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Do You Want Kentucky?" "... No Thank You, I'm not Hungry": A Case Study of International Student Choice in Higher Education

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“DO YOU WANT KENTUCKY?” “... NO THANK YOU, I'M NOT HUNGRY.”:
A CASE STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT CHOICE IN HIGHER
EDUCATION

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

By
Wouter Van Alebeek

May 2017

**“DO YOU WANT KENTUCKY?” “... NO THANK YOU, I'M NOT HUNGRY.”:
A CASE STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT CHOICE IN HIGHER
EDUCATION**

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I would like to dedicate this dissertation to Sarah, my loving spouse. You are my rock and you have carried the weight of this program as much as I have. You are the best partner anyone could ask for and I could not have done this without you, your care, and your patience. You have supported me in all pursuits of personal growth and have made me a better man in every way. Thank you, Sarah, for always loving me.

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	x
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
Background of the Problem	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Purpose of the Study	3
Significance of the Study	4
Primary Research Questions	4
Research Design.....	5
Theoretical Framework.....	7
Limitations and Delimitations.....	8
Definition of Terms.....	9
Summary	11
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	13
Internationalization	14
Recruitment.....	29
College Choice.....	39
International Student College Choice	53
Information Sources.....	71
Conceptual Model.....	75
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	80
Why Qualitative Research	81
Research Questions.....	81
Paradigm	82
Propositions.....	86
Setting	87
Participants/Sampling	89
Data Collection	91
Interview Protocol.....	93
Data Analysis	94
Reliability and Validity.....	95
Generalization	97

Role of the Researcher	98
Ethical Considerations	100
Summary	100
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS.....	102
Predisposition Factors	103
Search Factors	104
Choice Factors	105
Decision Making Process.....	106
Family	106
Selection of Country	107
Selection of Institution.....	111
Conclusion	117
Other Advisors	117
Selection of Country	117
Selection of Institution.....	121
Conclusion	125
Cost	126
Selection of Country	126
Selection of Institution.....	129
Conclusion	132
Environment.....	133
Selection of Country	133
Selection of Institution.....	137
Conclusion	143
Quality and Reputation	143
Selection of Country	144
Selection of Institution.....	147
Conclusion	150
Prospects and Opportunities	150
Selection of Country	151
Selection of Institution.....	154
Conclusion	155

Program of Study	156
Selection of Country	156
Selection of Institution	158
Conclusion	160
Application and Admission.....	160
Selection of Country	161
Selection of Institution.....	164
Conclusion	168
Language.....	169
Selection of Country	169
Predisposition.....	169
Selection of Institution.....	171
Conclusion	174
Other Factors.....	174
Selection of Country	174
Selection of Institution.....	175
Conclusion	178
Summary	178
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	183
Discussion of Results.....	183
Family	184
Other Advisors	185
Cost	187
Environment.....	188
Quality.....	190
Prospects	191
Program of Study	192
Application and Admission.....	193
Language.....	195
Other Factors.....	196
Practical Implications.....	197
Family	198

Other Advisors	199
Cost	199
Environment.....	201
Quality.....	202
Prospects	203
Program of Study	203
Application and Admission.....	204
Language.....	205
Other Factors.....	206
Additional Implications	206
Design Differences.....	207
Future Research	214
Summary.....	217
REFERENCES.....	219
APPENDIX A	239
APPENDIX B	240
APPENDIX C	241
APPENDIX D	245
APPENDIX E	244
APPENDIX F	246
APPENDIX G.....	247
APPENDIX H.....	248

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In order to attract international students, it is important to know why students select a particular institution and how they experience the selection process.

Additionally, there seems to be limited agreement among researchers on a conceptual framework for international student college choice and how it might differ from a model used to organize domestic students' college choice experiences.

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to gain insight into the stages of college choice for international students by testing an expansion of the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) theoretical model that adds the push and pull factors related to the decision to study internationally. In order to do so, I answered the question, why do international students choose to study at a regional university in the United States?

The findings of this study indicate that family, advisors, cost, environment, quality, prospects, programs of study, admission, and language influence international students college choice in that order. These factors impact the students' ability to study abroad and at a certain type of institution, during the predisposition stage; they influence the listing of potential countries and institutions during the search stage; and they favor one country and one institution during the choice stage. The college choice decision is a multivariate process in which one factor might be more influential than another, but all factors could push a student from a certain decision to select a country or institution.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

International students attend college in the United States of America (USA) in pursuit of a high quality education because family lives in close proximity to the school, or any one of the other numerous reasons to study abroad in the States (Lee, 2008). The number of international students enrolled in institutions of higher education in the US has steadily increased over the last five years (Institute of International Education, 2016).

Many educational administrators aspire to attract more international students for their particular institutions. The number of Student and Exchange Visitor Program-certified institutions that can host international students has been fairly consistent over the last six years, with a slight decrease in 2016 (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016a). With the desire to increase the number of international students enrolled at their institutions, university administrators need to know why students study abroad, select particular institutions, and how they evaluate and compare institutions, and experience communication from institutions.

Besides administrators, researchers are interested in learning about international students' college choice. The literature has shown limited agreement on a comprehensive conceptual framework that could provide insight in international students' college choice decision making. There have been few qualitative research studies that investigated why students select certain institutions, but few attempts have been made to develop a framework. Numerous authors have investigated international student choice (Chen, 2008; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Park, 2009; Tan, 2015), but most of these studies are

quantitative in nature and point out which factors were reported as important. Other qualitative studies found reasons for selecting an institution, but motives differed among studies.

In order to understand why international students come to a particular institution, students at that institution should be studied in order to find common themes and reasons. A conceptual framework that builds upon a framework traditionally developed for domestic students adds clarity about the decision process.

Statement of the Problem

Numerous institutions, especially in Western countries like the USA and United Kingdom (UK), list hosting and recruiting international students as part of their internationalization mission. Reasons for internationalization, which oftentimes embrace hosting international students, include financial benefit to the institution, financial benefit to the local economy, job creation, recruitment as a tradition, high quality assistants for low cost, an increase in diversity in the classroom, an increase in quality of research, improvement of the institution's international profile, an establishment of international alliances, and an increase in international volunteerism (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Bolsmann & Miller, 2008a; Horn, Hendel, & Fry, 2012; Huang, 2006; NAFSA, 2014; Stromquist, 2007). Regardless of the reasons for desiring international students, many institutions want international students to select their schools, and they have included international recruitment as part of their internationalization mission.

In order to attract international students, it is important to know why students select a particular institution and how they experience the selection process. International students might select a particular university for its low tuition costs, the location, the

perceived quality of education, motivations connected to friends, or a number of other reasons. Western Kentucky University's (WKU) administrators and university leadership want to attract international students to come and study in Bowling Green, KY. While at the time of this study WKU staff members were engaged in recruitment practices and enrollment strategies, no study had been conducted to investigate why students attend WKU. Additionally, there seems to be limited agreement among researchers on a conceptual framework for international student college choice and how it might differ from a model used to organize domestic students' college choice experiences. In order to gain insight into the international student college choice process, a comprehensive conceptual framework benefits the existing literature.

Purpose of the Study

Students have reported a variety of factors in regard to what they feel is important when choosing an institution of higher education (Bodycott, 2009; Maringe & Carter, 2007; Pyvis & Chapman, 2007; Wilkins, Balakrishnan, & Huisman, 2012). Those factors are similar to what domestic students reported when selecting an institution in their home countries, but international students have an additional choice to make regarding where to study. For researchers, as well as administrators, it is important to understand why and how international students select a destination and a particular institution. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to gain insight into the stages of college choice for international students by testing an expansion of the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) theoretical model that adds the push-and-pull factors related to the decision to study internationally.

Significance of the Study

This study brings together new information regarding international student choice at a particular mid-size regional university. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to gain insight into the stages of college choice for international students by testing an expansion of the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) theoretical model that adds the push-and-pull factors related to the decision to study internationally. The study contributes to the current literature on the topic of international student choice. The application of the modified conceptual model adds a conceptual framework for international college choice to the literature, which can help researchers and practitioners to better understand the international student choice process. Additionally, the model shows how international student college choice decision making differs from that of domestic students.

Institutional administrators who are interested in attracting international students to their institutions could benefit greatly from understanding why these students select their particular nation and their particular college. This case study focuses on Western Kentucky University and its international students specifically; therefore, findings directly apply to this institution. This mid-size regional university desires to attract international students, which falls in line with its vision statement of becoming “a leading American university with international reach” (WKU, 2016a, about WKU, para. 5). Through studying the case of WKU, its international students, and their reasons for selecting this institution, I hope to aid WKU in realizing this vision.

Primary Research Questions

In a pursuit to better understand the college choice decision-making process of international students, the following questions guide the inquiry. The questions serve all

stages of the conceptual framework and my interest of discovering how the different stages play into the international student's final choice of institution. The research questions are:

RQ1: Why do international students choose to study at a regional university in the United States?

RQ1a: How do *predisposition* factors influence an international student's decision to study at a regional university in the USA?

RQ1b: How do *search* factors influence an international student's decision to study at a regional university in the USA?

RQ1c: How do *choice* factors influence an international student's decision to study at a regional university in the USA?

Research Design

In this study, I draw on case study design to answer the research questions, primarily using the work of Yin (1994). Yin argued that case study research is appropriate when (a) the researcher is interested in how and why questions, (b) the researcher does not have control over behavioral events, and (c) the focus is on contemporary events. Additionally, case studies can involve situations in which there are more variables of interest than data points; the design relies on multiple sources of evidence, and theoretical propositions guide the data collection.

International student college choice is a complex and multivariate process. It involves information from the context as well as all variables influencing the student's decision making. It is unclear which aspects specifically contribute to the decision and if these aspects come from the context or are personal reasons that already exist within the

student. Through multiple sources of evidence and a theoretical framework, case study inquiry can investigate whether the case studied aligns with the theory on student choice and where the case contradicts the theory. The case also can provide a thick description of the experiences of students when they search for a potential country in which to study, create a list of potential institutions, and narrow down their options. Additional documents that might influence the student's choice can be reviewed, which helps triangulate experiences mentioned by the student.

