollment concern played a role in the recruitment and retention of prospective and current students?

Are the current processes related to important demographic characteristics of students? With a decrease in



traditional, college-bound students, the demographics of student populations are changing. Institutions are recognizing other aspects of their enrollments to be of significance to both recruitment and retention. Are the current processes differentiated in any way across important subpopulations of students, such as Honors students? The questions which may follow could include the manner by which institutions are attracting students in addition to the manner by which students are being attracted to institutions.

The means by which students may make their final college or university selections vary. Students typically begin their college searches by identifying the various college and university options available to them (Discenza, Ferguson, & Wisner, 1985; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). During this process, many variables come into play. In addition to the institutional choices which students will be considering, other influential factors will be identified throughout the process.

By understanding how students determine their institutional choices, colleges and universities can target their recruitment strategies toward both specific populations of students and toward factors associated with college choice. Admissions representatives and recruiters can assure prospective students of what is available to them

(Martin & Dixon, 1991) which may, in turn, effect both the final decisions of the students and the institutional enrollment numbers.

The ability to design effective recruitment plans may be of great concern to colleges and universities throughout the 1990s. The projected decline in traditional college-bound students and enrollment figures have required many institutions to question their current marketing strategies (Welki & Navratil, 1987). The responses of students asked about the means by which they made their college decisions can benefit all parties concerned. This information could be used to recruit new students while allowing institutions to recognize and continue promoting successful recruitment strategies of the past.

In addition to the affect on general admissions marketing, the ability to recognize needs of specific populations also can be of assistance to future marketing ideas. In the case of academically advanced students, such as Honors students, recruitment efforts to attract students with higher grade point averages (GPAs) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores could positively affect student body enrollment statistics. This type of affect could allow institutions to be recognized for their commitment to higher education and to the types of students which attend.

## **Purpose**

The Director of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (hereafter referred to as Virginia Tech) Honors Program and other university administrators associated with Honors, recognize a need to determine why Honors students chose Virginia Tech over other institutions. Additionally, the comparison of this information with a literature review directed toward the reason(s) cited for why all students choose their respective institutions could prove to be of significance to the recruitment of future Honors students.

The purpose of the study was to determine the reasons by which Virginia Tech Honors students made their college decisions. The data from interviews of Honors students were compared to data from literature to determine similarities and differences in the factors considered in college choice from these two perspectives.

## **Research Questions**

- (1) How did Honors students attending Virginia Tech make their institutional choice?
- (2) Do the stated reasons for institutional choice of Honors students correspond to the information conveyed through literature about the choices generally made by students?

## **Definitions**

### **Virginia Tech (freshmen) Honors Candidates/Students**

Virginia Tech (freshmen) Honors candidates/students are entering first-year students who have graduated from high school in the top 10 percent of their classes and have a combined Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) score of 1200 (both the math and verbal scores above 550).

### **Current Literature**

Current literature refers to published material on college choice during the years 1980 to the present.

### **Enrollment Management**

Enrollment management is "...a process, or an activity, that influences the size, the shape, and the characteristics of a student body by directing the institutional efforts in marketing, recruitment, and admissions as well as pricing and financial aid. In addition, the process exerts a significant influence on academic advising, institutional research agenda, orientation, retention studies, and student services" (Hossler, 1984, p. 6) which require the efforts of the campus as a whole.

### **Prospective Students**

For the purpose of this study, prospective students are graduating high school seniors who are seriously considering

attending an institution of higher education to obtain a baccalaureate degree.

### Institutional Fit

Institutional fit refers to the harmony of institutional characteristics and student needs and interests (Sevier, 1989).

### Scholarship Money

Dating back to 1643 when money was provided to a needy Harvard College student to assist with educational costs (Coomes, 1988; Woodward, 1988), scholarship money is best identified with a financial need in addition to academic and athletic excellence. For the purpose of this study, scholarship money involves academic achievement/excellence.

### Orientation

Orientation refers to the summer orientation program held at Virginia Tech by the Dean of Students' Office for accepted freshmen. The specific mention of orientation in this study refers to the introduction of the University Honors Program during summer orientation.

### Virginia Tech Library System

The Virginia Tech Library System (VTLS) is a computer search system used to locate publications. The publications can be located by a title, author, subject, or bullion search, a process that crosses two searches.

## Educational Resources Information Center

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) is a computer search system developed by the U.S. Office of Education. This system is used to collect, store, and distribute information on education (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 1990).

### **Organization of the Study**

This report is divided into four chapters. Chapter one introduced the study, including its purpose, research questions, and definitions of terms used throughout the report. Chapter two describes the methodology/procedures used to collect and analyze data. The format by which the study was conducted, in addition to the method of data presentation, are included in this chapter. Chapter three presents the results of the study, including the responses of the Honors' participants and the literature review. The two data sets are compared and similarities and differences are identified. Finally, chapter four will present the conclusion to the study.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **METHODOLOGY**

Taylor and Bogdan (1984) identified methodology as a manner by which one addresses concerns and discovers solutions. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodology and the procedures used during this study. The chapter is organized to include discussion of (a) the research method, (b) the research instrument, (c) the interviewer training sessions, (d) the sample, (e) the data collection, and (f) the analysis procedures.

#### **Research Method**

To obtain the most definitive answers to the questions asked, a qualitative research method was decided upon. Qualitative data has been identified to include specific descriptions of circumstances, occurrences, people, interactions, and observations of behaviors. Additionally, direct quotations from individuals regarding their viewpoints, feelings, and thoughts in conjunction with written notes or reports, correspondence, records and case histories are all associated with qualitative research and are the foundation for the data obtained (Patton, 1980).

A qualitative research method was chosen as a more informative means by which personal information could be obtained from the participants. In addition, a literature

search was performed to complete the literature review requirements of the study.

### **Research Instrument**

To assist the interviewees with their recollections of how they made their decisions to attend Virginia Tech, an interview protocol was developed. The primary function of this protocol was to collect data from the Honors students in a systematic way. Once collected, the information would be related to the data provided through the literature review to identify similarities and differences between the 2 sets (see Appendix A). This protocol was structured for a group interview climate and was focused on questions involving college choice. Additionally, the way in which the questions were worded focused repeatedly on the same topic. The students were continually asked how they made their final decisions to attend Virginia Tech. Each of these questions, however, was structured in an independent manner.

Ninety minutes was determined by the researcher to be an adequate amount of time to hold the focus group interview sessions. This time period would allow for the answers to each question to be discussed in their entirety, but would not appear to take up too much of the participants' voluntary time. While there was a limit on how long the entire interview sessions were to last, there were no limits



on each individual question. When each question had been adequately answered, with no new information being presented, the next question was asked.

### **Interviewer Training Sessions**

Prior to conducting the actual interviews, two training sessions were held to ensure the proper procedures and conduct for the interviews. The first session consisted of graduate students in the Virginia Tech Student Personnel Program serving as "mock" Honors students while Dr. Don Creamer (thesis committee chairperson) conducted the interview. During this time, notes and observations were made by the researcher. This format allowed for an understanding of or an opportunity for questions relating to the manner by which Dr. Creamer approached the protocol questions and the participants.

Following the observation session, the roles of interviewer and observer were reversed. Different Virginia Tech graduate students, from both the Student Personnel and Mechanical Engineering Programs, served as the "mock" Honors students. This change in roles allowed for Dr. Creamer to make notes and ask questions of the researcher regarding the format by which the "interview" was conducted. Additionally, the interviewer was given feedback from both

Dr. Creamer and the graduate students. This dual-critique was of benefit in understanding how the students understood what the interviewer was asking.

The result of the training sessions was an understanding of the way in which an interview should be conducted. In addition, the researcher was able to work with the comments from the interviewees to better prepare herself for her official role with the Honors students. The protocol questions were understood by the interviewees and did not require any changes.

#### **Sample**

The sample of this study consisted of 36 freshmen men and women who were admitted for the fall semester of 1992 as Honors students and who had remained Honors eligible for the spring semester of 1993, having received a QCA of at least 3.4. These participants were not a tightly defined group, as their only requirements were the meeting of the criteria without specific regard to their exact QCAs and current Virginia Tech class rankings. As a result, there was a mixture of Honors students who were totally committed to their academic experiences at Virginia Tech in addition to students who were not as committed to their academic experiences.

The students initially were recruited during a freshmen Honors meeting held during the second week of the spring

semester. They were informed of the thesis and its intent, including the confidentiality of all responses. An informational sheet was distributed to each student requesting their individual name, social security number, address, phone number, and signature of written consent which identified the confidentiality aspect of the study for those students who wished to participate. Additionally, dates and times of group interview sessions were included on the informational sheets, allowing the students to request both their first and second choices (see Appendix B).

As a result of only 15 attending students having volunteered to assist with the study, personal telephone calls were made to all students who met the criteria. Alphabetically, from A through M, students were called and informed of the study. They were asked if they would like to volunteer their time and thoughts and were given the same dates and times from which to choose their interview session, if they agreed to participate.

#### **Data Collection**

Following the recruitment of participants and the training sessions, focus group interviews were arranged. The decision to use focus group interviews as compared with individual interviews was to allow for the students to compare and relate their feelings and experiences with each

other. Additionally, having other students present provided support for their thoughts and responses.

Using the protocol, open-ended questions were asked of the interviewees. These questions asked the students to consider the factors and reasons associated with their college choices. The open-ended questions were chosen to assist them with their personal responses, concentrating on individual and specific issues of importance (Gorden, 1969). Additionally, the students were further questioned for more clarification of their answers. This was found by the researcher to be necessary to determine the details and meanings of the responses given (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

Six focus group interview sessions were arranged, based on the previously noted times from which the participants were asked to choose. The available dates and times were on Monday, March first, from 1:30-3:00 P.M. and 4:00-5:30 P.M.; Tuesday, March second, from 10:00-11:30 A.M. and 1:30-3:00 P.M.; and Wednesday, March third from 9:30-11:00 A.M. and 3:00-4:30 P.M. Although there were no restraints placed on the number of students who chose to attend a specific session, several times offered were shown to be more popular than others. These dates and times were March first, 4:00-5:30 P.M., March second, 1:30-3: P.M., and March third, 3:00-4:30 P.M.

During the interview sessions, handwritten notes were taken. As a means by which to support the written notes and be able to refer back to the actual responses given by the interviewees, the sessions were tape recorded. This decision was made because of the nature of the qualitative responses which are often personal and may be perceived in various ways if not clarified (Patton, 1980). (There were two tape recorders used to serve as back-ups to both the handwritten notes and the other tape recorded information in case of any defaults relating to the equipment.)

#### **Literature Review**

Literature relating to college decisions and the factors influencing such decisions were collected. Current journal articles and books were chosen for this review. While there was an abundance of available material, the significance of the literature was based on both the relevance of the information and the year of publication. The reason for the publication date was determined to best represent the more recent research of college choice.

ERIC and VTLS were reviewed for pertinent information relating to both the journals and other documents. Searches were made for information that related to enrollment management, admissions, financial assistance, and factors related to the choices students make during their college decisions. Additionally, there was an initial search

involving Honors students and influential factors associated with their college decisions. There was, however, no information located on Honors students based on the search performed by the researcher.

Traditional research procedures were performed. The search for related literature began by following leads based on previous research. Identifying books and journals located in a specific area of the library led to the discovery of additional information.

### **Analysis Procedures**

Upon completion of the six interview sessions, the recorded information and handwritten notes were analyzed for themes. While reviewing the tapes and notes, categories emerged. Repetitive answers which the students offered during the sessions indicated similarities between all of the focus groups. These initial categories were documented to compare the similar responses with the differing responses (see Appendix C).

A quantitative format was used to categorize the responses. Each question was identified by a correlating number running horizontally across the top of each page. (For example, question number one was identified by the number "1," question number two was identified by the number

"2," and so on.) In a vertical manner, the number of times a response was given was documented with its corresponding category.

The information which Appendix C revealed was then categorized into conceptual categories based on the relationships between the responses (see Appendix D). The data did not change. It was restructured so that all of the responses were easier to understand.

Twenty-one conceptual categories were identified. A third categorization was organized to further relate the responses given by the participants (see Appendix E). The final number of conceptual categories was 6, with related information being included as properties of the categories.

Several properties of the final categories were similar in content and could be associated with more than one category. The researcher determined the category which best represented the response. No response was identified with more than one category.

There were also several responses which did not fit into any category, due to the nature of the questions being asked. These responses were therefore not categorized, but were identified in the data analysis of the study.

Following the completion of the interviews and during the data collections, the literature review was being drafted. Information which current literature revealed to

be of significance to the study was documented. Since the results were to be compared with the interview responses, attention to detail was of extreme importance when relaying the findings of the references used for the literature review.



## CHAPTER 3

### RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the findings and data analysis of the study by summarizing the focus group interviews and literature review. In addition, a summary of the comparisons between the interviews and the literature review will be discussed.

The findings of this chapter are presented in several different formats. First, the interviews will be discussed. During this presentation, the actual interview questions will be stated, followed by the six final conceptual categories which emerged throughout the sessions (see Appendix E). These categories were determined by the recurring themes and responses given by the students during the interviews, sharing personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences of the students. The categories will be presented as they relate to the six similar protocol questions. The final discussion of this area of the chapter will introduce the list of additional colleges and universities which the participants had considered during their searches. This information may assist individuals with determining the types of institutions Honors students consider, especially those students who attend Virginia Tech.

A specific protocol question, number 3, will be given extra attention since this question involves the Honors Program. Additionally, the relationship of the Honors Program with all other questions will also receive special attention.

Second, the literature review will be presented. This review will offer the reader an additional insight to the ways by which students made their decisions to attend a specific institution. It will identify the various factors associated with these decisions as revealed in current literature.

Third, a summary will be provided. The purpose of this summary will be to recognize the similarities presented when comparing the interview responses of Honors freshmen students with literature. Additionally, this summary will allow the readers to recognize personal responses regarding the influential factors associated with the college decision-making process and research-based responses as represented by the literature review.

#### **Interview Process**

The interview process consisted of a series of steps taken by the researcher. The first step identified the sample which would be used during the study. The actual

focus group interviews followed, using the protocol designed for the sessions. The responses of the participants concluded the interview process.

#### Description of the Sample

The sample used for this study consisted of Freshmen Honors students who had been admitted into the Program for the fall semester of 1992 and who had remained Honors eligible for the spring semester of 1993. These students were both male and female and were drawn initially from a pool of approximately 100 Honors freshmen in attendance for an Honors class meeting. Since the participation rate was low, those students who had not volunteered during the meeting were personally called from a list of students who met the criteria. The alphabetical list was broken down from the letters A through M.

Given the amount of preparation and time required for both the telephone calls and the interviews, the number 50 was chosen by the researcher to be the cut-off point for the number of students to participate in the study. (It was understood by the researcher that 50 persons agreeing to participate did not mean 50 people would actually show up for the actual interviews.) The students were asked to pick a day and time from a list of available interview dates, with no limit on how many students could attend one

interview session. The total number of volunteers was exactly 50, as determined previously.

### Interviews

The University Honors freshmen participants were interviewed in focus groups pre-arranged from their choice of dates and times. The first session, Monday, March first, from 1:30-3:00 P.M. had seven students signed up to participate. Of those seven, four actually attended. The second session, Monday, March first, from 4:00-5:00 P.M. had 13 students registered with seven students actually attending. The third session, Tuesday, March second, from 10:00-11:30 A.M. saw four students on the registration list with all four in attendance. Session four, also on Tuesday, from 1:30-3:00 P.M. consisted of 10 students agreeing to participate at that time with nine of those students actually attending. Wednesday, March third, from 9:30-11:00 A.M. had three students sign up to participate with two of those students in actual attendance. Finally, Wednesday, March third, from 3:00-4:30 P.M. saw 14 students agreeing to participate with 10 of those 14 actually participating.

Various reasons could be given for why all of the students did not show up. During the week and the hours of the interviews, there was a cooperative (co-op) informational fair taking place. Several students who had not volunteered to participate explained that they were

uncertain when they would be called to speak with fair representatives. They explained that some businesses did not offer them the opportunity to schedule interviews in advance.

Other students may not have thought the study was important. They may have found other things to do with their time than attend the sessions and offer their thoughts and feelings. (An example of this type of thought might be that of one student. During the follow-up telephone calls to students who had not volunteered during the freshman class meeting, the researcher asked all the Honors students if they had or had not attended the meeting. One student said he had not. While there were no questions which asked "Why not," he happily offered his excuse. "I forgot to do my laundry over the weekend.")

Some students may have forgotten about the study. The telephone calls were made several weeks prior to the actual interviews. Letters were sent to remind and reconfirm the dates and times which students had requested, however, another type of reminder may have been needed for some students.

In addition to locating participants, the researcher had to arrange for rooms in which the interviews would be held. Places varied with the dates and times. Rooms were chosen in the student center for the first four interview

sessions, and then in an academic building for the remaining two sessions. This change in rooms was due to the unavailability of the student center for the final day's interviews.

The only people present during the focus group interviews were the interviewer and the students. The seating arrangement for all of the participants, including the interviewer, was a conference room format with a large table being the center of the circle. The tape recorders were off to the side, close to the interviewer to allow for the changing of the tapes.

Prior to the taping of each interview, an introduction was made to allow the participants an additional opportunity to know who the interviewer was and what the study was about. A permission form was presented to each student requesting confirmation that their willingness to participate in the study was voluntary, while reacknowledging the confidentiality of their responses. The use of the tape recording was discussed and a reconfirmation that the recording of the sessions was for the interviewer's personal purposes only.

The interview protocol guided the interviews, offering the students specific questions to consider. There was no defined manner by which the questions were to be answered; however, they were asked in the format predetermined by the

protocol. In many instances, however, it was necessary for the interviewer to break the ice by asking specific students if they had any information which might be relevant to the question being asked. In all instances, the participants either answered the question being asked or added that they had nothing more to contribute than what was formerly stated (either by themselves or by other participants in the study).

Since the interview sessions were (unintentionally) broken down into large and small groups, the average amount of time which the sessions lasted varied by the make-up of the groups. The interviews in smaller groups averaged about one hour, while the interviews in larger groups took up the majority of the hour and one-half allocated for the sessions.

#### Protocol Questions and Responses

Seven questions were asked of all the participants during their interview sessions. With the exception of question 5a, the questions asked by the researcher and structured by the protocol all asked basically for the same types of responses, centering around the factors associated with their college choices.

1. Describe the factors you considered in your choice of college.
2. Describe the process you used to make your decision.

3. Describe how involvement in the Honors Program affected your choice.
4. To what extent has Virginia Tech satisfied your expectations or met the conditions you wanted in your choice of college?
- 5a. Describe the pool of colleges you considered. Which institutions did you consider?
- 5b. How did you make your final choice to attend Virginia Tech?
6. Considering all issues in your choice, can you identify the single most significant factor in your decision to attend Virginia Tech?

With the exception of question 5a, the responses of the students began to take on similar characteristics. They were grouped into a total of 6 conceptual categories with several sub-categories included. The following conceptual categories and sub-categories emerged from the interviews:

Academic Programs

Engineering Program

Biology Program

Veterinary Program

Wildlife Program

Placement Program

Co-op Program

University Honors Program



Campus Atmosphere/Life

Campus Visit

Atmosphere of the Campus

Size of the Institution

Class Sizes

Social Life and Activities

Influential People

Reputation of the Institution

Parents

Brothers and Sisters

Current Students/Friends

Faculty

Location

Out-of-State

In-State

Small, Rural college Town

Money

Money and Education

Scholarships

Recruitment

Applications

Computer Searches

College Guides

College Representatives

High School Guidance Counselors

Not Being Accepted by Other Institutions  
Did Not Like Other Choices.

#### Academic Programs

With the pressure of choosing the "right" college or university, academic programs were identified as influential to the final decisions students make during their searches. What the institution has to offer academically can be of great significance to Honors students. Responses to protocol questions 1, 2, and 5b identified this category as influential to their decisions to attend Virginia Tech.

The wide availability of programs was considered to be of significance. As one participant described, (Virginia Tech had) "exactly what I wanted!" when the student was considering his/her final college selection and was looking at majors offered at Virginia Tech. Several specific areas of study were mentioned throughout the study. Engineering was the most popular program discussed throughout all six sessions. (Given the nature of the students being interviewed, it was discovered that many engineering students had volunteered to participate in the study. Also, given the entrance requirements at Virginia Tech, engineering students are very likely to qualify for the Honors Program.) The Accounting, Architecture, Biology, Computer Science, Math, Mining, Science, Veterinary, and Wildlife programs were also mentioned at various times

during the sessions. The Biology, Veterinary, and Wildlife programs were mentioned on more than one occasion, however, only with regard to the first protocol question and without much follow-up to the influence these programs had on the students.

#### Engineering Program

Specific information involving the areas of study mentioned above were interesting to note. Virginia Tech's engineering program was recognized to not only be a "good school" but the "best engineering college" known for its quality of education. During an Engineering Open House, one student was very impressed by the involvement of the faculty and staff as they "pumped up Virginia Tech!" Another student knew "engineers (from Virginia Tech) in the real world" which was an additional impressive factor when considering which institution to attend.

#### Biology Program

The biology program at Virginia Tech was mentioned only during the first protocol question discussion. It was, however, brought up during two separate sessions. Both of the respondents were out-of-state students searching for affordable colleges or universities but with a major emphasis on the biology programs of the institutions which they were interested in attending. Additionally, one of the two respondents was initially interested in another

scientific field, zoology, but when the student looked further into Virginia Tech, the biology program was found to be more attractive when future jobs were considered.

#### Veterinary Program

A very popular program at Virginia Tech is its Veterinary School, which was identified by protocol questions 1, 5b, and 6. Two of the participants were looking specifically at schools which offered a major either in or involving veterinary medicine. Virginia Tech met the personal academic demands, while also offering the possibility of graduate veterinary studies.

#### Wildlife Program

The wildlife program was mentioned in only one session; however, there were two students present who had chosen Virginia Tech as a result of this program. Insight into how this decision was made was not offered by either of the students. Both of the interviewees agreed that they were intrigued by the program offered at Virginia Tech. While they had each considered various other institutions, they felt that Tech could provide the best education in their field.

Also identified under Academic Programs were various other aspects of the University. The Placement, Co-op, and University Honors Programs were all identified at various times throughout the sessions as having been of significance

to the college searches of several participants. Given the nature of the Honors Program's involvement with this study and the protocol question of number 4 specifically requesting information on the Program's influence on the students, there were more responses given for this aspect of the Academic Programs category.

#### Placement Program

The placement program was identified as an important factor in the decision-making process of college-bound students. Students are more interested in what their college degrees will provide for them following graduation than in what their education will provide for them during their actual college experience (Leana, 1980). Future employment opportunities which will be available to graduates from Virginia Tech in addition to the "outside relationships" which the University has with businesses were discussed as important factors.

#### Co-op Program

The Co-op program and opportunities available to Virginia Tech students were identified as important factors of the college decision. Responses to protocol questions 1, 2, and 5b included this factor, with question 2 showing the greater interest. While there was an interest in the program, all of the responses came from the same interview session. This may have resulted from the students in that

session having contributed their thoughts and feelings based on each other's responses. One of the interesting responses relating to the program was the feeling that there was "an emphasis on the co-op program" at Virginia Tech. This emphasis was regarded as a positive influence on students to actively work during their college experience.

#### University Honors Program

Protocol question number three asked for specific information regarding the Honors Program and its influence on the students to attend Virginia Tech. The Program, itself, was mentioned throughout various other questions as well. With the exception of question 6, some form of Honors response was given during each of the sessions.

Beginning with question number 3, the majority of students did not feel as though the Honors Program had any influence on their decision to attend Virginia Tech. One student represented the group that he was in by stating, "It was no big deal! I was accepted into Honors programs everywhere else (that he had applied)." Another student bluntly admitted, "I didn't care about it then and I don't care about it now!"

Although limited, 5 of the 6 questions had students who recognized some aspect of the Honors Program to be influential during some of the participants' college decisions. The staff, Jack Dudley, Barbara Cowles, and

Patti Hall, were all recognized by name at one time or another as having been a positive reference for students. Jack was influential in one student's decision to not only attend Virginia Tech, but to study a specific program which the student had not considered previously.

Orientation was mentioned on several occasions as the only means by which some of the students had learned of the Honors Program, both in a positive and negative sense. Some students felt as though this was their only opportunity to find out about the Program. Jack spoke with the students during Orientation and explained the eligibility requirements and the specifics of the Program. One student felt as though Jack answered questions regarding the Program and the University that would have normally taken "forever" to have answered. "Dr. Dudley knew everything about Virginia Tech and Honors, regardless of the department. He knew the faculty **and** the students. Dr. Dudley...found the answers!"

Another student remarked that during orientation, he was intimidated and turned off to the Honors Program. He felt as though students were being pressured toward total academics and that the students should feel a sense of guilt when considering social activities and attending college. He continued by stating that if a student was more interested in a social life than academics, he or she was

not right for the Honors Program. (No other students continued with this thought.)

Advanced registration was another perk that several of the students identified as significant to their decision to attend Virginia Tech. The ability to register before athletes was considered to be important, however, one student was adamant that athletics registered first. The thought that athletics did register before Honors did not seem to upset any of the students nor did it result in a continued conversation on that specific issue.

For the most part, the students were confused about the Honors Program. Some students had not heard of it until "an application arrived in the mail." Others were informed directly that they had been accepted and they had never applied. "A letter arrived and you were in. I never even applied." (This quote was worded similarly during different sessions.) One student informed the group that she had received four copies of the same acceptance letter within two weeks, although she had never applied. "I figured you were just in," was her thought, feeling as though all students were automatically included in the Honors Program. Another student identified the letter as very positive. "It was nice to get the letter," she told the group. "It made me feel special."



The discussion of mail led to other related experiences. A student continued the discussion by saying that the same information from Honors kept coming in the mail. She became "utterly frustrated with the Honors Program" and was left with a "bad impression." In other instances, students were concerned with the manner by which they were informed of their acceptance. Apparently, they were accepted into the Program prior to being notified by the University that they had been accepted by Virginia Tech.

The discussion of the Honors Program, on several occasions, took a side-track as students asked specific questions with which they were not familiar. The following questions were brought up during different sessions:

1. What makes you an Honors student?
2. Do you have to take Honors classes to be an Honors student?
3. Do you have to take Honors classes to stay in the Honors Program?
4. What is the difference between "In Honors" and "Commonwealth Scholar?"
5. How many credits do I need to be an Honors student?

In addition to the questions, similar remarks were made by the students during the various interviews. One student summed up the feelings of the group by stating, "We're in an

organization that we have no idea what it's about." Other students were concerned with the relationship of academics and a social life if they were to stay in the Program, spurned by the remark of whether a student was "right" for the Honors Program if he or she was interested in social activities.

#### Campus Atmosphere/Life

Another category which emerged from the interviews was the campus atmosphere/life associated with an institution, specifically Virginia Tech. Various elements of the University were noted as important to students when they are considering which college or university to attend. The most popular responses given included the campus visit, actual atmosphere of the campus, size of the college or university, class sizes, social life and activities available to students.

#### Campus Visit

The campus visit was a very influential factor of students choosing to attend a specific college or university. Taking a campus tour can provide a more in-depth view of the institution, which was noted to be of importance to the students being interviewed. There were many remarks in different sessions of feelings associated with the campus visit. Virginia Tech's campus visit was summed up by several students: "You get a (good) feeling!"

Another student identified a "gut feeling" when he arrived. He knew he "wanted to go there!" because of that feeling. Another student remarked that he noticed a "...feeling that I knew I was coming here," also from the campus visit, while a separate interview revealed that one student's visit to Virginia Tech "felt comfortable immediately!" Four students agreed with the comfort comment.

With regard to a Virginia Tech campus visit, several students agreed that it made their final decisions for them.

"It was the best I saw!" remarked one student. Another student, who had initially identified several schools which he would like to attend, recalled that the visit "made my decision to come **here** (Virginia Tech) much easier." While yet another student had initially narrowed Virginia Tech down to her fourth choice of 30-40 schools...the visit made her decision for her. "See the school!" was her advice to prospective students, while another student in a different interview cautioned to "make sure students are there" when a campus visit is planned.

#### Atmosphere of the Campus

The impressions which a campus make on students were readily identified as influential to the decisions made to attend an institution. The atmosphere of the campus was the way in which the participants summed up their impressions.

One student recognized the campus setting of Virginia Tech to be significant in his decision to attend. The school felt "wide open," without too many trees, while another student recognized the number of trees to be numerous and pleasant. Another student commented that the campus was attractive with its "buildings, layout, and style of architecture." In another interview, that same type of response was shared with the identification that Virginia Tech "resembled a private school," due to the maintenance of the grounds.

Another element recognized by the participants with regard to the atmosphere was the way in which Virginia Tech presented itself to both students and non-students. One interviewee summed up these thoughts by saying (Virginia Tech was) "not just a technical school." There was a feeling associated with the University which represented more than some of the initial feelings of Virginia Tech's reputation for such programs as Engineering.