The study is a case study of Western Kentucky University (WKU), a four-year public institution with around 20,000 students of which 1,400 are international (WKU, 2015). The case study is bounded around these international students, who are embedded in the case, and their college choice decision to study at this specific institution. A breakdown of the top foreign countries with the largest representation of students at WKU can be found in Table 1 (Appendix A). The international students included in this case study were selected as they decided to enroll and attend WKU. The selected students are studied regarding their college choice motivations, which is compared to the developed modification of Hossler and Gallanghar's (1984) three-stage model of college choice in order to determine how they matched or deviated from the theory.

Through purposeful and snowball sampling, I selected international students with whom I had familiarity to participate in semi-structured interviews. Through these interviews I pursued rich description of the college choice decision making each student experienced. Additionally, documents referred to in the interview were collected and reviewed. These data were analyzed using the *a priori* codes listed in Table 5 (Appendix B). Through pattern-matching, I reviewed to what extent the subunits of the case follow

the conceptual model and how some participants differed in their decision making experiences. The *a priori* coding system is based on the conceptual framework and the factors mentioned in the literature reviewed in Chapter II. Table 3 (Appendix C) shows an overview of all influential international students' college choice factors mentioned in the literature.

Theoretical Framework

I analyzed international student college choice through an adjusted framework based on a model by Hossler and Gallangher (1987). To make the Hossler and Gallangher's three-stage model of college choice more specific to international students, I combined the idea of push-and-pull factors into the model (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Push factors are factors present in a country that might push students toward studying abroad or toward studying at a certain institution. During the *Predisposition, Search, and Choice* stages of the college choice decision making, international students could encounter these push-and-pull factors. Some predisposition factors might push a student to seek education abroad; pull factors might draw students to a certain institution during the search stage, and during the choice stage an easy application process might pull the student toward a certain institution. In addition to the push-and-pull factors, I used the three-stage model twice, making the model six stages, in order to stage two important decisions international students make. First, students select the country in which they want to study, and then students select an institution at which they want to study. The model, therefore, has six different stages, all further elaborated by dividing the factors within the stages between push-and-pull factors. Figure 1 (Appendix D) is a graphic representation of the model. Based on this conceptual model and the literature, I created

a priori codes that can be found in Table 5 (Appendix B). The data collected were coded based on these categories, which were derived from the literature reviewed in Chapter II.

Limitations and Delimitations

Research limitations develop when findings are influenced by unforeseen conditions outside of the researcher's control. These conditions, like biases, make it difficult for the researcher to draw accurate conclusions and generalizations based on the findings; e.g., an interviewee might believe the interviewer would judge her for a certain response and, therefore, she provides an answer she believes is viewed more favorable. The researcher will find skewed results, and the findings are not representative of a broader population.

Delimitations are limits put on the research by to the conscious decisions made by the researcher regarding research design. For example, choosing to pursue thick description from a small sample excludes the researcher from being able to make broad generalizations regarding an entire population. These decisions are conscious decisions made with the purpose of the study in mind.

In this study, boundaries of the case study are drawn around the international students at WKU. I pursued to obtain rich description of international students' experiences regarding college choice. As I aimed for rich description but wanted to keep the study feasible, I limited the collection of data to a purposeful small but unique sample. The generalization, therefore, applies only to the participants studied. My familiarity with the individual students could lead to richer description and more honest answers to the interview questions. While respondents might have been more willing to provide honest answers, they also could have felt the need to hide influential factors if

they were considered embarrassing in the eyes of the students. Additionally, as for most of the interviewees, English is their second language and some students experienced difficulties describing their experience.

Definition of Terms

CBP: Abbreviation for United States Customs and Border Protection. CBP is the agency responsible for checking and stamping immigration documents at the United States border.

College Choice: College choice refers to students' selection process of a higher educational institution most suitable to their desires and abilities (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2002). The policy outlines, "Researchers routinely define "choice" as the end result of a process, in which students evaluate their options and choose among them." (p. 1).

DHS: Abbreviation for the United States Department of Homeland Security.

F1 Visa: An F1 visa refers to a non-immigrant student visa for academic and language school attendance (Department of Homeland Security, 2015). Students, who are studying in the USA and have been accepted into an academic or language program, entering the United States under an F1 student visa combined with the Form I-20 are referred to as F-students. Students entering the USA with an F1 student visa are required to be full-time students.

Form I-20: After acceptance to a study program in the USA at a SEVP-certified school, the hosting school can issue the Form I-20 based on acceptance and proof of sufficient financial support (Department of Homeland Security, 2016). The Form I-20, combined with the I-94 card, is proof of an international student's legal

status in the USA.

Full-Time Student: For this study, a full-time student is defined as enrolled in 12 or more undergraduate credit hours or nine or more graduate credit hours.

I-94 card: Digital record kept by CBP of a student's name, status, and date of entry into the USA.

ICE: Abbreviation for United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement. ICE is a subunit of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

IELTS: Abbreviation for International English Language Testing System. According to the IELTS website, "IELTS is a test that measures the language proficiency of people who want to study or work in environments where English is used as a language of communication. An easy-to-use 9-band scale clearly identifies proficiency level, from non-user (band score 1) through to expert (band score 9)" (IELTS, 2016, IELTS introduction, para. 1). IELTS is one of the tests accepted at WKU as proof of English language proficiency.

International Student: In this study, an international student is defined as a student from a country outside of the USA enrolled at an institution in the USA while holding a non-immigrant F1 student visa.

Internationalization: Defined by Knight (2003) as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (p. 2).

Optional Practical Training (OPT): U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS, 2016) defines Optional Practical Training as "temporary employment that is directly related to an F-1 student's major area of study" (Optional Practical

Training (OPT) for F-1 students, para. 1).

SEVIS: Abbreviation for Student Exchange Visitor Information System. This system is used by the Department of Homeland Security and hosting schools to communicate regarding international students' immigration information.

SEVP: Abbreviation for Student Exchange Visitor Program. According to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (2016b), SEVP "...is a part of the National Security Investigations Division and acts as a bridge for government organizations that have an interest in information on nonimmigrants whose primary reason for coming to the United States is to be students" (SEVP overview, para. 2).

SEVP-Certified school: Institute for education approved by the Department of Homeland Security to host international students.

TOEFL: Abbreviation of Test of English as a Foreign Language. The TOEFL is a test provided by Educational Testing Services (ETS) and is one accepted at WKU as proof of English language proficiency.

USCIS: Abbreviation for United States Custom and Immigration Services. USCIS is the department responsible for monitoring international students, their immigration status, and their compliance with United States laws.

WKU: Abbreviation for Western Kentucky University. WKU is the topic of this case study.

Summary

This study expands the knowledge base on international student college choice and helps Western Kentucky University administrators adjust their recruitment practices

to focus on aspects important to international students. In Chapter II, I reviewed a selection of the literature on internationalization, college choice, and international college choice. Chapter III outlines the method and methodology used in this study. The results from the data are outlined, and the research questions are answered in Chapter IV. In the final Chapter V, I connects the results to the broader literature and conceptual framework, showed how the results align or differ from other studies, make suggestions for practitioners, and outline future research opportunities based on the findings from this study.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to gain insight into the stages of college choice for international students by testing an expansion of the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) theoretical model that adds the push-and-pull factors related to the decision to study internationally. I use research questions to investigate the decision making within the different stages.

RQ1: Why do international students choose to study at a regional university in the United States?

RQ1a: How do *predisposition* factors influence an international student's decision to study at a regional university in the USA?

RQ1b: How do *search* factors influence an international student's decision to study at a regional university in the USA?

RQ1c: How do *choice* factors influence an international student's decision to study at a regional university in the USA?

For this review I collected articles that discussed internationalization, college choice, and international student college choice. I found the articles through the *Google Scholar* and *WKU Libraries* searching for keywords like *international student college choice* and *internationalization*, often following citations from previously read articles. I limited my search to empirical articles and included only conceptual articles if they made an important point or were referenced by multiple other authors. I used the monograph by Bergerson (2009), who has given a strong overview of the college choice history. Additionally, a review article by Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2015) provided citations for a significant amount of articles applicable to this study.

In order to understand international students' college choice decisions, I needed to know what other authors have said about college choice, for both international and domestic students. The option of studying abroad at a particular institution does not become available, however, if the institution is not accepting international students. Therefore, I started the review with a discussion of internationalization and universities accepting international students in which I highlight articles regarding recruitment practices. I followed the internationalization section with an overview of college choice that focused on students selecting institutions in their home countries. The college choice section led to the international student college choice section, in which I separately addressed the evaluation of information sources. The chapter closes with an outline of the conceptual framework developed for this study.

Internationalization

Knight (2003) defined internationalization at the institutional level as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (p. 2). Explaining the definition in her conceptual article, Knight (2004) elaborated that, first, she used the word process, because internationalization is deliberate and ongoing. Second, *international*, *intercultural*, and *global dimension* were used to underline the relationships among nations, cultures, and countries, and to show a worldwide scope. These relationships can be established in a host country or in one's home country when that country is hosting foreign students. Third, Knight (2004) used *integrating* to highlight internationalization that is embedded in policies and program. Fourth, *purpose*, *functions*, or *delivery* were included to emphasize that internationalization exists in the overall objectives, daily

activities, and manner in which educational services are provided. After defining internationalization, Knight (2004) explained that an institution can utilize several strategies and approaches to internationalization.

Knight (2004) named program strategies like internationalizing academic programs or research collaborations; organizational strategies like implementing though governance operations, services, or human resources; and external relations like setting up extracurricular groups and collaborations with external organizations. Subsequent to these broader strategies are numerous approaches to internationalization. Knight discussed five approaches: (a) the activity approach, in which an institution focuses on activities like study abroad; (b) an outcome approach, in which the focus is on student competencies or an increased international profile; (c) the rationales approach, in which an institution internationalizes to generate income or increase diversity; (d) an at home approach, in which the goal is creating an international campus or specific culture; and last, (e) the abroad approach, in which an institution might start a branch campus in another country. The strategies and approaches used at different institutions depend on institutional administrators' motivations for internationalizing the university.

Another conceptual article by Knight (2007) in collaboration with Altbach listed some of the motivations institutions could have for internationalization. First, they mentioned the desire for colleges to increase profits. Through tuition dollars, but also additional purchases of goods and services, universities and companies surrounding the institution can earn additional money if an institution attracts international students. These students are additional customers who often have a need for more support services like on-campus housing or dining options near campus. Additionally, an institution could

save money by using internationalization to acquire high quality scholars through exchange programs whose participants deliver high quality instructional services for modest compensation.

Administrators also might be motivated to internationalize their institutions to enhance their international profile (Altbach & Knight, 2007). By increasing its international profile, the institution might gain prestige, and it also may attract beneficial strategic alliances with other institutions abroad. A stronger profile and higher prestige can lead to attracting better quality students. The institution could earn additional income if its reputation is better and, therefore, the university is more in demand. Strong relationships, scholar exchanges, research collaborations, and increasing diversity are advantages that can come from establishing strategic alliances. A more altruistic goal for internationalization might be to provide access to students whose home countries do not supply higher educational opportunities of a similar level or for a specific group; e.g., a Chinese student may not qualify for a prestigious university in China and, therefore, chooses to enroll at an institution abroad that provides education of equal quality. Internationalization can come with many benefits to an organization. Institutions need to be careful, however, as there can be some drawbacks to hosting international students and becoming more internationally focused.

Attracting international students can aid the university, and local and national economies; however, some approaches can lead to the downfall of both. One potential pitfall for internationalization, as Peterson, Briggs, Dreasher, Horner, and Nelson (1999) warned readers, is the unfair treatment of international students. The authors described a tale of British universities who charged international students significantly higher tuition

and fees in order to maximize profits. When the Malaysian government heard about these practices, they responded by boycotting British goods and services. Additionally, international students do not only require additional services, but often they require additional help from faculty and staff in adjusting to the host country, the classrooms, and understanding the expectations that come with being a college student in a different country (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007).

Stromquist (2007) conducted a case study of the internationalization of a private research university in the USA. The main motivations of this institution were to enhance its international profile and, in doing so, to attract highly talented students and scholars. The interviewees elaborated that with highly talented students and scholars, they also hoped to develop research, win grants, establish stronger departments, and become a higher ranked institution. The departments studied inside the institution were engaged in establishing collaborations, developing a cross-border network, and promoting the university's global presence. The universities abroad with which the institution established alliances were carefully selected with reputation in mind. The international students who were recruited by the institution under study often were treated like customers whose expectations mattered greatly. The customer-provider relationship led to some of the students viewing their education more like a pathway to a job rather than a deepening of knowledge. Stromquist reported that one administrator at the university stated that students were slowly viewing the college as a vendor who viewed students as paychecks. Outside of high quality students, international students also were reported as being the students who were charged full tuition without any discounts or aid.

An employee of the business school in the case study argued that the globalized perspective of business today requires more international sensitivity, awareness of foreign cultures, and more globally educated students. The argument for internationalization and the recruitment of international students was, therefore, increasing global perspectives of the institution, its classrooms, and the students. Having international students would benefit the goal of a global education (Stromquist, 2007); however, Stromquist (2007) noted that this argument contradicts the lack of students from nations where most students might not be able to afford the high tuition costs. Another interviewee argued that the business college did not cater to students who held market ideologies different from the American perspective because basic explanations of the capital system would require a preparation program or significant additional time. While more classroom diversity and other perspectives might have been a goal, other factors led to administrators applying a targeted strategy to recruit students from specific countries but not from others.

In gaining prestige and competitive contracts, the respondents reported a stronger emphasis on research than on teaching (Stromquist, 2007). One faculty member reported that, in order to gain ranking, grants and contracts from industry had to be earned. With this goal in mind, both superior students as well as specifically trained faculty were recruited. Some famous faculty members were recruited to attract more students as well as to increase university prestige. Additionally, industry partners requested training in specific skills and determined topics of research, which can lead to targeted recruitment practices. Stormquist (2007) concluded that, in the university's pursuit of a stronger global profile, the institutional strategies focused on recruiting high quality students and

faculty, especially for research. Additionally, the main institution strategy in the case study influenced decision making at all levels, from hiring to the curriculum. The institutional strategy, which includes the goals for internationalization, can be motivated by numerous factors. In spite of being motivated by reputation, revenue, and diversity, internationalization can have additional benefits.

Horn et al. (2012) showed through a multiple regression analysis that distinct indicators of internationalization have a positive influence on participation in international volunteerism, which refers to civic service in a foreign country that promotes intercultural understanding. Using the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, the authors studied a random sample of 120 institutions. The results indicated that internationalization of general education and the student body, as well as study abroad participation, are significant predictors of participation in the Peace Corps. Internationalization of general education was measured as the total credit required in areas of non-English language, non-Western culture, and global perspectives. Internationalization of the student body was measured as percentage of international students on campus. From these results, the authors argued that internationalization, in curriculum as well as by hosting more international students, could aid in encouraging student civic engagement.

Adding to the notion of internationalization benefitting civic engagement, Larsen (2015) conducted a case study of a university project in which students participated in international development activities. She interviewed 52 participants, including students, faculty members, administrators, and community members from the countries that hosted the students. The program enjoyed university-wide participation and has led to numerous

publications. The institutional leadership also used the program to advertise international opportunities available to the students. The administrators reported that they perceived the program in East Africa as evidence of the commitment the university has toward internationalization. A faculty member described the program as an important way to learn about global health issues and to collaborate with others. Larsen argued that the positive influence of the program on faculty included that it catered to the desire of many to help others and truly make a difference; it provided the opportunity to learn about other cultures; it opened the door for students interested in international programs; it added an international project to their coursework; and it made international research opportunities available for both students and faculty. The impact on students was described as an opportunity to develop new skills in applying learned knowledge and techniques as well as problem solving; enhancing cultural understanding; learning to be more flexible; developing relationships; and increasing their geographical, geopolitical, and religious knowledge.

Larsen (2015) also mentioned some challenges with students feeling isolated; stressing about their safety; coping with delays in their research projects; and managing of expectations regarding entitlements, race, and wealth. For the local community, there were similar opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, the new techniques and training with the students provided them with positive changes like increased health, confidence, and hope. The local participants learned multiple skills in terms of food preparations and storage, computer skills, basic business skills, and basic English language skills, as well as tangential learning due to the cultural exchange like the establishment of new relationships and a reduction of stereotypical ideas. The challenges

with local participants were almost all based in cultural misunderstandings. The local participants viewed some of the Canadian participants as disrespectful in their close relationships with members from the other gender, in their selection of clothing, not properly greeting elders, and not putting sufficient effort into learning the local language. Additionally, the local population would have had to manage the aftermath of hosting foreign students: handle the changes they implemented, dispose of the items they left, and function without the resources they took home.

Not every institution with faculty interested in internationalization shows the overall institutional support mentioned by Larsen (2015). The motivation behind internationalization depends to a large extent on the mission of the institution. Chan and Dimmock (2008) contrasted two institutions through a qualitative comparative case study, one located in the UK and one in Hong Kong. The cases were selected due to the authors' familiarity with the institutions, as well as to maximize the differences between them. Administrators, faculty members involved in internationalization, and administrative staff members were interviewed. These groups were viewed as the key informants, and from them 24 participants were selected. The participants from both universities reported that their institutions approached internationalization through activities in which an international institution should be participating and aspects on which it should be focused. The activity approach is where most of the similarities ended between the institutions. The informants from the British university reported that internationalization activities should underwrite the international position of the institution. Additionally, they adopted an outward viewing approach wherein the institution welcomed outside students and scholars into the university. The

internationalization goal of the British university was linked nationally in the attempt to promote intercultural learning. The intercultural learning was pursued mostly through enrolling international students, which gave the advantage of a higher-tier tuition payer. The university also established a significant distance learning network which strengthened the institution's global position.

The university from Hong Kong approached internationalization in a different way (Chan & Dimmock, 2008). The respondents reported that the institution's role was one of a bridge between mainland China and the rest of the world. As the gateway to China, the interviewees emphasized the importance of the institution's role in teaching understanding of its own history, culture, and role in global relations while developing international perspectives. To fulfill its role, the university limited its acceptance of international students and scholars in both teaching and research projects. The institution worked diligently to balance its international role and the opinions of local stakeholders, who were resistant to the use of English and the use of financial support for non-local students. Therefore, the internationalization mission of the institution was limited to introducing the Chinese population to the use of the English language, providing instruction in English, recruiting foreign faculty, and cultivating a diverse student body, while at the same time opening a Chinese university to the rest of the world. At the time of the study, the institution was not pursuing a stronger Hong Kong brand or aiming to attract as many international students as possible, like the university from the UK.

Chan and Dimmock (2008) showed that internationalization of an institution depends on the institution's overall strategic goal. Others elaborated on institutions' internationalization goals and how they influence their practices (Childress, 2009; Huang,

2006; Jones & Oleksiyenko, 2011; McBurnie, 2000; McBurnie & Pollock, 2000; Yang, 2005; Yang & Welch, 2001). Childress (2009) studied internationalization plans and key enabling factors regarding internationalization. The author interviewed employees of 31 member institutions of the Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA). Over two thirds of these institutions had internationalization plans. Of those plans, an overall institutional strategic plan was most common. The author found that support from institutional leaders, a campus-wide internationalization taskforce, and external organizations were three major factors that can stimulate and benefit the development of plans and start of internationalization. A decentralized organizational structure, slow institutional decision making, lack of leadership support, vacant critical positions, and financial constraints might slow or hinder the development of plans and, therefore, internationalization efforts. The author noted that institutions that reached an advanced stage of internationalization have less use for plans. Once plans have been developed, widespread faculty engagement, support from university senate, and additional support from internationalization leaders benefit the implementation of the plans. Much like the development of plan, limited funds, lack of support by both leadership and the campus community, faculty's desire for autonomy, and potential unforeseen emergencies can obstruct implementation of internationalization plans. Childress maintained as a final aspect after development and implementation of internationalization plans, that these plans and progress also should be monitored. Support from critical units, like institutional research, assigning monitoring responsibilities to individual departments, and even budgetary concerns can improve the monitoring process. Lack of clarity in regard to expectations and the monitoring progress

can have a negative influence on the overall monitoring and assessing of the internationalization efforts.