#### Size of the Institution

Several of the participants regarded the size of the institution to be a factor in their college choices. Initially, it was noted, Virginia Tech was considered to be a large university. The number of students attending the University biased many of the students. It was considered to be too large while its size was associated with

apprehension felt by the participants. "I thought I'd be just a social security number" on campus, was one thought identified during several sessions. Additionally, one student identified a fear of "being lost in the crowd," prior to attending Virginia Tech, while another admitted that the University was "more personal than I had thought."

Protocol questions 1 and 4 were the areas which specifically regarded the responses. Attention was given to the thought that Virginia Tech was much larger prior to attending the University. It was later identified to be smaller than anticipated. Virginia Tech "doesn't feel big" was one remark made from a student who had initially considered the school to be large. Another student explained that her initial thought was how she would "fit in" to both the University and her program of study, given the size of the institution. (Initially, this student was looking into small, liberal arts colleges, however, she soon determined that Virginia Tech would expand her "limited high school thoughts.")

Another student identified Virginia Tech to be a "big enough place where you can be by yourself, but there are always people to do things with." Another participant in that same session added that "no one is looking over your shoulder."

## Class Sizes

Students recognized the class sizes to be influential. As with the University size, some of the students felt a fear regarding whether or not they would feel a belonging to large classes. With high school classes being smaller than many college or university classes (in most of the circumstances noted by the participants), the students were concerned about Virginia Tech. This concern was only noted during the discussion of protocol question 4. There was no mention of class size as a factor of the decisions the students made. Instead, it was addressed as a relief when they were discussing their expectations. The students originally felt as though the classes at Virginia Tech would be much larger than they turned out to be.

Prior to attending classes at Virginia Tech, some of the students discussed an apprehension toward lecture classes. They were concerned that with several hundred students attending a class, there would be little concern for the students by the professor. In addition, they were worried that a large lecture class may negatively affect their ability to learn. In the long run, there was not as much concern for the large size, once the students attended. One student addressed the number of students by saying, "Lecture classes give me lots of people to study with."

### Social Life and Activities

Social life and activities were noted during several sessions. They were identified more during protocol question 4; however, 1 and 2 also addressed the issues.

Virginia Tech was recognized to be an "active campus" with a great deal of "diversity." (The definition to which the "diversity" responses were regarded was that of having many different activities from which to choose.) There is "always something to do" with "lots of opportunities." At Virginia Tech, there is "...lots of involvement. You can be an individual or you can be part of a group." Additionally, you can "do what you want to do" while "be(ing) yourself." One student volunteered his thoughts that "people study; people go out; people have fun!"

Another student explained that there is an "opportunity to meet people" at Virginia Tech, while being provided with "extras, like speakers (Maya Angelou) and political debates." Additionally, during another session, a student summed up his thoughts that Virginia Tech had "lots to choose from."

### Influential People

The Honors students interviewed found that what others thought of their college choices, specifically Virginia Tech, was of extreme importance. In many instances, the reputation of an institution was brought to the attention of

the students by others. Influential people involved with the decisions of the participants were their parent(s), brother(s), sister(s), current students, friends, and faculty.

### Reputation

The sub-category of reputation was best represented under the Influential People category due to its relationship with people. People expressed their views on both institutions and programs, which, in turn, affected how the prospective students viewed their options.

The reputation of an institution and the programs available were highly regarded by the students when asked protocol questions 1,2, and 5b. One student was initially interested in the Veterinary School at Virginia Tech and because of the departmental reputation, she made her decision to attend the University. Another student summed up the feelings of his group by saying, "Virginia Tech sounds like a good school; I'll go there!"

### Parents

The parents of many of the participants played a role in their decisions. Whether it was one or both, they were regarded specifically in questions 1, 2, 5b and 6. One participant mentioned that she had received a full scholarship to another university; however, her father's reaction was, "I'll pay for you to go to Virginia Tech."



Several students mentioned that their parents put stipulations on their decisions. An open-ended response of "Go anywhere you want to go, but..." which inevitably resulted in Virginia Tech.

#### Brothers and Sisters

Having brothers and sisters at the same college or university or having attended a specific university was an influence to the decisions made by several students. This response was listed for questions 1, 2, and 6. There was a feeling of security and comfort associated with a family member attending (or having attended) the same institution. In one instance, an out-of-state student had made her mind to join her sister at a specific institution. She found, after doing research on Virginia Tech, that "(Virginia) Tech took me by surprise!" What the University had to offer with regard to an education and future opportunities weighed more heavily with her than the thought of being with her sister.

#### Current Students/Friends

Current students and friends were recognized with protocol questions 1, 2, and 5b as having served as influences to the Honors students being interviewed. The information which current students can offer to prospective students was suggested to be of significance.

Virginia Tech students were recognized as being "friendly" and very courteous to the students being

interviewed. They were noted to have answered questions about the University in a very positive manner and were willing to assist the students with their concerns.

### Faculty

During the college search, faculty of Virginia Tech were also noted as having been "friendly" to those students who sought their assistance. They were "informative" and offered new insights to their individual departments that the students had not been aware of prior to speaking with them.

Several students were concerned that the size of the school could affect how well the faculty knew their students. At Virginia Tech, several students were very impressed by the way the instructors took interest in their students in the classroom and how they recognized their students outside of the classroom.

In addition, faculty were recognized as being "helpful." One student expressed a concern prior to attending Virginia Tech that there was an expectation of faculty to know and work with juniors and seniors, not freshmen. (He was pleasantly surprised when he arrived.) Another student was caught in the middle of two thoughts regarding her academic major options. Having spoken to one professor during a campus visit, a decision was made. He

helped make her decision to study Engineering and was very supportive of her, regardless of where she chose to attend college.

### Location

The students being interviewed identified location as a positive influence on their college decisions. Both out-of-state and in-state students recognized Virginia Tech to be within their mental perception of where they would like to attend college. The small college town was found to be attractive to several of the participants, while the rural area was also noted.

### Out-of-State

Out-of-state students identified themselves in each session. They were interested in additional factors of the college search that in-state students did not have to consider. The location of Virginia Tech seemed close enough to the homes of those students not from Virginia, yet "far enough away that I (they) don't have to worry about my (their) mother(s) surprising me on the weekend!" The few students who shared their actual home states were from West Virginia, Florida, Maryland, New Jersey, and New York. (In one session, there were four students from New York.)

### In-state

In-state students also had to consider the distance of Virginia Tech and their other choices from their hometown.

As with the out-of-state students, there was a feeling that Virginia Tech was close enough to home to "get away." On the other hand, they were also far enough from home that the students could be "on my (their) own." Those students who shared their hometowns were from Richmond, Radford, Blacksburg, Northern Virginia, and Virginia Beach.

#### Small, Rural, College, Town

The small college town was found to be a positive factor in the decision to attend Virginia Tech by the majority of respondents who addressed the topic. Protocol questions 1 and 4 were demonstrative of this observation.

Blacksburg seemed to receive more praise than criticism. While some students commented that it was a little more "remote" than they would have liked, the majority of students considered it to be a positive influence. Their reasons for this varied.

A few of the participants found Blacksburg to be similar to their hometown. This was a definite plus because they felt a "sense of belonging" to the entire community, as opposed to just the University. There were comments on the way in which Blacksburg views the students of Virginia Tech as compared with another popular college and town. "Blacksburg caters to students" while Harrisonburg people "hate students!"

Additionally, "The Town of Blacksburg supports Virginia Tech. It is a college town. Blacksburg wouldn't exist without Tech." Harrisonburg, it was noted, "thinks they would!"

#### Money (Costs/Financing)

"Money!" was a solid response given many times throughout most sessions and most questions. One participant described the influence of money on his decision to attend Virginia Tech by stating, "I pulled out my wallet and realized I couldn't go to Duke!"

The Honors students present during the interviews recognized money to be an intense issue during their decisions. Weighing cost as one of the most important aspects was mentioned as a response to protocol questions 1, 2, and 5b. Also included under money were the balance of money for the education being received and the affect of scholarship money on the participants.

#### Cost Benefit

Students in four different sessions brought up the thought that the money which students invest in an education at Virginia Tech is well spent. The questions which raised the issue of money and education were 1, 2, 5b, and 6. With different people in different groups demonstrating this to be of concern, Honors students were identified to be interested in what they are learning as compared with what

they are paying. "Virginia Tech is economical" and "gives you more for your money!"

### Scholarships

Scholarships received a great deal of attention on protocol questions 1 and 2, in addition to 5b. Many students volunteered the fact that they were receiving academic scholarships, both public and private. They tended to regard the scholarship money in an appreciative manner for the most part, however, one discussion offered two different perspectives.

In a session where all the students had admitted to receiving scholarship money, the factor became an issue. One student offered his comment that "Money from the school is important" regarding the final decision he made to attend Virginia Tech. Another student countered his statement. "Money is important, however, your choice should be where you want to go." This led to a mini-discussion where the winner was that "money is important!"

### Recruitment

The final category, recruitment, encompassed a large span of responses. Overall, there was very little emphasis placed on this category, however, several sub-categories did emerge. The application process, computer searches, college guide books, college representatives, high school guidance counselors, not being accepted by other institutions and not

liking the other college choices, were all identified as reasons for students deciding on a specific institution.

### Applications

The application process at Virginia Tech was brought up on several different occasions, during several different sessions, regarding several different variables. The general consensus was that Virginia Tech's applications were "easy!" There were "no application essays," which made many students happy. In addition, the application "fee was low," as compared with other institutions.

The topic of having the application fee waived by one student resulted in a discussion. Students were concerned as to why some fees were waived and others were not. This was determined by the students to be unfair to prospective students.

### Computer Searches

The guidance office was a popular spot for several students to make their decisions on which college to attend. Computer searches were the reasons for the students visiting the office.

Protocol question 2 received various responses during several different sessions, however, no students went into detail about how the computer searches really influenced them.

### College Guides

College guides received attention during questions 1 and 2. In different sessions, what the guidebooks had to offer where Virginia Tech information was concerned was found to be of influence to several student. One student was from out-of-state and had never visited the University. All he had to go on was what the books told him. During his review, he "somehow found Tech." Based on what the books told him, he knew that he would be happy at the University.

### College Representatives

College representatives were only mentioned during protocol question 2. While the response to this type of recruitment was very limited, the information shared during one session was very insightful. It was obvious that college representatives were influential to at least two individuals. "College reps can push you over the edge if you're not sure," was one response offered. In agreement, another student added, "Keep giving money to reps to travel around. It works!"

### High School Guidance Counselors

High school guidance counselors were only mentioned on two occasions. Protocol questions 1 and 2 countered each other. In one instance, the counselor proved to be of influence. In the other, the counselor had no affect at all. "She never said anything," was the response offered.



### Not Being Accepted by Other Institutions

While there were few responses centered around not being accepted by other institutions, it was noted during protocol questions 1,2, and 5b. There were no real discussions on this sub-category, however, the response was given on several occasions and noted accordingly.

### Did Not Like Other Choices

The interviewer found it to be interesting that several of the participants did not like their other choices, which served as influential toward their final decisions. The question which the interviewer should have asked was, "Why did you consider these other institutions when you didn't like them?"

One student who did not like her other choices stated that the "choice was easy. There was no choice!"

### **Literature Review**

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the factors recognized in current literature which affect the choices students make during their higher education institutional searches. Although there are many variables which literature has suggested to be of significance, those factors which were identified in three or more current journal articles or books will be presented in this review. Specific attention will be given to enrollment management, an area which pays direct attention to the attracting and

retention of students, two variables which are related to the final choices made by prospective students.

Additionally, based upon a current literature review, several influential factors will be discussed in detail. These factors have been recognized by literature as influential to the decisions made during the college search which eventually determine the final selection. They include: (a) institutional costs and tuition; (b) institutional geographic location; (c) parental, peer, and alumni influence; (d) institutional academic reputation; (e) institutional job placement programs and success; and (f) institutional campus visits.

Additionally, general information relating to the factors associated with institutional choice will be incorporated into the findings. No opinions or biases will be presented, although the review will combine both scientific and literary research.

In today's society, a college degree is an investment worth the risk (Henderson & Ottinger, 1985). Colleges and universities have recognized and welcomed this realization with open arms, yet have been faced with many related issues. It is one thing to attract students to institutions of higher education, while yet another to manage properly the number of students who attend (Hossler, 1987). Institutions must be prepared to not only entice students,

but to follow through on institutional promises. It is therefore necessary for colleges and universities to be attuned to the needs of students. Specific attention should be given to the elements or factors which students personally recognize as important when considering which institutions to attend.

Becoming familiar with the needs of students is not an easy task. Colleges and universities have had to recognize the ever-changing needs of both their current student population and the population of prospective college students. Such changes have resulted in many additional institutional responsibilities. The United States' population growth, increasing percentage of graduating college-bound high school students, and dependency of industry and government on higher education research and specialized personnel (Henderson, 1978), have forced colleges and universities to reevaluate their enrollments. The traditional college-bound student has become a thing of the past, making institutions question to whom their enrollment figures should be catering and how to go about recruiting these students.

Recruiting students is a necessity for institutional advancement and prosperity. The ability to attract students, however, has taken on a new meaning as students today are more conscious of their college options. They

have their own agendas before them when making their final decisions. Literature has revealed many factors which have been involved with these choices. From tangible to intangible, these factors have an individual effect on many yet are also common in numerous circumstances. As individuals, students have personal needs, yet as prospective students, many of these needs are related. Regardless of how these needs have been determined, they are all relative to the decision-making processes of prospective college students and should be viewed accordingly.

#### Enrollment Management

The university, as one of the oldest institutional structures (Lockwood & Davis, 1985), has been affected by numerous student attrition and retention scenarios over the years. Various economic and demographic attributes have assisted with the constant changing of student body populations. With more options and assistance available to prospective college-bound students, enrollment numbers have become more important to the continuation of colleges and universities. As a result, the ability to recruit and retain students has led institutions to a new understanding of how to administratively manage their enrollments.

In an attempt for colleges and universities to administer their student enrollments more efficiently and effectively, an enrollment administration process evolved

(Hossler, 1988). This process has allowed for more educational activities to be associated with the recruitment of new students in addition to the retention of current students. While management and supervision of these activities have ranged by definition from enrollment management to enrollment planning to optimizing enrollment (Hossler, 1984), the responsibilities have remained constant.

Enrollment management, a recently developed concept (Pollock & Wolf, 1989), was once segregated by departments to include such areas as student recruitment, student retention, and financial aid (Fenske & Hughes, 1990). These institutional areas were considered to be the most relevant to understanding a student's needs during his/her college choice and experience. The changes in trends and traditional college-bound students have forced higher education institutions to reconsider elements which would best be recognized as enrollment management.

According to Hossler (1984), this reconsideration has taken place in various manners. Since the 1980s, enrollment management has been recognized as the most important element of student recruitment and retention (Albright, 1986). Enrollment Management has gradually become associated with institutional missions and goals, current and future environmental examinations, and the assessment of

institutional ability for changes and adaptations (Hossler, 1984). The combination of attracting and retaining students has assisted with the development of the generalized enrollment management idea (Hossler, 1988).

### Admissions

Enrollment administration has historically been associated with the college or university Admissions Office (Erdmann, 1990). The primary responsibility of this office was the recruitment of prospective college students (Hossler, 1988). Known for their accountability of generating enrollments (Zemsky & Oedel, 1983), admissions offices have been faced with additional responsibilities and interests over the years. More facets have gradually become involved with the admissions process. No longer is there the sole concern of whether or not a student is accepted by an institution. There is an added concern of whether or not institutions have the means by which to accept and admit students (Boyer, 1987).

As the number of graduating and college-bound high school seniors fluctuates, admissions programs have had to prepare themselves accordingly (Hossler, 1986). Besides recognizing enrollment trends, admissions offices have had to become more knowledgeable of the relationship between higher education and enrollment management (Hossler, 1984; Williams, 1986). The affect of attracting students who best

meet individual institutional needs on those students who would best benefit from the particular institutions has become a significant issue with the admissions process (Sevier, 1989; Williams, 1986). The changing times and trends have proven the need for such institutional fits.

Trends. Higher education enrollment figures have been changing ever since the first institution of higher education opened its doors. Hutchinson (1988) associated such changing numbers with the changing times, identifying several significant college enrollment factors of the not-so-distant past. Sputnik's push for stronger science programs; the increase of students following World War II; open-access institutions like those in California; equal access of public education regardless of family income, race, or sex; and the then-current needs of students, were backgrounds for the changes affecting today's colleges and student populations. Such advancements have led to the offering to current college-bound students of more options for their institutional choices than ever.

Other diversity issues in trends have affected the choices with which prospective students are faced. The National Association of College and University Business Officers (1989) recognized environmental trends which affect both the size and composition of the prospective pool of students. Additionally, the types of students seeking

higher education and the types of institutions seeking students have diversely affected college choices (Fenske & Hughes, 1990). It is difficult, however, to make generalizations regarding institutions and trends. The changing types of institutions, programs, and nature of student bodies have left many questions unanswered, especially where current enrollment figures are involved.

The 1990s may best be described as an era with a decrease in traditional college-age students (Martin & Dixon, 1991). This decrease in the number of college-bound students can be attributed to a variety of reasons. The number of eighteen to twenty-two year old individuals has been identified as a primary reason for the reduction of traditional students (King, et. al. 1986; Willingham & Breland, 1982).

With a decrease in college-bound students, college and university competition has increased, affecting many aspects of the changing times and trends (Muffo, 1987; Welki & Navratil, 1987). Students have more of an opportunity to select one or more institutions which best fit their expectations. There are more questions being asked and more factors being presented when college selections are made. As the decrease in students continues, institutions should recognize these issues and make the necessary adjustments for attracting students.



Marketing and recruitment strategies. The changing trends of higher education have affected the admissions processes tremendously. With enrollments declining due to educational and cultural options and a decrease in the appeal of traditional curriculum and degree expectations, the employment of marketing techniques has been heavily regarded (Goldgehn, 1989). College and university admissions offices have gradually taken on the responsibility of serving as institutional marketing offices.

Hossler (1988) discovered such a relationship between admissions offices and marketing departments. Marketing tools of improved publication materials, targeted mailing strategies, and telemarketing techniques have provided the background for expansive promotional ideas and abilities. Private/personal high school visits, counselor visits, interviews of applicants, and alumni committee meetings, have also contributed. Many students who may not have been attainable in the past have gradually been provided for in the present (Greene & Minton, 1987).

Importance of marketing and recruitment strategies. As with any organizational structure, the marketing of an institution is extremely important to its success, especially when the competition is fierce (Brooker & Noble, 1985). Admissions marketing was presented to higher

education as a means by which colleges and universities could advance themselves among prospective students (Williford, 1987). Institutions similarly accepted this concept, while independently being aware of and responding appropriately to the progressive changes of the times (Lolli & Scannell, 1983).

Higher education marketing has been identified as an important means by which to attract students. Various issues, however, have demonstrated the need to be aware of what the institutions are actually marketing. The real reason for higher education should not become lost in the battle for enrollment numbers. Marketing techniques should be directed toward the attraction of students who are interested in completing their programs of study and obtaining their respective degrees (Sevier, 1989).

Prospective students, however, have their own agendas and questions regarding what is important to them during their college experiences. As a result, colleges and universities have slowly acknowledged these differing individual requirements and distinctive problems (Litten, Sullivan & Brodigan, 1983). In an effort to personally represent these conditions, institutional characteristics have been adapted (Goldgehn 1989). By recognizing the competition, this adaptation can assist with the specific student marketing tactics associated with individual

institutions (Rowse, 1987).

Future requirements of marketing and recruitment strategies. The combination of marketing with recruitment strategies has proven to be successful to institutions of higher education. To ensure continued prosperity, thoughtful detail should be given to both the structure and implementation (McCalmon, 1987). The strengths of an institution should be heavily regarded where future marketing and recruitment are concerned (Willingham & Breland, 1982).

The way in which a marketing program is developed can be of interest to prospective students as they decide which college best fits their individual requirements (Rowse, 1987). What an institution chooses to base its marketing strategies on can have a direct influence in how prospective students perceive the information.

There are many ways to go about organizing an effective marketing program. One possible suggestion identified three factors associated with such an effective development of a marketing plan: (a) a series of prioritized marketing goals; (b) a list of activities to accomplish these goals; and (c) strategies for evaluating the success of marketing activities (Sevier, 1989). Above all, institutions should remember who their audiences are and to whom they wish to market themselves (Brooker & Noble, 1985). Additionally,

Muffo (1987) advises colleges and universities to keep up with the competition.

### Student Retention

Hossler (1987) identified the association of enrollment management with higher education as a factor of enrollment control which in turn has affected retention rates. Students are concerned with what an institution has to offer when they are making their college selection. In addition and as a follow-up to their choice, they expect the institution to satisfy their requirements, academically and personally. These issues are related to both their decisions to choose a college or university as well as their decisions to stay at the institution which they chose.

Enrollment management has recognized student retention as an important element to both its recruitment of new students and its satisfaction with current students. With the decrease of various resources and traditional college-bound graduating high school seniors, student retention has gradually gained importance in higher education (Ferguson, Wisner, & Discenza, 1986). These decreases, however, have had many effects on many different areas of colleges and universities. Enrollment management has had to understand and act appropriately to the changes.

The ability for a college or university to react to varying times has demonstrated interesting institutional

developments. Institutions have had to reconsider their previous means for enticing students and then providing for them. In essence, there has emerged the need for a campus-wide concern (Pollock & Wolf, 1989), since the campus community is very influential among prospective students (King, Kobayashi & Bigler, 1986). A genuine relationship among all campus departments has been identified as significant to successful enrollment management strategies.

In addition, attention should be directed toward student recruiting, admissions, and retention. Attracting students and then admitting them is very important to the continuation of an institution. Once again, the ability to provide for these students, or retain them, is of equal importance. Understanding what it takes to attract, admit, and retain should therefore concentrate on the knowledge and responsibility of meeting individual student requirements (Pollock & Wolf, 1989) with both efficiency and effectiveness (Ferguson, et. al., 1986). In turn, students will recognize the dedication and commitment of the institution to their college educations as both students and individuals.

#### Financial Assistance

Financial aid has been identified as another variable of enrollment management (Fenske & Hughes, 1990), having a

direct influence on both the number of applications received as well as the number of students who actually enroll (Hossler, 1986).

Financial assistance can be traced back to 1643 when an allocation of money was given to Harvard College to assist a needy student until the degree of Master of Arts was awarded (Coomes, 1988; Woodward, 1988). Eventually, the term "perpetual scholarship" arose, assisting a student with his/her higher education costs while enrolled. This type of scholarship may have been the start of renewable scholarships (Woodward, 1988) used to impel student persistence (Fenske & Hughes, 1990; Woodward, 1988).

There are several sources of student assistance funds that the National Task Force on Student Aid Problems have recognized: the federal government; states; institutions; private industry and donors (Binder, 1983 cited in Fenske & Huff, 1983). This variety of sources has been helpful with students who need additional financial resources as well as those who are deserving in other manners. Financial assistance, which has been primarily associated with student need (Anderson, Ellickson, Nuetzel & White, 1985), can also include no-need recipients.

Financial aid has been identified as a relevant factor in choosing a college or university (National Association of College and University Business Officers, 1989). It has

been identified as important to the recruitment and admission of undergraduate students. The various means by which financial aid can be awarded has positively influenced student perseverance when it comes to attending college (Anderson, et. al., 1985).

One of the most important concerns of college-bound students is how they will finance their educations. Financial aid has provided for additional ways in which to meet anticipated expenses. The monetary concern may not have to be the most significant factor of students' decisions to attend a college or specific institution. Financial aid has allowed for scholarships and loans to be of assistance (Greene & Minton, 1987).

Scholarships. Since that first Harvard allocation of scholarship money (Coomes, 1988; Woodward, 1988), additional scholarships have emerged, mostly for financial need (Leana, 1980). These scholarships vary in content and can be awarded to students at various times throughout the duration of their college experiences. The primary purpose for scholarships, however, is to reward students for academic excellence, special skills, and talents (Woodward, 1988). This type of recognition can be of significance to prospective college students as they determine their personal and educational needs.

According to Muffo (1987), academic scholarships are a significant influence on students when considering their final college selection. The acknowledgement from higher education institutions of a student's academic performance can assist a student with his or her question of an institutional fit. Prospective student recruitment is the most influential reason for these scholarships (Iba, Simpson & Stockburger, 1988).

Loans. With the question of how students will pay for their college educations in the future, student loans have become a continued issue of importance (McPherson & Schapiro, 1991). They have been and will continue to be identified as a decisive factor in the college decision-making process (Muffo, 1987; Shaut & Rizzo, 1980). Students who might not have been able to afford a college degree have relied on student loans in the past to compensate for some expenses. Literature has revealed that students will continue to rely on some form of assistance in the future as tuition costs continue to escalate.

Numerous student loans have been made available to both prospective and current college students. While there are many different types of loan money to consider, the Guaranteed Student Loan is the most recognizable and obtainable (Shaut & Rizzo, 1980). In 1965, the federal



government implemented the Guaranteed Student Loan program (Hartle & Kusnan, 1991) under the 1965 Higher Education Act, Title IV. This loan has been recognized as the largest supplement of financial assistance (Merisotis, 1988) and renamed the Stafford Student Loan (Gladieux, 1989).

The Guaranteed Student Loan Program (GSL) was initiated to encourage states and nonprofit organizations to arrange for a substantial amount of loan insurance for students while paying a portion of the interest on the loans and guaranteeing the loans proceeds (Burns & Moore, 1984). It was intended to be the final monetary resource, used to promote higher education, following the exhaustion of all other possible forms of financial assistance (Hartle & Kusnan, 1991).

When considering enrollment management and recruiting students, financial assistance can be of great benefit to institutions. Prospective students question whether their choices of colleges and universities can provide for them when they first enter. This question has also been directed at the continuation of their college tenure. The ability to provide some form of financial assistance has been identified as a positive influence on students during their college searches.

## **Influential Factors Associated with College Choices**

Choosing a college or university can be a very demanding and trying time for young college-bound students. The process can be very complex, involving an assortment of different influences and research (Welki & Navratil, 1987). Students have more than just institutions on their mind. They have certain personal requirements which they hope their final choice will provide for them. By beginning their searches with a large number of institutions from which they can choose, a series of steps usually assists students with making that final decision (Discenza, Ferguson & Wisner, 1985; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

Research has been conducted to assist institutions with understanding how students proceed with their college selection processes. One example included the three-phase model which Hossler and Gallagher (1987) developed. In the first phase of this model, predisposition, the decision to attend college or not attend college is considered. This decision directly relates to the individual's personal attitudes and influences. The decision to actually attend college is thereby related to the decision to attend a specific institution (Smith, 1990).

The second phase, search for information, consists of a list of possible colleges or universities to consider (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Students have a general idea

of what type of institution in which they are interested and tend to consider several colleges or universities which meet their criteria. From that point, they begin to associate variables and information with each other which has been identified as very significant in the college search (Boyer, 1987). The more information available to prospective students assists with the final college decision of prospective students.

The third phase, decision-making, results from the elimination of possible institutions into the ultimate decision (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Students, once again, have an idea of what they are looking for in higher education institutions. After completing the first two steps in the process, they are usually better prepared to make that final decision. They have had the opportunity to weigh out the pros and cons of their possible selections and determine which institution best represents their personal and academic requirements.

When attempting to understand this process, institutions have had to determine what the needs of students are and how they can assist the students with their final decisions. Recognizing that college and university information is of value to prospective students, institutions have taken on a new approach. Institutions of higher education have responded by taking an active interest

in this process (Smith, 1990). By researching the factors which prospective students have identified as significant to their college decisions (King, et. al., 1986), institutions can direct their marketing strategies toward these variables.

Through current literature, various factors were presented as important to prospective students during their searches. While the resources were limited, the available information was of interest and significance. High school grade point averages; tuition rates; institutional geographic locations; parental, peer, and alumni influences; academic reputations; job placement programs; and campus visits were respectively recognized as influential factors in the decisions of college-bound students.

#### High School Grade Point Average

When considering higher education, it is important for students to understand where they fit in academically before attempting to determine the appropriate institutions. They should begin their college search by assessing themselves and their academic abilities first, and then consider which institutions they would like to attend (Hayden, 1986; Unger, 1986). This personal assessment can begin the college search with an understanding of who they are in terms of academic performance as well as which institutions best match their abilities.

High school academic performance can have various effects on students interested in higher education. Whether or not a student decides to go on for such advanced schooling may be directly related to how well he or she performed at the high school level. High academic ability, for example, has been related to the probability of a student attending college (Christensen, Melder & Weisbrod, 1975 cited in Shaut & Rizzo, 1980). This does not mean that students who did not perform at a higher academic level will not go on for higher education or that they will continue to perform at a low level. There is a correlation, however, between grade point averages (GPAs) and attending a college or university. The higher the GPA, the more choices an individual will have when it comes to institutional decisions (Smith, 1990).