With the support of key participants, strong support from institutional leadership, and clear strategic plans, institutions should be able to internationalize if desired. Huang (2006) used a comparative analysis to study institutions in China, Japan, and the Netherlands regarding their internationalization efforts and their internationalized curriculum. In Huang's study of the literature, the author noted that all three countries had seen international programs increase, including foreign language programs and programs catering to international students. Each of the countries also tended to cater its programs to students from specific regions who they desire to attract. The contents of these programs often were specific professional programs, high quality academic programs, or programs about the host culture and language. The demand for English programs also had grown in all three countries. An increase in international students also benefited the local students, as their English competencies grew due to increased communication with foreign students; their educational programs were internationalized, which increased their cross-cultural exposure; and the quality of the programs often increased when international students were mixed into the classroom and into research projects. China and Japan showed differences from the Netherlands in regard to their main internationalized programs. The majority of international programs in China and Japan were non-degree programs that specialized in local language and culture. In the Netherlands, the majority of international programs offered were complete degree programs offered due to influence of the European labor market and other international forces.

Yang and Welch (2001) surveyed 59 administrators and 110 faculty in Guangzhou, China, about the internationalization of institutions in the region. The authors argued that many Chinese institutions desire more integration in global knowledge and research networks. At the time of this study, the Chinese government discouraged research in specific fields, and most of the institutions pursued natural science research. Of the respondents however, only 12.73% had international research projects. Additionally, it was rare for faculty members to be members of an international scholarly organization. Yang and Welch also reported that several aspects surrounding some of the institutions' internationalization missions were poorly communicated throughout the universities; e.g., 50.84% of administrative respondents reported no knowledge of the international educational exchange and communication section mentioned in the institution's mission statement. Another example showed that only 30% of administrators in the region considered their university leaders to be active in internationalization of university activities. Yang and Welch noted that the survey showed that academics were slower to respond to the call for internationalization than administrators.

In regard to international students and scholars, Yang and Welch (2001) discussed that China sends out more scholars than it takes in, even though the majority of institutions studied had exchange programs. Recruiting and hosting international students was generally not regarded as important, and the respondents surveyed were not always aware of their institutions receiving international students. Yang and Welch explained that many exchange programs were partially established to receive degree recognition overseas. Further, the authors found that reported internationalization of

programs was limited outside of specific international programs which attracted mostly international students. Many academics reported a lack of support for international activities. Around half the instructors noted that their teaching content had international components and they did incorporate international activities. In regard to English language programs, the respondents reported more support and emphasis. These findings support the Chinese government's desire to strengthen its connection with global research efforts and to increase China's competitive position.

Focusing on one particular institution, Yang (2005) conducted a case study of a specific Chinese institution. This particular institution had, in the past two decades prior to Yang's study, signed agreements with around 100 foreign universities in a pursuit to integrate into higher educational and research networks. Most of the international activities matched the ones mentioned by Yang and Welch (2001), which included hosting foreign scholars, sending personnel abroad, hosting international conferences, and increasing research collaborations. Another internationalization aspect mentioned by an interviewee in Yang's study was that of external contacts who provided international financial support to the institution. Some of these contacts were alumni of the university who lived abroad, obtained employment, and gave financially to the institution. The respondents in this case study mentioned, however, that the internationalization efforts and the international communication achievements were far from adequate. They pointed out that overseas travel remained rare among faculty, and an international dimension was not mentioned in the institution's mission statement. The author noted that this particular institution most likely was ahead of many others in China. Yang also mentioned, like Yang and Welch, that internationalization is better implemented in natural sciences and

engineering departments than in that of the arts and humanities, which falls in line with the demands by the Chinese government. Yang reported that the university must respond to the market economy and competition, which may have led to a desire in administrators to stimulate world-class education, but this has resulted mostly in a focus on research in science fields. To the dissatisfaction of some of the faculty, this strong focus also brought some deterioration of teaching and research in other fields, according to Yang. While internationalization was mentioned, the results were focused research geared toward recognition from other nations.

A more Western perspective on internationalization can be found in McBurnie's (2000) case study of Monash University, the largest university of Australia. Much different than almost any other university's internationalization strategy, the institution created numerous campuses in different countries and a new company named Monash International as part of pursuing its mission. In an attempt to increase financial self-reliance, administrators viewed providing education to international students a major opportunity. The case study highlighted that the institution provided quality Australian education abroad with high quality international aspects in the curriculum, as well as strong international support services.

Also studying Monash University, McBurnie and Pollock (2000) listed several institutional opportunities that came with starting campuses abroad. First, the authors listed that it enhanced the profile for the university; with more campuses around the world, the institution's name recognition grew. Second, they mentioned the financial benefits resulting from additional student fees and consultancy opportunities abroad. Third, additional campuses led to an expanded student base, which was less subject to

local enrollment trends. An increased number of alumni aided in name recognition and influence all over the world. The authors continued, mentioning more opportunities for students and staff to study at one of the foreign locations without leaving the university system. This also meant an increase in research opportunities at these locations and with the local members of the satellite campus. Besides research, international campuses also added the advantage of developing new curricula and adding diversity. Last, McBurnie and Pollock named the creation of resources as a benefit which can be used strategically. Opening new campus locations abroad is not completely without risk. The authors pointed out that financial risks, reputational risks, legal risks, and physical risks are chances an institution takes when opening new locations abroad. Additionally, there are sovereign risks associated with doing business in a country that is not one's own. To maximize benefits and minimize risks, McBurnie and Pollock suggested that sufficient strategic, academic, and business planning could help. Also, hosting countries should be researched and carefully selected, the market in regard to offering and competition should be investigated, different educational delivery models should be considered, and quality educational offerings should be guaranteed.

Starting new campuses and expanding offerings through internationalization might be a viable way to gain sufficient financial revenue to increase self-reliance and to decrease dependency on one country and one market. For many institutions, the creation of additional campuses abroad might not be a feasible option in their current situation. The research university described at the institutional level of Jones and Oleksiyenko's (2011) case study had to navigate internationalization within the boundaries of their budget and among demands from stakeholders. With strong demands from local,

provincial, and national governments and stakeholders, the university leaders decided to assign only a small portion of each year's resources to the pursuit of international relations and research initiatives. Using the medical faculty as an example, they argued that they were tasked with educating local trainees and the university did not allocate resources away from this main goal. Faculty members interested in international engagements competed for the limited resources available. The budget allowed no room for major internationalization activities or initiatives. Interviewees mentioned that they could pursue international activities and research projects, but they also were directed that teaching was the priority and limited support would be provided for additional activities. Therefore, as Chan and Dimmock (2008) argued, Jones and Oleksiyenko also showed that the strategic mission will determine the internationalization activities and strategies.

Institutions can pursue internationalization through a variety of activities like hosting international students, sending students abroad, establishing exchange programs, and the other examples mentioned in this section. Several authors studied why institutions want to host international students and how these universities go about recruiting these students. The following sections review some rationales for attracting international students and give an overview of some practices implemented by several institutions.

Recruitment

Through interviews of university officials from four institutions in the United Kingdom (UK), Bolsmann and Miller (2008a) studied rationales for international student recruitment. All interviewees were higher level institutional administrators. The authors

reported that primarily institutions recruit international students as part of their internationalization strategies. Some administrators view the recruitment as a long standing tradition and core value. Others stated that, in order to be a leading global university, hosting international students and scholars is essential. The respondents mentioned that recruiting and receiving international students increases the international status of the institution. Additionally, they argued that these students contribute to a more diverse academic community, which benefits both the campus and classroom environments. International students brought global perspectives, which are needed if preparing global citizens is the goal, according to one respondent. The diversity and knowledge that international students contribute also is seen as essential to research endeavors. On top of a more diverse classroom and research teams, diversity brought by international students aids in preparing domestic students for an increasingly diverse work environment that results from globalization.

As a final point, all respondents named additional revenue due to the international students' fees as a reason to host international students, even though most administrators tried to name other reasons first (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008a). One interviewee reported that an increased reputation, due to hosting international students and improving the institutional brand, also would allow the institution to charge more tuition from international students. This additional tuition revenue could be used to hire better teachers and to improve facilities, which would increase the reputation and allow for raising fees. Bolsmann and Miller argued that, for many institutions, the financial benefits are most likely the main driver behind the desire to recruit international students. Additional revenue is not only beneficial for the financial viability of the institution, but

it also allows institutions to hire extra staff who can focus on research to earn grants and other prestige-generating awards.

In describing the benefits to the university, the interviewees listed some cautionary arguments in hosting international students (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008a). They mentioned that many departments viewed having large groups of international students as an indication of quality and that these students are a great research benefit; however, they maintained that international students should be integrated with domestic students in order to benefit from the diverse population. Additionally, the authors preferred diversity among international students, and they believed domination by one particular nationality should be avoided. One administrator stated that integrating a large group from a single nationality is much more difficult. Having a diverse group of international students also prevents the danger for the institution to be dependent on one specific student market. Finally, while many administrators saw additional funding generated through international students as an essential benefit, they felt that cost and revenue should be balanced so the institutional administrators understand where international students cost additional money and where they contribute. For example, international students might require additional services but benefit the university through additional tuition, research output, and perhaps cheaper employment. Another example is that strategic alliances with other institutions might provide a steady stream of students who benefit the institution, but maintaining the relationship and agreement with the institution abroad drains resources that are not always taken into account when calculating cost. While some administrators might argue that additional profits are not the main reason for international recruitment, Bolsmann and Miller (2008a) pointed out

that recruitment and traditions of educational aid were strongly influenced by finances. Some students from developing countries were being educated abroad, but they would not have attended these institutions if their governments had not paid the tuition fees for the students. The receiving institutions would not host these students for free, even if they brought other benefits.

In another study, Bolsmann and Miller (2008b) interviewed international administrators at South African institutions regarding their international student recruitment desires and internationalization plans. Like respondents of other studies discussed, an administrator of a historic white university expressed the mission for the institution to be an international university with an international reputation. Additionally, the desire to academically engage and collaborate with European and North American institutions was described as crucial. A different administrator for another historically white university stated that a large portion of their student population would never have the opportunity to travel abroad. The administrator predicted that hosting international students would aid in diversifying the student population, expose domestic students to cultural diverse interactions, and train all students to work in a global context.

Unique to South Africa was the expressed developmental goal (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008b). One interviewee described a need for training of foreign workers who want to get into Africa, and the University of South Africa provided that service; e.g., the University of South Africa offered a post-graduate program in Ethiopia where students could obtain qualifications to become Ethiopian and Sudanese civil servants. These services were part of University of South Africa's vision to become a major provider of education in Africa. Another respondent explained that some countries have a tradition

of sending graduates abroad, but this was becoming increasingly more expensive. South African institutions were, therefore, becoming a viable option for other African students. Most institutions also were trying to attract international students from further away by building an international reputation. More similar to institutions in the UK and the USA, South African administrators expressed the benefit of additional revenue collected through international students. One respondent shared that some institutions approach fee generation in a unique way by renting their institutional facilities to foreign universities for summer or short-term programs. While this respondent expressed that this exchange would not necessarily influence the institutions culturally, the additional revenue would provide valuable resources with which the institution could serve its own students. Unfortunately, at the time of this research, South African institutions also were losing qualified students and workers to richer Western countries due to the more desirable prospects in those regions. To compensate for this loss, South Africa attracted many students from poorer, mostly African nations who were sponsored by their governments. These nations viewed the education in South Africa as an option to obtain high quality education, but at the same time South African institutions served as a cheaper alternative to education in Europe or the USA. Internationalization and international recruitment were, therefore, important parts of the South African higher educational system.

Many institutions, especially in Western countries like the USA and UK, listed hosting and recruiting international students as part of their internationalization mission. Reasons for internationalization could include financial benefit to the institution, financial benefit to the local economy, job creation, recruitment as a tradition, high

quality assistants for low cost, increasing diversity in classroom, increasing quality of research, improving international profile, establishing international alliances, and increasing international volunteerism (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Bolsmann & Miller, 2008a; Bolsmann & Miller, 2008b; Childress, 2009; Frølich & Stensaker, 2010; Horn et al., 2012; Huang, 2006; Jones & Oleksiyenko, 2011; Knight, 2004; Malo, Valle, & Wriedt, 1999; McBurnie, 2000; McBurnie & Pollock, 2000; NAFSA, 2014; Stromquist, 2007; Yang, 2005; Yang & Welch, 2001). Regardless of the reasons for desiring international students, different institutions want international students to select their particular institution. Even though the number of international students enrolled in institutions of higher education in the US has steadily increased over the last five years (Institute of International Education, 2016), institutions maintain the desire to attract students as part of their internationalization strategies. The number of SEVP-certified institutions hosting international students has been relatively consistent over the last six years, with a very slight decrease in 2016 (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016a). As institutions increasingly speculate on how to attract more international students, several researchers have investigated recruitment practices in higher education (Gomes & Murphy, 2003; Mazzarol, 1998; Özturgut, 2013; Ross, Grace, & Shao, 2013; Ross, Heaney, & Cooper, 2007).

Through a survey that was sent out to 40 institutions with the largest number of international students on their campuses, according to the Institute of International Education's Open Door Report, Özturgut (2013) asked institutional administrators to list their top five recruitment practices. The author found eight different themes for best practices in the recruitment of international students utilized by the 53 respondents. The

themes included:

- 1) Providing academic support and utilizing campus resources,
 - 2) Attending and participating in international education fairs and recruitment events,
 - 3) Partnering with other organizations (colleges and universities, non-profit and governmental institutions, high schools, for-profit organizations),
 - 4) Passive Marketing (Web advertising-online, brochures and booklets, etc.),
 - 5) Utilizing staff and faculty,
 - 6) Utilizing alumni,
 - 7) Utilizing agents, and
 - 8) Snowballing (word-of-mouth).
- (p. 6)

These themes were represented in different orders of utilization for the different institutional categories. For doctoral students, passive marketing tools like the use of online brochures and booklets, was reported as the number one most used recruitment practice. For master's degree students, as well as students pursuing an associate's degree, providing academic support and utilizing campus resources was the number one practice. For baccalaureate students, the institutional administrators reported attending and participating in international education fairs and recruitment events as the most used practice. Besides recruitment practices and ways to provide international students with information, institutional factors also can influence recruitment.

To understand how institutional factors influence international student recruitment, Ross et al. (2007) interviewed 10 administrators from tertiary and secondary schools who were involved in international student recruitment. The authors found that for universities: (a) the size of the marketing department positively affected the total percentage of international students enrolled at an institution, (b) the years an institution had been recruiting students negatively affected the percentage of international students enrolled, (c) the marketing qualifications of the recruiting employees were positively

related to the percentage of international students enrolled, and (d) there was some support that the institutional focus was related to the total years an institution had been recruiting international students. For secondary schools, Ross et al. did not find any support of relationships between the themes, or between the themes and the percentage of international students enrolled. While the authors showed that recruitment practices, the recruitment department, and the institutional traditions matter, the institutional focus and approach to the internationalization strategy might have an overall impact as well.

Through a survey of 159 international student recruitment practitioners and the quantitative analysis of a structural equation model, Ross et al. (2013) studied recruitment approaches of departments and universities from a variety of Australian higher education institutions. The authors divided international student recruitment approaches into three different groups: customer-oriented, competitor-oriented, and inter-functional. A customer-oriented focus refers to the recruitment team developing an understanding for current and future international students to ensure long-term satisfaction and a positive reputation. Competitor-oriented departments focus on strengths and weaknesses of their competitors and understand opportunities in the market. The inter-functional approach refers to organizations in which recruitment endeavors reside throughout the institution. In this approach, all departments share the recruitment responsibility to ensure student satisfaction at all interactions between the student and the organization. Ross et al. (2013) revealed that the majority of their respondents reported to practice a customer-oriented approach to international student recruitment. Their findings also indicated that an inter-functional orientation would lead to the best student recruitment performance. The authors argued that the customer-orientated approach to the market is not sufficient

to gain superior recruitment performance. An international student recruitment strategy should be shared throughout the organization, a student should receive a consistent and helpful message at all points of contact, and the student's experience should be pleasant regardless of the department with which the student is in contact.

Mazzarol (1998) asked employees of institutions in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK, and the USA, in a survey to rate success factors of international education marketing. The results from the 315 respondents were analyzed using a logit analysis, and the author found different factors that have a major impact on successful marketing of educational institutions. First, image and resources, like financial resources; reputation for quality; brand recognition; and range of courses are important when marketing one's institution. Specialized courses and famous departmental programs can enhance an institution's brand and reputation. Additionally, influential and famous alumni of the institution give name recognition to the university. Second, international agreements and alliances with institutions abroad are crucial to develop name recognition. Alumni from exchange programs can spread a good reputation about the university and their experiences studying there. Additionally, strategic partners can be used to market the institution locally as a service available through the institution. In summary, image, resources, and strategic alliances are important to attract new students and to market the institution abroad. Outside of critical marketing factors, institutional administrators also might want to know how students receive the information regarding their institution and the university's success factors.

Investigating the role of the internet in facilitating the communication regarding education opportunities and the information students need in order to decide at which

institution they would like to study, Gomes and Murphy (2003) surveyed 156 students and interviewed marketing executives at several universities in Hong Kong. The survey results showed that the large majority searched the internet for information about institutions, a little over half went to the institution's homepage, half used a search engine to research the institution, about a third e-mailed the institution for information, and about 15% found the institution's website through other promotional materials. Surprisingly, only 5% of the students reported to have found sufficient information about the institution through the institution's website alone. Of the students who e-mailed the institutions, one of five did not receive a response, which might be a mistake, as four of five respondents who e-mailed stated that the response influenced their choice of institution. Most institutions replied within one or two days, with only 25% taking more than five days. The authors also found significant differences between groups, with female students e-mailing the institutions more often and respondents with higher education using the internet to search for information and to visit the institution's webpage more. The majority of students also named themselves as the key decision maker, followed by their parents. Independent agents, recommendations, scholarship offers, and country governments played lesser roles. Institutional administrators reported in the interview results that the majority of institutions could enroll students online. Just under half of the institutions' re-enrolling questions were asked by e-mail and most institutions had standard formats and time-frame policies for answering e-mails. Gomes and Murphy also found that all institutional representatives agreed that the internet would play an increasingly important role in marketing and recruitment of students, and the internet speeds up institutional processes. Last, all representatives named trust as an

essential aspect when it comes to online marketing and enrollment. If an institution has a strategic mission to recruit international students, and the institution has an idea of how to market their educational offering and how students receive information, the next step would be to learn why students select an institution: This often is referred to as college choice.

College Choice

In order to investigate college choice, I need to make a distinction between college access and college choice. College access refers to a topic in which the researchers attempt to determine which students can enroll in higher education if they desire to continue their education. Availability, affordability, and admission standards play a major part in college access. College choice researchers, on the other hand, concern themselves with the aspects that influence the decision of selecting a specific institution of higher education, and the decision process itself is studied. In the college choice research, authors maintained a general assumption that students have access to college (Bergerson, 2009).

Historically, three major perspectives on the college choice process have prevailed: sociological, psychological, and economic (Bergerson, 2009). Researchers who have used the sociological perspective have argued that college choice is a part of a larger status attainment process, and an individual's background like race, socio-economic status, level of parents' education, parental expectations, previous academic achievement, and peer groups is the main influencer on the college choice decision. Within the psychological perspective on college choice, authors have argued that the institutional environment and characteristics, and student perceptions of the institution

influence college choice decision the most. Factors like location, curriculum, financial aid availability, and cost contribute to a student's decision where to enroll according to the psychological perspective. When studying college choice using the economic perspective, researchers have focused on how students weigh the cost against the benefits of enrolling in an institution of higher education. From the economic perspective, authors assumed that students include factors like the real cost of attending an institution, financial aid availability, cost of other institutions, and return on investment into their decision-making process.

Using different parts of the sociological, psychological, and economic perspective, numerous authors throughout the literature created comprehensive models in an attempt to fully explain the student's college choice process (Bergerson, 2009). Some well-known examples include Chapman's (1981) causal model of college choice, which focused on student characteristics, external factors, and students' expectations; Litten's (1982) model focused on racial, ethnics, gender, academic ability, parent education, and geographic location; the Kotler and Fox model (1985) added alternative paths to college; and models by Chapman and Jackson (1987) and Davis-Van Atta and Carrier (1986) described the entire college choice process. After these models, Hossler and Gallangher (1987) developed perhaps the most famous comprehensive model for understanding the college choice process.