#### Tuition

While economic factors were not recognized as determinants in the college decision process (Muffo, 1987), the issue of cost was highly regarded. Students have identified tuition as a major concern during their college searches (Frances, 1990; Gladieux, 1989; O'Keefe, 1987; Pascarella, Smart & Smylie, 1992; St. John, 1990). Additionally, it is a fundamental aspect of their college selection process and final decision (Hossler, 1986; Iba, et. al., 1988; Shaut & Rizzo, 1980; Smith, 1990; Welki &

Navratil, 1987) and in some cases, the single most important factor (Boyer, 1987).

Many students question how they will not only be able to afford their first years in college, but the continuation of their years during their entire college experience. Whether a student is financing his or her own education or if someone else is assisting with the costs, tuition questions are inevitably asked. Answers to these tuition questions are constantly being sought.

Financial aid has altered the perceptions of cost with some students, indicating that the availability of financial aid can counter the cost or rising costs of an institution (Welki & Navratil, 1987). If money is available, the issue of tuition and expenses may not be as heavily regarded as students may originally believe. Institutions have gradually begun to recognize this thought as they have illustrated both their institutional costs to prospective students and parents and the actual costs which will be incurred after financial assistance has been subtracted.

While tuition and expenses have been recognized as important to the decision-making processes of students, the relationship between costs and education were not of significance. Boyer (1987) discovered that college-bound seniors did not associate high tuition with a better education which counters the suggestions that a lower

costing institution did not represent a higher quality of academics (Smith, 1990). Tuition may be a concern, however, academics need to be represented in a more informative manner.

#### Geographic Location

Another significant factor in the decision-making process of prospective students is the geographic location of a college or university. Where an institution is located can have a direct affect on how students make their decisions (Iba, et. al., 1988; Martin & Dixon, 1991; Trusheim, Crouse, Middaugh, 1990; Welki & Navratil, 1987).

The distance between an institution and a young person's home has been identified as important to college-bound students. They tend to consider institutions that are relatively close in proximity to their homes (Willingham & Breland, 1982). Although some students may initially feel as though they would be happier further away from home, most students attend colleges or universities within their home state or within a 100 mile radius of their homes (King, et. al., 1986).

#### Parental, Peer, and Alumni Influences

Young adults tend to seek out the advice of others when making important decisions. Since college has been identified as one of the most important decisions people can make in their lives, it is very common for opinions and

thoughts to be sought. Prospective students have identified parents, friends, and alumni as the most instrumental individuals during this time (Martin & Dixon, 1991).

Many families experience the process of college decision-making as a family event (Cottle, 1991). Where young adults decide to attend college can have a direct impact on most families. It is very common for students to seek the assistance of their parents, usually acting as a team during this process (Olson & Rosenfeld, 1985). (Occasionally, according to Brouder (1987), parents sometimes seem more eager to receive college information than the prospective student!) Students' parent(s) could be the best source of assistance since he/she/they know(s) the students better than most anyone else (Fiske, 1988).

Students' friends or peers are often influential on the decisions made by prospective students. Friends who attend colleges and universities, whether they be the same institutions being considered or just attending an institution, are many times recognized as powerful resources (Fiske, 1988; Martin & Dixon, 1991). Young adults are apt to want peer acceptance and therefore seek peer thoughts regarding college selection.

Since alumni are usually active in financial, political, and economical sectors of their respective institutions (Hayden, 1986), there is often a true sense of



knowledge and commitment to the information which an alum will offer. While most alumni may be respectable elder figures, many times a parent will wish to have his or her child consider his or her alma mater.

Having a parent as an alum may not only increase the knowledge on the alma mater, but may affect the admissions decision of the institution (Unger, 1986). This could prove true where any family member is concerned. Whether the advice comes from a respected non-family member or a family member, however, the information will be biased. Additionally, there is always the general understanding that students go on to become alumni following their college experiences (King, et. al., 1986).

#### Academic Reputation

The academic reputation of an institution is a key element to the decision prospective students make when considering colleges and universities (Hossler, 1984; Iba, et. al., 1988; Martin & Dixon, 1991). How others view an institution and its programs can have a direct impact on the positive or negative feelings students may have. Students are interested in the reputations of both when considering which college or university to attend (Smith, 1990; Trusheim, et. al., 1990).

Universities and colleges have begun to recognize the significance of the relationship between the image of their

institutions and their recruitment programs (Milo, Edson & McEuen, 1989). Whether it be the type of institution being considered or the academic abilities of the students making the decisions, the reputation of a college or university has been determined to be significant to students during their college searches.

#### Job Placement

Higher education institutions offer students many privileges which are important during their job search as well as their college search. The concern of what individuals may do once they have completed their college education is often a question considered before any institutional choice has been made. There is a focus on the after-college experience which has been related to the before- and during-college experience.

Why students choose both to go on to college and go to a specific college or university has concerned both prospective students and higher education administrators. Many college-bound students report that their reasons for attending college are directed not toward their actual education and college experience but toward graduation and getting good jobs. Making money in their careers has been identified as a driving force of college-bound students (Leana, 1980).

Students have become more interested in materialism and success than they were in the past. What their college degrees can offer them later on in life has become a predetermining college question. With the value of a college degree in the job market increasing steadily throughout the years, more and more students are placing an added amount of significance on receiving a degree. This thought has added to the list of factors associated with a student's choice of a higher education institution.

#### Campus Visit

When it comes to colleges and universities, how students perceive the institution can be of great influence to their ability to make a final decision. Visiting an institution can assist with this perception by allowing students the first-hand opportunity of experiencing college life. The availability of a campus tour can also be of assistance as it provides a more in-depth view of what the institution has to offer its students (Smith, 1990). The visiting of an institution has been recognized as an important factor in the college selection process (King, et. al, 1986; Unger, 1986). After all, the institution chosen will soon become home (Unger, 1986).

Included in the actual campus tour is the psychological effect which may be experienced by prospective students. Hayden (1986) recognized the campus visit as a means of

independence for a student. It is during this time that individuals who may not have been actively involved in their decisions in the past may be afforded an opportunity of searching colleges on their own.

Additionally, what students see during their visits can influence the choices made. The observations made during a campus visit can accommodate the thoughts regarding personal elements involved with college decisions (Fiske, 1988). A feeling of comfort found during the campus visit can be influential (Smith, 1990) in addition to the style of the campus (Welki & Navratil, 1987).

An additional element regarding the campus visit consisted of the size of an institution. Many students have personal concerns regarding the size of an institution and consider this factor to be of significance (Hayden, 1986; Smith, 1990). Although an institution may appear to be large or small based on student enrollments or other variables, seeing an institution for oneself can assist a student with recognizing its true, personal size.

The opportunity of visiting a college or university campus is one which prospective students should not miss. The ability to walk along the grounds, see current students in action, and feel the sense of academia may assist a student to an even greater extent with his or her final decision, whether it be in a positive or negative manner.

## **Conclusion**

Many elements are associated with students determining where they would like to spend their college years. Various facets of both the students' lives and the institutional missions and abilities to provide for students have become important in the college decision-making process. Institutions must be able to respond to the needs of students and understand the concept of why and how they are administering.

Enrollment management has become a means by which institutions can provide for students in addition to their own educational demands. As the times change, so do college and university enrollments (Hutchinson, 1988). To work with these changes, enrollment management has created more of a foundation for control of both the institution and the number of students, prospective and current.

The number of graduating high school seniors who are college-bound has decreased over the years (Muffo, 1987). This decrease has created an even greater challenge for colleges and universities to fill their student vacancies. Institutions must market their strongest attributes in a more aggressive manner. This type of marketing strategy should be geared toward the attraction of students who best fit the institution, rather than just the attraction of students.

Financial assistance, an element of great influence during the college decision-making era (National Association of College and University Business Officers, 1989), has been offered as a possible solution to assisting students with their college choices. Scholarships and loans have become marketing tools used by institutions which benefit both the students and the institutions. This type of additional funding can not only assist with the decision to attend a specific college, but can be the determining factor of actually going to college.

According to recent literature, there are many factors associated with the final decision students make when considering institutions of higher education. Some of the more influential factors include students' high school grade point averages (GPA); the tuition/cost of an institution; geographic location; the influence of parents, peers, and alumni; the reputation of an institution, including its programs; the placement of students following graduation; and the campus visit.

College-bound students are starting to do their homework more thoroughly where institutions of higher education are concerned. There are more questions being asked and more concerns being considered. While there are many factors associated with the final decisions made by prospective students, some are weighted more heavily than

others. Students know what they want with a higher education institution and usually settle for nothing less than what they desire.

### **Comparative Summary**

Both the individual focus group interviews and the literature review offered insights regarding the factors associated with how students make their college/university decisions. Insights were given that can allow for the reader to understand that most students share the same concerns when considering which institutions would best suit them and their personal needs.

The purpose of this comparative summary is to discuss the relationships between the interviews and the literature review. Table 1 shows the conceptual categories that emerged throughout both the interview sessions and the literature review. The key to the Table identifies the relationships between each data set as either No, Low, or High relationships. Reading the Table horizontally, the literature review categories can be compared with the interview categories. Each cell displays the symbol appropriate to the level of correspondence between the two data sets.

This section is organized to discuss the two data sets by conceptual categories. (The six conceptual categories, as a reminder, are made up of sub-categories or properties.

Table 1

**Level of Correspondence of Interview and Literature Data by Category**

Literature Categories	Interview Categories					
	Academic Programs	Campus Atmosphere/Life	Influential People	Location	Money	Recruitment
High School GPA	■	○	○	○	○	○
Tuition	■	○	○	○	■	○
Geographic Location	○	○	○	■	○	○
Parental, Peer & Alumni Influence	○	○	■	■	■	○
Academic Reputation	■	○	■	○	■	○
Job Placement	■	○	■	○	■	○
Campus Visit	○	■	■	■	○	○

Key: ○ No Relationship   ■ Low Relationship   ■ High Relationship



In some instances, as this summary will indicate, there is a relationship with either a category or one of its subcategories and the literature review.)

#### Academic Programs

The category of Academic Programs that emerged from the interviews corresponded closely with literature categories in two instances--Tuition and Academic Reputation. Slight correspondence was found with the High School GPA and Job Placement categories and no correspondence was noted with Geographic Location, Parental, Peer and Alumni Influence, and Campus Visit.

Academic programs were noted as important to the Honors students interviewed. The literature review described the academic reputation of both an institution and its departments to be of extreme importance to students during their college selections (Hossler, 1984; Iba, et. al 1988; Martin & Dixon, 1991). Students want to know what to expect from colleges and universities and are usually concerned with specific programs of study.

The literature revealed that institutions are becoming more aware of students' interests and needs (Milo, Edson & McEuen, 1989). Colleges and universities are beginning to use their academic reputations and facilities to entice students who fit their institutional molds.

The interviews of Virginia Tech Honors students confirmed what the literature review revealed. Both the institution and its departments, specifically Virginia Tech and several of its academic programs, were found to be influential during the college searches of the participants. The University Honors Program, however, was **not** found to be influential.

Given the population of the students being interviewed, their academic abilities were taken into great consideration during their searches, both by themselves and the institutions which they were considering. The Virginia Tech University Honors Program recognized these academic abilities and attempted to solicit the participation of these students into their Program.

Academic faculty members, it was noted in the interviews, were of assistance to the participants during their college searches. There was personal contact between several students and faculty representatives of various departments. This contact allowed for the students to be guided into programs of study which they were either considering or had not considered previously. The amount of information offered by the faculty to the students left very positive feelings with the students. Additionally, some of the students made their program decision based on what they learned from the professors.

High school grade point averages were identified as significant factors in the decisions made by college-bound students (Smith, 1990). Given the nature of the student population being interviewed, Honors students, it was not a direct issue. All of the students interviewed were in the top ten percent of their high school classes and had graduated with a minimum of a 3.4 QCA.

Job placement programs were also identified as influential to the college decisions made by students (Leana, 1980). This topic relates to several of the responses given during the interviews. The subcategories of Placement and Relationship With Businesses were how the students described their interest in job placement and future opportunities.

#### Campus Atmosphere/Life

The category of Campus Atmosphere/Life that emerged from the interviews corresponded closely with literature categories in only one instance--Campus Visit. High School GPA, Tuition, Geographic Location, Parental, Peer and Alumni Influence, Academic Reputation, and Job Placement had no relationship.

The literature review identified the college visit as very an important factor in students' decisions to choose colleges or universities (King et. al., 1986; Unger, 1986). The interviews, in a subcategory, also identified this to be

the case when they were making their decisions on Virginia Tech and the possibility of other institutions. The campus visit was one of the most highly regarded responses in all six of the interview sessions.

The ability for students to actually see an institution was identified by both the review and the respondents as beneficial to how students perceive colleges and universities. It affords them an opportunity to recognize the type of environment in which they will live during their college experience, should they choose that specific institution. One of the students admitted that he found himself referring to Virginia Tech as "home" whenever he was away from the campus. That home feeling is what a campus visit can provide for if students take the time to plan one.

#### Influential People

The Influential People category that arose from the interviews had a high relationship with the Parental, Peer, and Alumni Influence, Academic Reputation, and Campus Visit categories from the literature review. There was a low relationship with Job Placement and no relationship with High School GPA, Tuition, and Geographic Location.

The literature review recognized parents, peers, and alumni to be the most influential people to college students (Martin & Dixon, 1991). For the most part, this finding was

confirmed, although to a lesser degree where the interview responses were concerned.

The participants identified their parents as the most influential people in their college searches. Parents provide a sense of comfort to students during stressful times such as college searches (Olson & Rosenfeld, 1985). Their support was identified as comforting to the students; however, the roles of parents were different. The role of the parent(s) was more of a director than a supporter for students. In some instances, parents tried to let the students decide on their own. "Stipulations," it was noted, were placed on the students, limiting their options.

The family was discussed in the literature review (Cottle, 1991). Brothers and sisters were not specifically mentioned. They were discussed in some of the interviews as having influenced a few students. The point that one student brought up about expecting to join her sister at another institution until she found out about Virginia Tech identified the influence in a different manner. Initially, the thought was that the two sisters would be attending the same institution. Other factors associated with how the student learned of Virginia Tech made the decision for her to **not** attend her sister's institution.

Friends, or peers, were regarded in both the interviews and literature review (Fiske, 1988; Martin & Dixon, 1991).

There was a concern identified by the students and the review that recognized the thoughts of others to be very influential. This issue was supported during the interviews with the responses of both friends who attend a specific institution, as well as friends who do not.

Alumni were mentioned in both the review and the interviews. There was not a great deal of information offered in either.

#### Location

The Location category which was identified during the interviews corresponded closely with the Geographic Location found in the literature review. There was a small correspondence with the Parental, Peer, and Alumni Influence and Campus Visit Categories. No correspondence was identified with the High School GPA, Tuition, Academic Reputation, and Job Placement categories.

The location of an institution was highly regarded by both the interviews and the literature review as an important factor during college searches. There was evidence that where an institution is located can play a major role in the decisions students make. Whether they be from in- or out-of-state, most students preferred a college or university fairly close to home, although the students' opinions of close and far varied.

The subcategories of small college town, rural area, in- and out-of state effects, Blacksburg being seen as similar to the participants' hometowns, and liking the state of Virginia, were identified during the interviews. They were not recognized in the literature review. The issue of location was related specifically to the distance between an institution and students' hometowns. The interviews recognized various other issues relating to location which ranged from the type of area (ie. rural) to the type of environment (ie. small, college town).

#### Money

Money was identified in the interview sessions as being important to the students. There was a high relationship between Money and the literature review categories of Tuition and Academic Reputation. A small relationship was recognized with the Parental, Peer, and Alumni Influence, and Job Placement categories. No relationship was determined with the High School GPA, Geographic Location, and Campus Visit categories.

In the literature review, specific information was given regarding the relationships between college choices and financial assistance (Anderson, et. al., 1985; National Association of College and University Business Officers, 1989; Welki & Navratil, 1987) and tuition (Hossler, 1986; Iba, et. al., 1988; Shaut & Rizzo, 1987; Smith, 1990; Welki

& Navratil, 1987). The literature review paid particular attention to financial assistance, identifying it as an influential element to entice students to attend a college or university. Scholarships and loans were of interest and influence. Additionally, the review recognized tuition as a concern of students and how affordable it would be.

Financial assistance, during the interviews, had a different effect on the Honors students. There was no mention of borrowing money to cover expenses. Loans were not discussed at all. Scholarships were highly regarded and fairly common among the interviewees. There were, however, concerns regarding expenses, regardless of any scholarship money which had been awarded. The actual word "tuition" was never mentioned, although the issue of "cost" was a very popular factor. Honors students at Virginia Tech were just as conscientious of how they were going to pay for their educations as the general population which the literature revealed.

#### Recruitment

The final category which emerged from the interviews was Recruitment. There were no relationships between any of the information revealed through the literature review.

Recruitment, in various forms, was determined to be of significance to students during the interview sessions. The literature review and the interviews identified this to be



true, although in different terms. The relationship between the general population had a higher regard for recruitment.

Direct attention was given in the literature review to the admissions programs of institutions, including marketing and marketing strategies. Students need to know about the institutional options which are available. There was a great deal of information revealed that regarded the admissions office as an important factor of college choices made by students.

During the interview sessions, recruitment was mentioned, although it did not appear to have the a large impact on the groups of students. Answers were given sporadically, relating to various aspects of college recruitment. No direct attention, however, was directed toward this issue. Other factors made larger impacts on the students.

Findings from this research permit the drawing of some conclusions about the guiding research questions. This section will be used to address each question specifically.

#### **Research Question Number One**

How did Honors students attending Virginia Tech make their institutional choice?

The interview sessions recognized various factors which individual participants felt were important to them during their college searches. The information revealed through

this study indicates that many factors may assist with searches, however, only a few actually recruit Honors students. Honors students attending Virginia Tech identified three influential factors which had more recruiting power than any of the other responses. Academic programs/reputation, money (including both cost and scholarships), and campus visits were all continuously identified throughout each of the six focus group interview sessions. The University Honors program, however, was not found to be a significant factor in their decisions.

#### Academic Programs/Reputation

Given the nature of the participants of the study, Honors students, there was a general feeling that what an institution has to offer, academically, can be of influence to prospective students. Virginia Tech offered the participants a great deal of satisfaction where its academic programs were concerned. Additionally, the reputation of both the institution and its individual programs were highly regarded.

#### Money

Money was also mentioned frequently during all six sessions. Most, if not all, of the students had received some form of academic scholarship to assist them with their college costs. None of the students mentioned any form of loans.

There were several responses given during different sessions which mentioned the economical aspect of Virginia Tech. The University was recognized as a "good buy" and that the cost was equal to the education. The students were interested in how their money would be invested where their educations were concerned. Virginia Tech was considered to be "cheaper" than many schools. The education, however, which a student could receive at the University far exceeded the money aspect.

Since Virginia Tech was determined to be economical, the students went further with their discussions where their futures were concerned. Several students felt as though the money they felt they were saving by attending Virginia Tech could be put toward graduate schools.

#### Campus Visits

The Virginia Tech campus visit was a common factor associated with the choices made by the participants. A few of the students identified a "feeling" which they received when they visited the University. This feeling helped them to associate a sense of comfort with their choice to attend Virginia Tech. One student stated that he "felt as though I (he) could make it through four years and not regret my (his) decision."

### University Honors Program

Although the sample for this study consisted of all University Honors students, there was no relationship between the program and the students' decisions to attend Virginia Tech. More questions were asked about the program during the discussions than there were answers being shared to the protocol questions. Apparently, many of the students were confused about how they became associated with the program, what the program entails, and what they would need to do in the future.

#### **Research Question Number Two**

Do the stated reasons for institutional choice of Honors students correspond to the information conveyed through the literature review about the choices generally made by students?

The stated reasons for institutional choices of Honors students did correspond to the information conveyed through literature about the choices generally made by all students. Seven categories emerged throughout the literature review as being influential to prospective students. Of those 7, all 6 of the categories which emerged from the interviews were represented.

The study indicated that specific populations, such as Honors students, tend to make their college selections in a similar manner as the overall student population. Their

individual needs tend to be related, regardless of their student classifications.

There were several surprises in the findings. The first surprise was the lack of attention which the students offered to the recruitment tools of colleges and universities. The amount of emphasis placed by admissions offices on their recruitment programs did not emerge in the discussions.

While there was an emphasis placed on academics and programs, it was interesting to note that other factors tended to persuade the participants toward their final decisions. Honors students tended to have the same physical and emotional needs that students, in general, have.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this study was to compare factors associated with Honors students choosing Virginia Tech with current literature findings of factors used by all students to make their college decisions. Chapter 1 introduced the study, including its purpose, research questions, and definitions of terms used throughout the report. Chapter 2 described the methodology and procedures used to collect and analyze data. Chapter 3 presented the results of the study, including the responses of the Honors participants and findings of the literature review. The two data sets were compared and similarities and differences were identified. The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the report and discuss the implications. Recommendations for further research are also offered.

#### **Summary of Findings**

This summary was guided by two research questions.

1. How did Honors students attending Virginia Tech make their institutional choice?
2. Do the stated reasons for institutional choice of Honors students correspond to the information conveyed through the literature review about the choices generally made by students?

The study was pursued by two data sets, Honors students and a literature review. The Honors students were guided by a protocol designed to ask the students how they made their final college selections. This was done through focus-group interviews in which data was revealed from the responses offered by the students. The information was transcribed and categorized and then reported in Chapter three.

The literature review, the second data set of this study, was chosen from current literature between the years of 1980 and the present. Themes emerged from the review which were categorized in a similar manner as the interview responses. This information was also reported in Chapter three.

An analysis between the two data sets was conducted. This analysis determined that the cost of an institution and a campus visit were the most beneficial factors to the decisions college-bound students make.

Six conceptual categories arose from the use of in-depth interviews structured around 7 protocol questions. These categories consisted of (a) academic programs, (b) campus atmosphere/life, (c) influential people, (d) location, (e) money (costs/financing), and (f) recruitment. The literature also revealed 7 categories relating to significant factors associated with college decisions. These categories were comprised of: (a) high school grade

point averages; (b) tuition; (c) institutional geographic locations; (d) parental, peer, and alumni influences; (e) academic reputations; (f) job placement programs; and (g) campus visits.

The results of this study appear to show a direct, though not a perfect, correspondence between the responses given by the Honors students and the information revealed through the literature review. It is important to note that the design of the sample could have affected the results of the interviews. Since the students were not identified by their class rankings and GPAs, only by their eligibility to be in the Honors Program with at least a 3.4, some of the responses may not have been indicative of the different types of students participating. Some of the students may have been more concerned with specific factors differentiated by their stronger/weaker academic records, for example.

The categories which emerged throughout both data collections identified that most students tend to have the same concerns when they are experiencing the process of choosing colleges or universities, regardless of their Honors affiliation. While the titles of the descriptors varied in certain instances, the general information remained essentially the same.



### Cost

The most influential factor associated with attending an institution of higher education was reported by the students as the cost. The students were very interested in what type of expenses they would be incurring throughout their college experiences. Although scholarship money was identified as very common among the participants, there were no full scholarships reported. The concern of how the students would pay for the expenses not covered by their scholarships was relevant.

The cost of Virginia Tech was important to the Honors students. Several of them had other institutions in mind but the cost of those other colleges and universities was higher than that of Virginia Tech. Additionally, some of the students were concerned with graduate and veterinary schools and the money they felt they would be saving by attending Tech would help support further studies.

### Campus Visit

The next most significant factor which arose from the study was the campus visit. Almost half of the participants identified the campus visit as having assisted them with their decisions. While seeing a campus can have a negative impact on some students, the visits which the participants made to Virginia Tech were very influential and positive. Students had an opportunity to experience the University

from a personal viewpoint, seeing how both the institution and the students function. One student exclaimed to "make sure students are there" when visiting the campus. This remark identified the thought that to see how students act and respond when in the college environment can assist others with determining whether or not they would fit in.

#### Institution Location

Another highly regarded factor which the interviews revealed was the location of the institution. The students tended to associate Virginia Tech with a positive identification to their hometown. There was evidence that the locale was considered to be close enough to home where the students could return at any given time, yet far enough away that they felt in control of their lives. (Mothers were mentioned as not being able to "drop in" on the weekends!) Included in the location category/factor were several subsets. These additional responses, related to the location of the institution, small college town, rural area, Blacksburg being similar to other hometown, and liking the state of Virginia. Two negative reactions were given to the location and ruralness of Virginia Tech; however, the positive responses far outweighed these negative thoughts.

#### Reputation

The reputation of an institution and its academic programs were very important factors associated with their

college decisions, according to the interviewees. Many of the respondents reported that they had heard good things about Virginia Tech prior to deciding to apply and attend. The positive feelings which the students felt while considering which colleges or universities would best fit them were relayed when they chose Virginia Tech.

Additionally, several academic programs were identified as significant to the final decisions made. These programs were accounting, architecture, biology, computer science, engineering, math, mining, science, veterinary science, and wildlife. The reputation of the engineering department was highly regarded by many of the participants. Positive remarks were offered pertaining to both the department and its faculty members.

The University Honors Program was not found to be influential to the students who participated in the study. Many of them felt as though they were not properly prepared for the Program prior to attending Virginia Tech. There were questions regarding how they had been accepted when they had not applied, in addition to the manner in which they were made aware of their acceptance. Several students were notified of their admittance without having been notified that they were admitted to the University. Others did not know about the Program until the orientation program held at Virginia Tech.

The specific recruiting responsibilities of the admissions office were not recognized. With the exception of two individuals recognizing the recruiters, there was no other mention. College fairs and high school visits were also hardly recognized. High school computer searches and college guide books were discussed on several occasions; however, even those topics were limited.

The majority of students were satisfied with their decision to attend Virginia Tech. Only one participant identified a dissatisfaction -- not being able to locate his academic advisor. Additionally, it was discovered that there were "more good qualities" about Tech than other institutions. When asked if they could identify the single most important factor associated with their college decisions, the majority of students could not. There were too many variables and it "was a mixture of everything!"

#### **Implications of Findings**

These findings, while useful and revealing, should be interpreted with caution. There were weaknesses in the design. The Honors students that were interviewed were all treated equally, without regard to demographics (ie. gender and academic ranking). Had the study been organized to include such separate categories, more conclusions might have been possible. Findings, as a result, were generalizations about Honors students.

Another criticism of the study was the necessity for the students to speak in an ex post facto voice, after their decisions had been made. It would have been more beneficial to the study if the students could have been interviewed during the actual time when they were making their decisions.

#### **Recommendations for Further Research**

While this study did associate the factors which Honors students considered in their college decisions with the factors identified by current literature indicating why all students choose institutions, further research could be performed to fully understand the responses of each data set. Other forms of data collection could be used to compare the responses of each. Surveys, both open-ended or identifiable answers, could be distributed among Honors students. Additionally, telephone interviews could be held.

With regard to the sample, it might be of benefit to both the researcher and the University if the demographics of the participants were made available. The researcher might want to include gender and race information. Additionally, the breakdown of students based on their GPAs, class rankings, and extra-curricular activities might be of importance to the responses offered by the participants.

There may also be a level of individual leadership abilities which might be identifiable if such information were made available.

With specific regard to the collection of students to participate in the study, there was more interest and agreement when the students were personally called and their assistance was requested. Further research might include calling all of the students who fit the criteria for the study. It is important to make these calls as close to the dates as possible, however, allowing the students enough time to schedule a convenient time. The closer the phone calls are to the actual dates, the less likely the student may be to forget his or her commitment. Additionally, the follow-up of a letter was a good reminder and should be used for any future research.

It might be helpful to schedule all of the interview sessions in the same room. The environment will remain constant and may not offer any additional thoughts to the participants. It might also assist the researcher, especially if it is his or her first time interviewing, with feeling comfortable with the surroundings.

An initial thought regarding this study was to use video equipment. This might prove to be useful in future studies. The ability to see who made what response could assist the researcher with proper association of respondent

and responses. In some instances, using audio equipment only, it was difficult to translate responses as being repetitive by one person or a new answer to another. Video equipment would require additional concentration, as non-verbal communication would be involved.

Regardless of how the interviews are recorded, there should definitely be some form of recording. Having the tapes to refer back to was a definite advantage when making sense of the handwritten notes taken during the sessions.

Once the students are involved with the discussion, a suggestion for further research would be to help guide the students toward more informational responses. For example, if the response of campus visit is identified, the researcher may wish to ask the participant to expand on that response. "What, specifically, about the campus visit helped you to make your final decision?" might be a possible way of pushing for more information.

The appendices used in this study identify the manner by which the researcher identified the responses given during the interview sessions. While they were helpful to the researcher in becoming fully acquainted with the study, they were time-consuming and later, confusing. A qualitative study was turned into a quantitative study once the results were organized, which became a series of numbers and no qualitative responses. The researcher became so

enveloped in making sure that each question had the precise number of responses, that she (temporarily) lost sight of what was being said about each response.