The three-stage model of college choice by Hossler and Gallangher (1987) is a widely-used model for the study of college choice (Bergerson, 2009). Based on an analysis of other studies, the model determined that a student's college choice would be based on the stage of *Predisposition*, *Search*, and *Choice*. During the stage of

Predisposition, a student develops his or her aspirations and college-going expectations based on aspects like socio-economic status, parental encouragement, academic achievement, perception of the value of college, high school teachers, peers, and other aspects. At this stage, parents are the main source of influence. At the second stage, *Search*, the student starts forming a list of potential institutions and determines which characteristics are important. The student moves to seeking information to form options. Peers, counselors, and parents can be important during this stage. Additionally, institutional characteristics, test results, traditions, quality and reputation of a school, proximity, price, understanding of financial aid, and parental encouragement and socio-economic status are important. In the final stage, *Choice*, the student narrows his or her institutional list and completes the application processes. During this stage, the institutional characteristics and the ability to use the collected information to select an institution are most important. Academic abilities, test scores, achievement, cost, financial aid, high school context, student aspirations, and parental encouragement (including funding) are important aspects that play into the final choice.

Besides the authors who pursued the development of a comprehensive model that illustrates how students interact with their background, the institutions, and their environment in weighing higher educational options and making a college choice, numerous other researchers recently have investigated individual factors which significantly impact students' decision making processes (Baker & Brown, 2007; Bonnema & Van der Walldt, 2008; Bornholt, Gientzotis, & Cooney, 2004; Bratti, 2002; Briggs, 2006; Briggs & Wilson, 2007; Brown, Varley, & Pal, 2009; Callender & Jackson, 2008; Davies & Guppy, 1997; Dooley, Payne, & Robb, 2012; Drewes & Michael, 2006;

Gormley & Murphy, 2006; Griffin, del Pilar, McIntosh, & Griffin, 2012; Hagy & Staniec, 2002; Horstschräer, 2011; Hoyt & Howell, 2012; Hung, Chung, & Ho, 2000; Imenda & Kongolo, 2002; Imenda, Kongolo, & Grewal, 2004; Ivy, 2001; Jung, 2013; Keskinen, Tiuraniemi, & Liimola, 2008; Kettley & Whitehead, 2012; Leslie, 2003; Maringe, 2006; McGregor, Thanki, & McKee, 2002; Menon, 2004; Menon, Saiti, & Socratous, 2007; Moogan, Baron, & Harris, 1999; Niculescu, 2006; Oosterbeek, Groot, & Hartog, 1992; Oplatka & Tevel, 2006; Ozdemir & Hacifazlioglu, 2008; Pampaloni, 2010; Pasternak, 2005; Patitu, 2000; Perna & Titus, 2004; Porter & Umbach, 2006; Price, Matzdorf, Smith, & Agahi, 2003; Reay, Davies, David, & Ball, 2001; Sa, Florax, & Rietveld, 2004; Sánchez, 2012; Siegfried & Getz, 2006; Sojkin, Bartkowiak, & Skuza, 2012; Strayer, 2002; Thomas, 2004; Veloutsou, Paton, & Lewis, 2005; Wagner & Fard, 2009; Whitehead, Raffan, & Deaney, 2006; Zain, Jan, & Ibrahim, 2013; Zimbhoff, 2005).

Among others, abilities, admission requirements, academic offerings, career prospects, cost, course content, facilities, family, friends, gender, institutional type, location, parental education, race, reputation of the institution, socio-economic status, social life, and teacher quality are factors that influence the students' college choice decision.

Career and job prospects, as well as vocational interest, were factors highlighted in the results from numerous authors. The surveys by Bonnema and Van der Waldt (2008); Briggs (2006); Briggs and Wilson (2007); Gormley and Murphy (2006); Imenda and Kongolo (2002); Imenda et al. (2004); Ivy (2001); Ozdemir and Hacifazlioglu (2008); Sojkin et al (2012); Wagner and Fard (2009); Zimbhoff (2005); the interviews by Moogan et al. (1999); the case study by Pasternak (2005); and the studies by Kettley and Whitehead (2012) and McGregor et al. (2002) using national survey showed that career

prospects and the future value of a college degree have a strong influence on students' decisions of and where to enroll. Strong job prospects and a high return on investment can convince students to enroll at a specific institution and in a specific field of study. On the other side, low future job prospects might convince a student to select an alternative to college enrollment, like entering the job market without a college degree. Sojkin et al. (2012) showed through their survey that potential professional advancement after graduation also could influence the decision to enroll in a college and specific degree program. The survey study by Oosterbeek et al. (1992) indicated that, for Dutch students, earning potential is not significantly important to the students' college choice between different institutions.

Cost is another aspect often cited by authors as strongly influential. Surveys by Bonnema and Van der Waldt (2008); Briggs and Wilson (2007); Callender and Jackson (2008); Griffin et al. (2012); Hung et al. (2000); Imenda and Kongolo (2002); Imenda et al. (2004); Pampaloni (2010); Patitu (2000); Sojkin et al. (2012); Wagner and Fard (2009); Whitehead et al. (2006); studies using existing data like the ones by Bornholt et al. (2004); Drewes and Michael (2006); Kettley and Whitehead (2012), and the case study by Pasternak (2005) investigated how institutional cost, financial aid, funding, and benefits impact the student's decision of enrolling. In most studies, the authors showed that the costs that outweigh the perceived benefits will lead to a decrease in enrolling. Financial aid availability and other benefits that help offset costs increase the likelihood of a student selecting an institution that provides these benefits. Dooley et al. (2012) found, however, that costs do not have a major impact on students who choose selective schools. Additionally, Callender and Jackson discovered that debt aversion strongly

influences the decision making of only students from lower socio-economic class.

Bonnema and Van der Waldt and Whitehead et al., as well as the interviews by Baker and Brown (2007), survey research by Davies and Guppy (1997) and Reay et al. (2001), and existing data studies by Dooley et al. and Perna and Titus (2004) concluded that students' socio-economic classes impacts their choice to enroll in college and institutional type in which they enroll. Coming from a background with easier access to financial resources and information from other college graduates, students from higher socio-economic classes select colleges for other non-financial related reasons. For students with fewer resources, financial aid becomes more important; institutions who demand lower levels of tuition, like community colleges, become more appealing; and alternatives to college might be given more consideration compared to students who have access to more financial capital.

Location and distance from home often are cited as important aspects in selecting an institution of higher education. Briggs (2006); Briggs and Wilson (2007); Hoyt and Howell (2012); Imenda et al. (2004); Keskinen et al. (2008); Pampaloni (2010); Patitu (2000); Price et al. (2003); and Whitehead et al. (2006) found location to be an important factor in their surveys. Drewes and Michael (2006), Gormley and Murphy (2006), McGregor et al. (2002), and Sa et al. (2004) encountered location in their studies of existing data, and Moogan et al. (1999) were told during interviews that location is a major factor for students in their college choice process. Location can have a positive influence on students' decisions to select specific institutions when the geographical location is perceived as desirable. This often is the case when the location is near students' homes or when the location of the institution is in an area the student would like

to live, like on the beach. Location also can have a negative influence if the distance between the institution and home is perceived as not enough to feel independent or too far to be acceptable. Additionally, some institutions are located in major cities that are less desirable or where the environment is less pleasant.

Besides location of the institution, the reputation of the institution is extremely important for students and their college choice. Briggs (2006); Briggs and Wilson (2007); Horstschraer (2011); Hoyt and Howell (2012); Imenda and Kongolo (2002); Imenda et al. (2004); Keskinen et al. (2008); Ozdemir and Hacifazlioglu (2008); Pampaloni (2010); Pasternak (2005); Patitu (2000); Price et al. (2003); Sanchez (2012); Sojkin et al. (2012); and Whitehead et al. (2006) encountered reputation of the institution as a significantly important factor influencing college choice. Brown et al. (2009) also noticed this factor during their focus group research. Students tend to be drawn to universities with positive reputations for quality, services, and overall experience. A negative reputation also can strongly disadvantage an institution if students are pushed from enrolling at the institutions due to negative attention the university received. Sometimes a part of this reputation, but independently important to most students, is the quality of the faculty, the courses, and the instruction.

In surveys by Briggs (2006); Briggs and Wilson (2007); Imenda and Kongolo (2002); Imenda et al. (2004); Price et al. (2003); and Sanchez (2012), faculty quality was identified as one of the more important factors when deciding on an institution of higher education. Zain et al. (2013) showed the same results in their survey, but the respondents referred to the factor as course quality. Hoyt and Howell (2012) found that some students even select an institution for a specific instructor. Whitehead et al. (2006) stated that in

their survey teaching methods were specifically mentioned as influential.

Understandably, many students desire high quality instructors, and they search for a high quality education. If an institution employs well-known experts in a field, award-winning scholars, or faculty with positive reputations, administrators might want to advertise their institution using these faculty members, as the research has shown that this factor influences student choice. The study of existing data by Drewes and Michael (2006) however, showed that a successful research reputation might discourage students from applying to an institution.

Besides the quality of the courses, survey studies by Bonnema and Van der Waldt (2008); Brown et al. (2009); Imenda et al. (2004); Ivy (2010); Maringe (2006); Price et al. (2003); Sojkin et al. (2012); Wagner and Fard (2009); Whitehead et al. (2006); an existing data study by Sa et al. (2004); and interviews by Moogan et al. (1999) indicated that course content has a strong influence in the student college choice process. In selecting an institution of higher education, most students reflect on the topic they would like to study and the field in which they want to major. Course content and topic interest, therefore, play important roles, as it is hard to major in one's favorite topic if the institution does not provide curriculum in this field. For institutional administrators this means that they will not be able to attract students who are interested in a field that does not match courses the university provides. Keskinen et al. (2008) also found that research orientation and possibilities at the institution could influence a student selection decision. A survey conducted by Hoyt and Howell (2012) added that it is important to some students that the institution can offer them a schedule that fits with their other responsibilities. Outside of institutional offering, students will not be able to select an

institution for its course content if they do not meet the admission requirements.