While it might be more difficult, the ability to conduct this type of research while students are actually making their college decisions might prove to be of more significance. Since the participants had been college students for almost one year when they were asked to consider what influenced them to choose Virginia Tech, some useful information may have been lost. As a result of the length of time between their searches, decisions, and current enrollment statuses, their previous thoughts may have differed from the responses which they offered.

The study was interesting and could prove to be useful in the present and in the future. A specific consideration would be the changes in times and the responses which colleges and universities are offering to students where recruitment is concerned. Further research may wish to note both of these variables and how they affect the choices made by Honors students and information revealed through current literature about all students entering institutions of higher education.



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**Appendix A**  
**PROTOCOL QUESTIONS**

Instructions: (to be announced to each focus group)

- Introduction of self, including Master's program of study: Student Personnel.
- Introduction of thesis/study.
- Reminder of consent form: all data gathered during the interview, and all information formulated from the data following the interview, will be anonymous.
- Reminder of audio recording taking place during interview.

1. Describe the factors you considered in your choice of college.
2. Describe the process you used to make your decision.
3. Describe how involvement in the Honors program affected your choice.
4. To what extent has Virginia Tech satisfied your expectations or met the conditions you wanted in your choice of college?
5. Describe the pool of colleges you considered.
  - a. Which institutions did you consider?
  - b. How did you make your final choice to attend Virginia Tech?
6. Considering all issues in your choice, can you identify the single most significant factor in your decision to attend Virginia Tech?

**Appendix B**

**FRESHMAN HONORS RESEARCH PROJECT**

**STUDENT PARTICIPATION AND CONSENT FORM**

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Social Security Number: \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

Local Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Local Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Available Times:

Monday, March 1                      Tuesday, March 2                      Wednesday, March 3

1:30 - 3:00 \_\_\_\_\_                      10:00 - 11:30 \_\_\_\_\_                      9:30 - 11:00 \_\_\_\_\_

4:00 - 5:30 \_\_\_\_\_                      1:30 - 3:00 \_\_\_\_\_                      3:00 - 4:30 \_\_\_\_\_

(Please place a 1 next to your **first** choice and a 2 next to your **second** choice. If at all possible, first choices will try to be matched.)

I agree to participate in the Freshman Honors Research Project being conducted by Judith M. Lynch (Soc. Sec.# 058-42-1596), EDSP Master's Candidate. I understand that the interview sessions will be recorded (audio) and that my responses will be used anonymously by the researcher.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(date)



### Appendix C

QUESTION	1	2	3	4	5B	6
1) Engineer Program:	9	4	0	0	3	1
2) Biology Program:	2	0	0	0	0	0
3) VET School:	2	0	0	0	1	1
4) Accounting:	1	0	0	0	0	0
5) Computers:	1	0	0	0	0	1
6) Reputation:	14	7	0	1	6	1
7) Location (positive):	15	7	0	3	9	0
8) Location (negative):	1	1	0	1	0	0
9) Cost:	14	17	0	0	17	8
10) Not being accepted by another school(s):	2	1	0	0	2	0
11) Scholarship money:	10	12	0	0	5	0
12) College guides:	3	4	0	0	0	0
13) Sister attending:	0	1	0	0	0	0
14) Brother attending:	0	1	0	0	0	0
15) Father:	0	1	0	0	2	0
16) Mother:	2	0	0	0	0	0
17) Campus visit:	16	11	0	0	3	1
18) Campus atmosphere:	9	2	0	4	4	3
19) Small college town:	4	0	0	5	0	0
20) Rural (positive):	2	0	0	0	0	0
21) Rural (negative):	1	1	0	0	0	0
22) People (friendly):	3	1	0	4	0	0

	QUESTION	1	2	3	4	5b	6
23)	Professors (friendly):	3	1	0	5	1	1
24)	Other choices too costly:	0	2	0	0	0	0
25)	Out-of-state:	9	1	0	0	1	0
26)	Program:	6	5	0	0	7	1
27)	Current students:	4	1	0	0	1	0
28)	Visited brother at VT:	1	0	0	0	0	0
	Visited friends at VT:	0	1	0	0	0	0
29)	Easy application:	2	1	1	0	0	0
30)	No application essay:	3	2	0	0	0	0
31)	Low application fee:	0	1	0	0	0	0
32)	Application fee waived:	0	1	0	0	0	0
33)	Blacksburg-similar to hometown:	1	0	0	1	0	0
34)	VT size:	5	0	0	1	0	0
	Too large:	3	0	0	1	0	0
	Smaller than anticipated:	1	0	0	7	0	0
35)	Friends:	4	1	0	0	0	0
36)	Alumni:	2	1	0	0	0	0
37)	Friends who are Alumni:	2	2	0	0	0	2
38)	Orientation:	1	2	2	0	0	0
	Had not heard of Honors until:	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	0	N/A
	Turned of:	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	0	N/A
39)	Boyfriend:	1	0	0	0	1	0

QUESTION	1	2	3	4	5b	6
40) Wide range of curriculum/majors:	1	1	0	1	0	1
41) In-state:	2	4	0	0	2	0
42) Financial Aid:	1	0	0	0	0	0
43) Activities:	2	1	0	7	0	0
Outdoor activities:	1	0	0	0	0	0
44) Governor's school:	2	1	0	0	0	0
45) Football Saturday:	1	1	0	0	0	0
46) Football games:	2	0	0	0	0	0
47) VT accepted him/her first:	1	0	0	0	0	0
48) Big school= more money:	1	0	0	0	0	0
49) Engineer Open House:	1	1	0	0	0	0
50) Departmental graduation rate:	1	0	0	0	0	0
51) Student:Teacher ratio	3	0	0	0	0	0
52) Honors:	2	0	N/A	1	0	0
53) Placement:	3	1	0	0	1	0
54) Relationship with businesses:	1	3	0	1	4	2
55) Social Life:	3	3	0	1	0	0
56) Concerts (Roanoke):	2	0	0	0	0	0
57) Father: ALUM	3	0	0	0	0	0
58) Brother: ALUM	1	0	0	0	0	0
59) Sister: ALUM	1	0	0	0	0	1
60) Library:	1	2	0	0	1	0

QUESTION	1	2	3	4	5b	6
61) Labs:	1	1	0	0	0	0
62) Buddy Luncheon:	1	0	1	0	0	0
63) JETS:	1	0	0	0	0	0
64) Media:	1	0	0	0	0	0
65) Competitiveness:	1	0	0	0	0	0
66) More for money/ money=education:	4	1	0	0	2	1
67) Diversity within colleges:	1	0	0	0	0	0
68) High school counselor: Counselor did NOT affect:	0	1	0	0	0	0
69) Wildlife Program:	2	0	0	0	0	0
70) Computer search in guidance office:	0	4	0	0	0	0
71) Parents: "Choose where you want to go": Stipulations:	0	9	0	0	4	1
72) Mail: Repetitive pieces sent:	0	1	0	0	1	0
73) College representative:	0	3	0	0	1	0
74) Centralized campus:	1	1	0	0	0	0
75) Available resources:	1	2	2	0	0	0
76) Alumni in the workplace:	0	2	0	0	0	0
77) National Merit Scholarship dinner:	1	0	0	0	0	0

	<b>QUESTION</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5b</b>	<b>6</b>
78)	Co-op:	2	4	0	0	1	0
79)	Presidential Scholarship:	1	0	0	0	0	0
80)	Engineering main office:	1	0	0	0	0	0
81)	Math Program:	1	0	0	0	0	0
82)	Reputation of faculty by current students:	1	0	0	0	0	0
83)	No process:	N/A	5	N/A	N/A	1	N/A
84)	Architecture Program:	0	1	0	1	0	0
85)	Like the state of Virginia:	0	1	0	0	0	0
86)	Bad reputation of other schools:	0	1	0	0	0	0
87)	Didn't like other choices:	0	2	0	0	3	0
88)	Quick response by VT to application:	0	1	0	0	0	0
89)	College fairs:	0	1	0	0	0	0
90)	Private high school visits:	0	1	0	0	0	0
91)	Campus recruiting events:	0	1	0	0	0	0
92)	Odyssey of the mind:	0	1	0	0	0	0
93)	Only (VT) choice:	0	1	0	0	0	0
94)	Jack Dudley:	0	1	4	1	1	0
95)	Barbara Cowles:	0	0	1	1	0	0
96)	Patti Hall:	0	0	2	1	0	0

QUESTION	1	2	3	4	5b	6
97) Honors: advanced registration:	N/A	N/A	4	N/A	N/A	N/A
98) Honors: "No big deal; accepted by other Honors programs also.":	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	N/A	N/A
99) Didn't receive enough information:	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	N/A
100) No Honors application:	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	N/A
101) No affect by Honors:	N/A	N/A	17	N/A	N/A	N/A
102) (VT) First choice:	0	0	0	0	1	0
103) More good qualities at VT:	0	0	0	0	1	0
104) Honors: comparable to other school programs:	1	0	1	0	0	0
105) Honors: didn't know about it until application was received in mail:	N/A	N/A	4	N/A	N/A	N/A
106) In-Honors degree would assist with VET/Grad school admission:	0	0	2	0	0	0
107) Everything:	0	0	0	0	2	0
108) Classes: Smaller than anticipated:	0	0	0	4	0	0
Large:	0	0	0	2	0	0
	0	0	0	1	0	0
109) Phone system:	0	0	0	2	1	0
110) Computer Integration:	0	0	0	2	0	0
111) Satisfied:	N/A	N/A	N/A	3	N/A	N/A
112) Cable:	0	0	0	1	0	0

QUESTION	1	2	3	4	5b	6
113) Dissatisfied: Advisor is never available:	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	N/A
No available co-ops:	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	N/A
114) No expectations:	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A
115) Diversity:	0	0	0	4	0	0
116) Better than expected:	N/A	N/A	N/A	4	N/A	N/A
117) Dining Facilities:	0	0	0	1	0	0
118) More of a university than a technical school:	0	0	0	1	0	0
119) Academics:	0	0	0	1	1	2
120) No single factor:	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	15
121) Science Program:	0	0	0	0	0	1
122) Computer Science Program:	1	0	0	0	1	1
123) Mining Department:	1	0	0	0	0	0
124) Available Resources:	1	0	0	0	0	0
125) Honors acceptance came before VT acceptance:	N/A	N/A	3	N/A	N/A	N/A
126) Honors letter came: "You're in!"	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	N/A

### Appendix D

QUESTION	1	2	3	4	5B	6
<b>Program:</b>	6	5	0	0	7	1
Accounting Program:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Architecture Program:	0	1	0	1	0	0
Biology Program:	2	0	0	0	0	0
Computer Science Program:	1	0	0	0	1	1
Engineer Program:	9	4	0	0	3	1
Engineer Open House:	1	1	0	0	0	0
Engineering main office:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Math Program:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Mining Program:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Science Program:	0	0	0	0	0	1
VET School:	2	0	0	0	1	1
Wildlife Program:	2	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Alumni:</b>	4	1	0	0	0	0
Father: ALUM	3	0	0	0	0	0
Brother: ALUM	1	0	0	0	0	0
Sister: ALUM	1	0	0	0	0	1
Friends: ALUM	2	2	0	0	0	2
Alumni in the workplace:	1	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Parents:</b>	0	9	0	0	4	1
Father:	0	1	0	0	2	0
Mother:	2	0	0	0	0	0



QUESTION	1	2	3	4	5b	6
<b>Parents (con.)</b>						
"Choose where you want to go":	0	1	0	0	1	0
Stipulations:	0	3	0	0	1	0
<b>Current Students:</b>	4	1	0	0	1	0
Sister attending:	0	1	0	0	0	0
Brother attending:	0	1	0	0	0	0
Boyfriend Attending:	1	0	0	0	1	0
<b>Reputation:</b>	14	7	0	1	6	1
Friends:	4	1	0	0	2	0
<b>Location (positive):</b>	15	7	0	3	9	0
Small college town:	4	0	0	5	0	0
Rural (positive):	2	0	0	0	0	0
Out-of-state:	9	1	0	0	1	0
In-state:	2	4	0	0	2	0
Blacksburg-similar to hometown:	1	0	0	1	0	0
Like the state of Virginia:	0	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Location (negative):</b>	1	1	0	1	0	0
Rural (negative):	1	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Honors:</b>	2	0	N/A	1	0	0
Orientation:	1	2	2	0	0	0
Had not heard of Honors until:	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	0	N/A
Turned off to Honors:	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	0	N/A
Football Saturday:	1	1	0	0	0	0

QUESTION	1	2	3	4	5b	6
<b>Honors (con.)</b>						
Buddy Luncheon:	1	0	1	0	0	0
Jack Dudley:	0	1	4	0	1	0
Barbara Cowles:	0	0	1	0	0	0
Patti Hall:	0	0	0	2	0	0
Honors: advanced registration:	N/A	N/A	4	N/A	N/A	N/A
Honors: "No big deal; accepted by other Honors programs also.":	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	N/A	N/A
Didn't receive enough information:	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	N/A
No Honors application:	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	N/A
No affect by Honors:	N/A	N/A	17	N/A	N/A	N/A
Honors: comparable to other school programs:	1	0	1	0	0	0
Honors: didn't know about it until application was received in mail:	N/A	N/A	4	N/A	N/A	N/A
In-Honors degree would assist with VET school admission:	0	0	2	0	0	0
Honors acceptance came before VT acceptance:	N/A	N/A	3	N/A	N/A	N/A
Honors acceptance came without the student applying:	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Cost:</b>	14	17	0	0	17	8
More for money/ money=education:	4	1	0	0	2	1
Financial Aid:	1	0	0	0	0	0

QUESTION	1	2	3	4	5b	6
<b>Cost (con.)</b>						
Other choices too costly:	0	2	0	0	0	0
<b>Scholarship money:</b>	10	12	0	0	5	0
National Merit Scholarship dinner:	1	1	0	0	0	0
Presidential Scholarship:	1	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Campus Visit:</b>	16	11	0	0	3	1
Visited brother at VT:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Visited friends at VT:	0	1	0	0	0	0
JETS:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Governor's school: (30 students attended)	2	1	0	0	0	0
Odyssey of the mind:	0	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Campus Atmosphere:</b>	9	2	0	4	4	3
Centralized campus:	1	0	0	0	0	0
VT size:	5	0	0	1	0	0
Appeared to be too large:	3	0	0	1	0	0
Smaller than anticipated:	1	0	0	7	0	0
Diversity:	0	0	0	4	0	0
More of a university than a technical school:	0	0	0	1	0	0
People (friendly):	3	1	0	4	0	0
Classes:	0	0	0	4	0	0
Smaller than anticipated:	0	0	0	2	0	0
Large:	0	0	0	1	0	0