Bornholt et al. (2004) concluded from their analysis of existing data that interest and ability are among the most important factors in student choice. The existing data studies of Bratti (2002), Davies and Guppy (1997), Leslie (2003), and Strayer (2002), as well as the survey by Hung et al. (2000), included admission requirements in the list of important factors to students' college choice. Student achievement and ability influence students' choices, as their performance indicates if they meet institutional admission requirements and if an institution is a potential option. Additionally, ability and achievement in high school are good indicators of students' enjoyment in going to college and their success. Students who are low performing and struggling in high school might not be motivated to select an institution of higher education to continue their studies. Maringe (2006) found through a survey study that ability in a specific subject area also influenced student college choice, as students only can pursue their interests when they meet admission requirements. If students perform well in subject areas in which they are interested, the likelihood of them selecting institutions that have strong programs in that particular field increases. Because meeting admission requirements depend on the student's ability, these requirements also influence college choice.

The surveys by Briggs (2006) and Briggs and Wilson (2007), and the analysis of existing data by Leslie (2003), illustrated that entry requirements influence college choice. In order to be able to select an institution, the student must meet the admission requirements and gain admission to the institution. Admission standards could prevent students from selecting a field of interest if departmental admission standards are hard to meet and some prestigious institutions only will accept students from the higher

percentile of test scores. Low admission requirements might increase the likelihood that average performing students select an institution as they meet the requirements dictated by the university. On the other hand, high admission standards can persuade high achieving students to select an institution that will reject many other students, as it adds to the perception of prestige and status. Institutions with high admission standards might be able to provide high level and quality classes to students who are high achieving.

Outside the ability to meet standards, Kettley and Whitehead (2012) showed that the ease of the application process influences college choice and is an important factor. Having an application process that is much more work intensive than the application of competing institutions will discourage students who are thinking about applying to the institution. Additionally, if students or their parents perceive that the institution requires too much information or they do not understand the application, the likelihood of students applying to this institution diminishes. Finally, the survey by Imenda and Kongolo (2002) and the focus groups by Brown et al. (2009) highlighted that a fast application process and decision, as well as being the first institution to respond, influences the selection of institution by the student. When planning for the next step and selecting an institution of higher education, students want to know their options.

When evaluating alternatives, speed of the admission decision is not the only factor. Imenda and Kongolo (2002); Imenda et al. (2004); Pampaloni (2010); Price et al. (2003); and Wagner and Fard (2009) through survey research illuminated that the facilities provided by the institution sway the college choice decision as well. Many institutions of higher education provide numerous facilities and services to students besides classrooms and teachers. Housing facilities, computer labs, health services,

sports facilities, restaurant facilities, and other non-academic facilities can be found on most large college campuses. Facilities and services offered, and the condition in which they are offered, can persuade students to select one institution over the other.

Additionally, students could be discouraged from choosing an institution if they have to pay for facilities that they will not use on a regular basis; e.g., some institutions require meal plans for first-year students, which they can use at the school cafeteria. While some students might like the school cafeteria, others might resent the institution for requiring such service.

Besides non-academic facilities, academic services also could make a difference. Hoyt and Howell (2012) specifically named smaller classes in their survey as an educational service offering that influences student college choice. While smaller class sizes and a lower student-to-faculty ratio might be a positive factor in the eyes of most students, some individuals might weigh the benefits of smaller classes against the cost of competing institutions. Besides class size, Price et al. (2003) highlighted the influence of a friendly attitude by institutional employees as a college choice factor. Students who visit an institution or hear about it are more likely to select the institution if they perceive the institutional employees as friendly. A friendly environment and services that aid students in enjoying their college experience help to convince students who are selecting an institution in pursuit of the best social experience.

Some students reported in surveys that they selected specific institutions partially to gain new experiences (Moogan et al., 1999; Zimbhoff, 2005). Others stated that the social life is what drew them to higher education (Briggs, 2006; Briggs & Wilson, 2007; Pampaloni, 2010; Sojkin et al., 2012). While the student life and the experiences on

campus will depend largely on the student body, institutional administrators can arrange to provide facilities, a friendly staff, and services to increase the chances of students having positive experiences. A positive environment and an overall satisfied student body will lead to a better reputation and will increase the likelihood of students selecting that particular institution. Negative experiences and unsatisfied current students might lead to the opposite effect. A survey by Bonnema and Van der Waldt (2008) showed the student experience is important to some groups of students. Besides sports facilities, the school's athletic team can increase the likelihood of students selecting an institution, if the pride for the team and school spirit lead to a more unified student body that is perceived as positive. Some non-traditional students reported in interviews led by Oplatka and Tevel (2006) that their main goal for higher education was self-development and that they selected an institution that could provide this. Similar to the college experience, these students selected an institution for the experience, but this experience was tied to education and self-development. For institutional administrators, specific services, facilities, and employee help must be provided to these students in order to persuade them to select their university. Self-development is driven by the students' desire to better their education, but some students consider other referent sources when deciding on which university to attend.

Jung (2013) concluded that recognition from others is an important factor when considering to enroll at a certain institution; but those survey results, as well as surveys by Pampaloni (2010), Sojkin (2012), Wagner and Fard (2009), and Zimbhoff (2005), also revealed that family and friends influence the college choice decision. Students reported the same finding in the interviews by Moogan et al. (1999). While most college students

are legal adults, their decision making is still influenced by other sources; and a substantial decision like attending college for the upcoming four years is not always made by the student alone. Family and friends can affect the student's decision by sharing information as well as resources. Family members might discuss where they went to college and how their experiences were, friends might plan to go to a particular institution together, and parents might provide financial resources for one particular institution. Students are not only influenced by people in their life, but also by the demographic groups to which they belong; e.g., African and central Asian students were more likely to place importance on family when selecting a college, while Afro-Caribbean students reported career prospects to be more important (Ivy, 2010).

Several studies found differences in college choice decision making between males and females (Davies & Guppy, 1997; Gormley & Murphy, 2006; Ivy, 2010; Porter & Umbach, 2006). Additionally, university selection decisions differed depending on the student's racial background (Hagy & Staniec, 2002; Ivy, 2010; Patitu, 2000; Porter & Umbach, 2006; Reay et al., 2001; Thomas, 2004); on the highest achieved educational level of a student's parents (Baker & Brown, 2007; Siegfried & Getz, 2006); or to which socio-economic class a student and his or her family belong (Baker & Brown, 2007; Bonnema & Van der Waldt, 2008; Davies & Guppy, 1997; Dooley et al., 2012; Perna & Titus, 2004; Reay, 2001; Whitehead et al., 2006). These demographic differences between students and how they influence decision making are complicated. Some students cannot select certain institutions due to the financial resources required; other students have less encouragement from their parents because they never attended college themselves. Families do not always expect the same from male students as they do from

females, and certain groups might experience a disadvantage as their local community provided lower quality secondary education. While the way these factors influence college choice decisions is complicated, they lead to statistical differences in the type of institutions students select. Due to their demographic circumstances, some students also might lack access to information regarding colleges and college enrollment.

Information sources and information retrieval impact college choice decisions, as was shown in the surveys by Menon (2004); Menon et al. (2007); Moogan et al. (1999); Siegfried and Getz (2006); Veloutsou et al. (2005); Wagner and Fard (2009); and Zain et al. (2013). The focus groups by Brown et al. (2009) also explored the interaction between entering college students and information sources. In order for students to select institutions, they need to know about the institution. Many students use websites, but also university prospectuses and open days to investigate a potential college. It is important that students can find the answers to their questions and that they obtain a positive view of the college if the institution is interested in being selected. Marketing efforts and conscious distribution of college information might impact students' college decision as well (Sojkin et al., 2012). The information sought by students should speak to all the factors mentioned previously, as these have the potential to influence a student's college choice decision.

The literature has highlighted some of the common mentioned factors that influence a student's decision to attend a particular college. Bergerson (2009) argued that the field of college choice is heading toward examining the experiences of underrepresented students and the process of removing barrier for these students in order for them to participate fully in higher education. While Bergerson referred to domestic

students from minority backgrounds and lower socio-economic status, international students are another group underrepresented in the research. International students make a decision to search for potential institutions of higher education outside their home countries. Without understanding the reasons and factors that guide international students' college choice processes, institutional administrators will not be able to remove barriers for these students and attract them to their institution, which for many institutions is an important part of their internationalization mission.

International Student College Choice

Perhaps one of the more important articles for this study is one by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002). They performed a meta-analysis of three previous studies conducted by the authors. Combining these survey studies, a total of 2,485 students from Taiwan, China, India, and Indonesia offered their opinion on push-and-pull factors that influenced their study abroad decisions. Push factors are factors present in a country that pushes students toward studying abroad. Examples of push factors are few high quality postsecondary education options or political instability. Pull factors are factors present in a country that pulls a student toward studying in this particular nation; e.g., high quality of education or opportunities to work part time could be perceived as pull factors. These students reported their perception that overseas courses are better than local courses and that they wanted to better understand the West as two reasons for studying overseas. Students from Taiwan and Indonesia also listed that difficulty in gaining entry to postsecondary institutions at home and courses not being available are important. To Indian students, the intention to migrate was reported. These aspects influence the initial decision to study abroad. The students were aware that some higher education aspects are

better abroad, and they aspired to study a certain course in a certain country. The authors continued by listing the importance of knowledge and awareness of the host country, where the majority of all countries scored that ease of obtaining information on host country, knowledge of the host country, quality of education in host country, and recognition of qualification obtained in host country were important. With these results, students in the study generated a list of possible hosting countries, specified with quality of education and recognition of degrees. Mazzarol and Soutar continued by reporting the importance of recommendations. Students from all four countries stated that reputation of the institution was highly important. Recommendations by parents and relatives came in second. Students used these recommendations to cull the list of potential institutions they might select.

Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) discussed aspects regarding affordability that were seen as important. Financial considerations were included in both developing a list of potential institutions, as well as determining the final choice. Students from Indonesia and China were shown to be the most cost conscious. To these students, some factors like fees and cost of living are important; but aspects like job opportunities, a safe environment, low racial discrimination, established population of overseas students, entry qualifications, and that the institution is government run were stated as more important than fees. These factors could be clustered as risk factors, which seem to be reported as more influential than direct cost on student choice of study abroad location. The final aspects mentioned were the importance of the environment, the importance of friends and relatives at the destination, and geographic proximity to their home countries. Almost all respondents stated that a comfortable climate, an exciting place to live, and an

environment beneficial to studying influence their choice. To students from Taiwan, India, and Indonesia, friends or relatives studying in or living at the destination was described as important. Geographical proximity to home was mentioned only by the majority of Indonesian students as influential.