QUESTION	1	2	3	4	5b	6
<b>Professors (friendly):</b>	3	1	0	5	1	1
Reputation of faculty by current students:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Student:Teacher ratio:	3	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Available Resources:</b>	1	0	0	0	0	0
Big school=more money:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Library:	1	2	0	0	1	0
Labs:	1	1	0	0	0	0
Phone system:	0	0	0	2	1	0
Computers:	2	0	0	0	0	1
Computer Integration:	0	0	0	2	0	0
Cable:	0	0	0	1	0	0
Dining Facilities:	0	0	0	1	0	0
<b>Academics:</b>	0	0	0	1	1	2
Competitiveness:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Diversity within colleges:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Wide range of curriculum/majors:	1	1	0	1	0	1
<b>Placement:</b>	3	1	0	0	1	0
Departmental graduation rate:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Relationship with businesses:	1	3	0	1	4	2
Co-op:	2	4	0	0	1	0

QUESTION	1	2	3	4	5b	6
Campus recruiting events:	0	1	0	0	0	0
College representative:	0	2	0	0	0	0
College fairs:	0	1	0	0	0	0
Private high school visits:	0	1	0	0	0	0
Media:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Mail:	1	1	1	0	0	0
Repetitive pieces sent:	0	2	2	0	0	0
High school counselor:	0	1	0	0	0	0
Counselor did NOT affect:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Computer search in guidance office:	0	4	0	0	0	0
College guides:	3	4	0	0	0	0
Easy application:	2	1	1	0	0	0
No application essay:	3	2	0	0	0	0
Low application fee:	0	1	0	0	0	0
Application fee waived:	0	1	0	0	0	0
Activities:	2	1	0	7	0	0
Outdoor activities:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Football games:	2	0	0	0	0	0
Social Life:	3	3	0	1	0	0
Concerts (Roanoke):	2	0	0	0	0	0
Only (VT) choice:	0	1	0	0	0	0
(VT) First choice:	0	0	0	0	1	0
Didn't like other choices:	0	2	0	0	3	0

QUESTION	1	2	3	4	5b	6
Bad reputation of other schools:	0	1	0	0	0	0
<b>VT accepted him/her first:</b>	1	0	0	0	0	0
Not being accepted by other choices of schools:	2	1	0	0	2	0
Quick response by VT to application:	0	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Satisfied:</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	3	N/A	N/A
Better than expected:	N/A	N/A	N/A	4	N/A	N/A
<b>Dissatisfied:</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	N/A
Advisor is never available:	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	N/A
No available co-ops:	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	N/A
No expectations:	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A
<b>More good qualities at VT:</b>	0	0	0	0	1	0
Everything:	0	0	0	0	2	0
<b>No single factor:</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	15
No process:	N/A	5	N/A	N/A	1	N/A

## Appendix E

QUESTION	1	2	3	4	5B	6
<b>ACADEMIC PROGRAMS</b>						
Program:	6	5	0	0	7	1
Accounting Program:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Architecture Program:	0	1	0	1	0	0
Biology Program:	2	0	0	0	0	0
Computer Science Program:	1	0	0	0	1	1
Engineer Program:	9	4	0	0	3	1
Engineer Open House:	1	1	0	0	0	0
Engineering main office:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Math Program:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Mining Program:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Science Program:	0	0	0	0	0	1
VET School:	2	0	0	0	1	1
Wildlife Program:	2	0	0	0	0	0
Honors:	2	0	N/A	1	0	0
Orientation:	1	2	2	0	0	0
Had not heard of Honors until:	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	0	N/A
Turned off to Honors:	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	0	N/A
Football Saturday:	1	1	0	0	0	0
Buddy Luncheon:	1	0	1	0	0	0
Jack Dudley:	0	1	4	0	1	0
Barbara Cowles:	0	0	1	0	0	0

QUESTION	1	2	3	4	5b	6
<b>ACADEMIC PROGRAMS (con.)</b>						
Patti Hall:	0	0	0	2	0	0
Honors: advanced registration:	N/A	N/A	4	N/A	N/A	N/A
Honors: "No big deal; accepted by other Honors programs also.":	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	N/A	N/A
Didn't receive enough information:	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	N/A
No Honors application:	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	N/A
No affect by Honors:	N/A	N/A	17	N/A	N/A	N/A
Honors: comparable to other school programs:	1	0	1	0	0	0
Honors: didn't know about it until application was received in mail:	N/A	N/A	4	N/A	N/A	N/A
In-Honors degree would assist with VET school admission:	0	0	2	0	0	0
Honors acceptance came before VT acceptance:	N/A	N/A	3	N/A	N/A	N/A
Honors acceptance came without the student applying:	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	N/A
Academics:	0	0	0	1	1	2
Competitiveness:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Diversity within colleges:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Wide range of curriculum/majors:	1	1	0	1	0	1
Placement:	3	1	0	0	1	0



QUESTION	1	2	3	4	5b	6
<b>ACADEMIC PROGRAMS (con.)</b>						
Departmental graduation rate:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Relationship with businesses:	1	3	0	1	4	2
Co-op:	2	4	0	0	1	0
<b>CAMPUS ATMOSPHERE/LIFE</b>						
Campus Visit:	16	11	0	0	3	1
Visited brother at VT:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Visited friends at VT:	0	1	0	0	0	0
JETS:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Governor's school: (30 students attended)	2	1	0	0	0	0
Odyssey of the mind:	0	1	0	0	0	0
Campus Atmosphere:	9	2	0	4	4	3
Centralized campus:	1	0	0	0	0	0
VT size:	5	0	0	1	0	0
Appeared to be too large:	3	0	0	1	0	0
Smaller than anticipated:	1	0	0	7	0	0
Diversity:	0	0	0	4	0	0
More of a university than a technical school:	0	0	0	1	0	0
People (friendly):	3	1	0	4	0	0

QUESTION	1	2	3	4	5b	6
<b>CAMPUS ATMOSPHERE/LIFE (con.)</b>						
Classes:	0	0	0	4	0	0
Smaller than anticipated:	0	0	0	2	0	0
Large:	0	0	0	1	0	0
Available Resources:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Big school = more money:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Library:	1	2	0	0	1	0
Labs:	1	1	0	0	0	0
Phone system:	0	0	0	2	1	0
Computers:	2	0	0	0	0	1
Computer Integration:	0	0	0	2	0	0
Cable:	0	0	0	1	0	0
Dining Facilities:	0	0	0	1	0	0
Activities:	2	1	0	7	0	0
Outdoor activities:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Football games:	2	0	0	0	0	0
Social Life:	3	3	0	1	0	0
Concerts (Roanoke):	2	0	0	0	0	0

**INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE**

Alumni:	4	1	0	0	0	0
Father: ALUM	3	0	0	0	0	0
Brother: ALUM	1	0	0	0	0	0
Sister: ALUM	1	0	0	0	0	1
Friends: ALUM	2	2	0	0	0	2

QUESTION	1	2	3	4	5b	6
<b>INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE (con.)</b>						
Alumni in the workplace:	1	1	0	0	0	0
Father:	0	1	0	0	2	0
Mother:	2	0	0	0	0	0
Parents:	0	9	0	0	4	1
"Choose where you want to go":	0	1	0	0	1	0
Stipulations:	0	3	0	0	1	0
Current Students:	4	1	0	0	1	0
Sister attending:	0	1	0	0	0	0
Brother attending:	0	1	0	0	0	0
Boyfriend Attending:	1	0	0	0	1	0
Reputation:	14	7	0	1	6	1
Friends:	4	1	0	0	2	0
Professors (friendly):	3	1	0	5	1	1
Reputation of faculty by current students:	1	0	0	0	0	0

#### LOCATION

Location (positive):	15	7	0	3	9	0
Small college town:	4	0	0	5	0	0
Rural (positive):	2	0	0	0	0	0
Out-of-state:	9	1	0	0	1	0
In-state:	2	4	0	0	2	0
Blacksburg-similar to hometown:	1	0	0	1	0	0

QUESTION	1	2	3	4	5b	6
<b>LOCATION (con.)</b>						
Like the state of Virginia:	0	1	0	0	0	0
Location (negative):	1	1	0	1	0	0
Rural (negative):	1	1	0	0	0	0
<b>MONEY (COSTS/FINANCING)</b>						
Cost:	14	17	0	0	17	8
More for money/ money=education:	4	1	0	0	2	1
Financial Aid:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Other choices too costly:	0	2	0	0	0	0
Scholarship money:	10	12	0	0	5	0
National Merit Scholarship dinner:	1	1	0	0	0	0
Presidential Scholarship:	1	0	0	0	0	0
<b>RECRUITMENT</b>						
Student:Teacher ratio:	3	0	0	0	0	0
Campus recruiting events:	0	1	0	0	0	0
College representative:	0	2	0	0	0	0
College fairs:	0	1	0	0	0	0
Private high school visits:	0	1	0	0	0	0
Media:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Mail:	1	1	1	0	0	0

QUESTION	1	2	3	4	5b	6
<b>RECRUITMENT (con.)</b>						
Repetitive pieces sent:	0	2	2	0	0	0
High school counselor:	0	1	0	0	0	0
Counselor did NOT affect:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Computer search in guidance office:	0	4	0	0	0	0
College guides:	3	4	0	0	0	0
Easy application:	2	1	1	0	0	0
No application essay:	3	2	0	0	0	0
Low application fee:	0	1	0	0	0	0
Application fee waived:	2	1	0	0	0	0
Only (VT) choice:	0	1	0	0	0	0
(VT) First choice:	0	0	0	0	1	0
Didn't like other choices:	0	2	0	0	3	0
Bad reputation of other schools:	0	1	0	0	0	0
VT accepted him/her first:	1	0	0	0	0	0
Not being accepted by other choices of schools:	2	1	0	0	2	0
Quick response by VT to application:	0	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Satisfied:</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	3	N/A	N/A
Better than expected:	N/A	N/A	N/A	4	N/A	N/A
<b>Dissatisfied:</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	N/A
Advisor is never available:	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	N/A
No available co-ops:	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	N/A

<b>QUESTION</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5B</b>	<b>6</b>
No expectations:	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A
<b>More good qualities at VT:</b>	0	0	0	0	1	0
Everything:	0	0	0	0	2	0
<b>No single factor:</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	15
No process:	N/A	5	N/A	N/A	1	N/A

**Appendix F**  
**Other Institutions Considered by Students**

<b>Question 5a</b>	<b>Considered</b>	<b>Applied to</b>
Air Force Academy:	1	1
Amhurst:	1	1
Averett:	1	0
Berkley:	1	0
Boston University:	1	0
Bridgewater:	1	0
Brown:	1	0
California Tech:	1	1
Case Western:	2	1
Carnegie-Mellon:	5	2
Colorado School of Mines:	1	1
Colorado State:	1	1
Cornell:	9	5
Dartmouth:	1	1
Drexel:	1	1
Duke:	4	1
Elizabethtown:	1	0
George Mason University:	3	1
Georgia Tech:	8	6
Hopkins:	1	0
James Madison University:	4	2

	Considered	Applied to
Lehigh:	1	0
Louisiana State University:	1	1
Loyola:	1	0
Mary Washington College:	1	1
Massachusetts Institute of Technology:	4	4
Michigan Tech:	1	0
Middlebury:	1	1
Northwestern:	3	2
North Carolina State University:	7	5
Ohio State:	1	1
Old Dominion University:	1	0
Penn State:	2	1
Princeton:	1	1
Radford University:	1	1
Rensilare:	3	3
Rice:	1	0
Roanoke College:	1	1
Rocheshire:	1	1
Rutgers:	2	1
Stanford:	2	0
SUNY Buffalo:	1	1
SUNY Syracuse:	1	1



	Considered	Applied to
University of California:	0	0
-at Davis	1	0
University of Delaware:	1	1
University of Georgia:	1	0
University of Maryland:	3	3
University of Michigan:	1	1
at Deerbome:	1	0
University of New Orleans:	1	0
University of North Carolina:	1	0
University of Pennsylvania:	1	1
University of Virginia:	10	6
Vanderbilt:	1	1
Virginia Tech:	34	34
Wake Forest:	3	3
George Washington University	2	1
-at St. Louis:	1	1
Webb:	1	1
West Virginia University:	2	2
William and Mary:	2	1
Wooster:	2	2
Yale:	1	1
Virginia Schools		
Florida Schools		
SUNY Schools		

## VITA

Judith Marie ("Judi") Lynch was born in Bronx, New York on October 7, 1965. She lived in Old Bridge and Cape May, New Jersey before moving to Richmond, Virginia in 1979. In 1983, Judi graduated from Saint Gertrude High School in Richmond. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in English with a minor in Communications from Longwood College in Farmville, Virginia. In 1993, Judi completed her Master of Arts in Education in Student Personnel with a cognate study in Communications from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech), Blacksburg, Virginia.

Prior to returning to graduate school to obtain her Master's degree, Judi worked in several corporate positions, all in Richmond, Virginia. Licensed to sell all lines of individual and group insurance policies, Judi worked for an independent agent. In an attempt to move more into marketing and public relations, she accepted a position with Crestar Bank in the Employee Benefit Services department of the Trust Group. There, Judi worked with sales, investment, and fiduciary compliance until a new department, Executive Recruiting, asked her to join them.

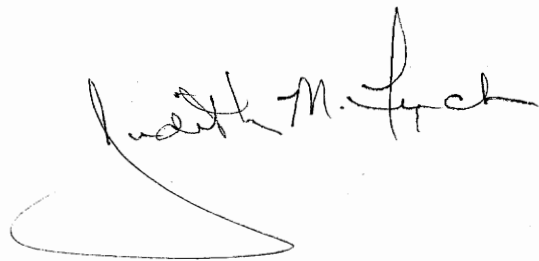
Judi decided to pursue the recruiting aspect of her position in a different capacity and accepted an offer to return to Longwood College as an admissions officer.

Recognizing her interest and dedication to higher education, she made her decision to not only continue working in the field, but to obtain her Master's Degree.

While studying at Virginia Tech, Judi worked for the Center for Intelligent Material Systems and Structures. She was offered a graduate assistantship with the Virginia Tech Alumni Association. Her position with the Alumni Association afforded her the opportunity of advising the freshmen and senior classes in addition to the Virginia Tech Homecoming Court. Recently, Judi accepted an offer to continue with the Alumni Association as their Alumni Programs Coordinator and Class System Advisor.

Judi has served as the president of the Virginia Tech Association for Student Development and a member of the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators and American College Personnel Association.

Judi will continue with advanced graduate studies at Virginia Tech and will work toward the achievement of her doctoral degree.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Judith M. Fuch". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a large, sweeping, horizontal flourish that extends to the left and curves back under the signature.