Similar to the study by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), Chen (2008) used a meta-analysis of two studies to analyze what factors influenced students to study abroad, what factors influenced their choice to pick Canada, and what factors related to the choice of institution. Chen collected a total of 140 survey respondents, 23 graduate interviews, and 17 undergraduate interviews. First, the author reported the factors that influenced the students' decision to study abroad. Graduate students reported personal satisfaction, encouragement by professors, acquisition of language, future job prospects, and potential work experiences to be most important in their decisions. Undergraduate students reported that family decisions influenced their decision to study abroad most. All of these aspects revolved around considering the value of education, encouragement, motivation, and family influences. In selecting the country of study, Chen stated that the characteristics of Canada were most important to the majority of students. Factors that influenced the students' choice to go to Canada included professor recommendation, Canadian environment, quality or reputations of Canadian education, tuition cost, living expenses, and family factors. Some Chinese respondents reported that ease and speed of the Canadian visa process also was important. To graduate students in professional programs, the factors of cost, including tuition fees and cost of living, were more important than characteristics of the Canadian environment. Without making a definite selection of institution, the students narrowed the list of potential institutions by selecting

the host country. Internationalization factors, availability of financial aid, faculty reputation, the quality of the university, ranking of programs, affordability, and institutional characteristics were reported as influencers of the final selection of the institution.

Chen (2008) noted that internationalization factors like quality, reputation, and environment and location of the institutions were ranked ahead of other factors. Some graduate students reported that availability of financial aid was specifically important to them before they could focus on other factors. From the interviews, Chen also highlighted that graduate students were guided by choice of program first before considering other factors. The decision making between graduate students in professional programs compared to research programs was slightly different, with students in professional programs putting more emphasis on cost-related factors. Graduate students in research programs considered their research interests and recommendations from professors. For undergraduate students, family and what high school the respondents attended influenced the decision in a unique way. Most undergraduate respondents stated that parents and family were part of or even made the decision for them to study abroad. For some students, this decision was made early on, which influenced the parents' decision of in which primary and secondary institution to enroll their child.

Some Canadian students also decided to study abroad and to pursue a college degree elsewhere. McCarthy, Sen, and Fox Garrity (2012) looked for the factors influencing Canadian students' choice to study in the USA. A convenience sample of 411 students reported through a survey their reasons to study outside of Canada, the

factors influencing their choice to study in the USA, and what was most important when selecting an institution in the USA. Strict competitive entry requirements in Canada was reported by most students as an important reason to study outside of the country. Inability to be placed in their course of interest, the unavailability of the course, and enhancement of employment prospects also were mentioned as somewhat important to very important. In the reasons for selecting the USA, students reported recognition of qualifications at home as most important, followed by geographical proximity, the ability to commute, and the value of degree in job market. Having the desired program of study, the location, having favorable scheduling options, and the quality of education were stated as most important in selecting an institution in the USA.

In another study using push-and-pull factors, Tan (2015) used the concept to investigate why international students study abroad. With a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, the authors retrieved eight interviews and 183 survey responses from a convenience sample of international students. From the surveys, the author concluded that factors such as a strong student services support, having diversity on campus, an easy application process, and a variety of subject choices are more important than family recommendations, having family at the location, affordable tuition, scholarship and financial aid opportunities, influence from recruiters, and recruiting materials. The author named a strong institutional support system and application process as the most significant factors. A significant difference was reported between men and women, with men caring more about family recommendations. Students who selected a private institution reported the importance of an easier application process and wider variety of academic programs as more important compared to students who

selected a public institution. From the interviews, Tan heard reasons like better career prospects, poor education at home, proximity to friends, and ease of admission, which he turned into themes regarding why students choose a college abroad. He named better quality education, benefits of having a foreign degree, lifestyle, family, media, friends, language, easy application processes, and program options as themes, which were divided in to perception, influence, and opportunity.

Like Tan (2015), Daily, Farewell, and Kumar (2010) conducted a survey with 42 international students focusing on which factors contributed to international students' college choice decision. They found through a convenience sample that opportunities for post-graduation employment, financial aid availability, and reputation were most important. While significantly less important, other factors the students mentioned were information available, accreditation, tuition costs, cost of living, and safety. Daily et al. reported that they found a significant difference in responses between male and female students on the importance of tuition; females put more emphasis on the importance of tuition amount than males.

Adding the importance of information sources to her study, Lee (2008) investigated international students selecting institutions in the US. The author reported from her case study that about 51% of all international students rely on the internet, brochures, and advertisements for information about the institution; 36% on friends; 14% on counselors or teachers; and 13% on family members who studied abroad. This would mean that the information on which students establish their list of potential institutions is largely dependent on online information, brochures, and advertisements. Lee also found that a good college reputation is the main reason for institution selection, followed by

assistantship offerings, financial assistance, and special educational programs. Her qualitative study confirmed the importance of institutional reputation, and she noted that East Asian students rely more on college ranking. Comparing other groups, males relied more on friends, and more males were not accepted by their first choice. Students from developing countries rely more on friends; developed countries use more exchange programs; and more students from East Asia and Canada use the internet, brochures, and advertisements in making their choice. From the open-ended questions, Lee found that some students choose a particular institution because friends, family, or spouses were already studying there. One student reported that the visa process and safety issues were a major deterrent for her. Additionally, some students experienced unmet expectations and disappointments once enrolled, where students with more contacts and financial means to visit the location first did not have these negative experiences.

Investigating international student choice for students who might select institutions in Australia, Kemp, Madden, and Simpson (1998) conducted a survey study among 746 students from Indonesia and Taiwan. The main initial reasons for studying abroad mentioned by the students were the superiority of overseas courses and the learning of Western culture. Difficulty entering domestic universities, courses not being available in one's home country, and intention to migrate were listed but by only about half of the students. The largest group wanted to study in the USA, with Australia being the second destination of choice overall. The majority of Indonesian students named Australia as their preference over the USA. In comparing the study options of the USA, Australia, and the rest of the world, the respondents listed reputation, government control, information available, friends and friends at the destination, geographical proximity, safe

environment, racial discrimination, and university enrollment as significant factors. Reputation, information availability, family and friends in country, and university enrollment gave the USA an edge over Australia. Australia was preferred over the USA on the factors of government administration of university, geographical proximity, and safety of the environment. Students also selected Australia over anywhere else in the world due to geographical proximity, safe environment, and university enrollment; but students were deterred due to potential racial discrimination in Australia.

Focusing on a more specific group, Bodycott (2009) studied push-and-pull factors for Chinese students and their parents. The author used a survey and a small focus group and investigated information sources about study abroad destinations, as well as factors influencing the decision to study abroad. Both parents and students viewed educational fairs and the recommendations of friends and family as the most important sources of information. Students reported the internet as more important than recommendations from their parents, and this source was of lesser importance than the fairs and information from references. Parents and students highlighted different factors that pushed the student to pursue education outside of China. Higher quality of education and international experience pushed the students to go abroad. Parents reported inadequate supply of universities, improved employment opportunities, immigration prospects, and higher quality education as the most important push factors. In regard to the pull factors, parents and students both rated support services, range of program availability, language and academic support, onsite accommodations, relatives in the area, and an English-speaking environment as important. Students also emphasized facilities and international education experiences in their review of pull factors. Employment prospects, migration

possibilities, proximity to home, scholarships, and cost were aspects illuminated as important by parents.

Another specific group was investigated by Maringe and Carter (2007). The authors studied why African students come to study in the United Kingdom (UK). Using “...a multi methodological and multi-site approach” (p. 463), they interviewed 28 African students from two universities through four focus groups. Maringe and Carter discovered that, for some strong push factors for country selection, these students mentioned the local economy, political environment, and lack of opportunities in their home countries. Few higher education options at home also were mentioned. Much in line with these results, McMahon (1992) mentioned previously from an analysis of country-level statistics that the strength of a country’s economy is a negative indicator of the number of students who pursue education abroad. Educational opportunities at home also had a negative influence, while global trade and national emphasis on education had a positive influence on students exploring education outside their own borders. With economic difficulties in some African countries and a lack of educational opportunities, the interviewed students decided to attempt earning a degree abroad (Maringe & Carter). Pull factors for country selection listed by the respondents were recognition of qualification earned in the UK, a simple application, quality of education, opportunity to work, opportunities for graduate work, and a safe environment. Some students specifically mentioned that they were turned off by the application and visa process in the USA and, therefore, selected the UK; in addition, the environment in the UK was perceived as safer than the USA.

In selecting a university and course of study, Maringe and Carter (2007) reported that friend and teacher recommendations, information found online, informal agencies, embassies, families, joint ventures, and even colleagues had an influence on the students' decision making. The authors reported that, if students were already in the country, their selection process was similar to that of domestic students. Most respondents reported, though, that the choice of institution was less important than the decision about coming to the UK. Course choice, prestige, course profiles, and relevance of course for job market were mentioned as important before interest in the subject. Some students reported ambitions beyond gaining employment and discussed future leadership plans. The interviewed African students also mentioned fears that could have pushed them away from their study pursuits. Many named financial risks, costs, and fear of not being able to meet course requirements as potential barriers to their academic success. Outside of regular costs, opportunity costs of not working or moving up in a position back home brought anxiety to some of the students. The fear of not meeting course requirements stemmed from the lower quality secondary education they received at home and the perceived starting gaps in knowledge of information teachers assumed students possessed. Frequent changes in visa requirements and uncertainty in regard to visa related permissions was another fear with which students lived. Maringe and Carter stated that institutional administrators could prevent much of the fear and anxiety by sharing more information about the institution, visa requirements, and costs.

Looking for general factors that influence international students to select an institution of higher education in the UK, Hemsley-Brown (2013) conducted a case study of a business school using secondary data. She analyzed applications and personal

statements of 60 international students. The results showed that word-of-mouth prompted the most applications, followed by the British Council. The website, newspaper magazines, and agencies were other sources that gave students a reason to apply. Reputation and excellence, location and environment, teaching, learning, and employment were separately mentioned in students' personal statements as being important to them. These aspects influenced their decision to select the UK as their destination of choice and to enroll at the business school where the study was conducted. From a more marketing perspective, Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) studied students' perceptions of educational opportunities in the UK. From their survey they found that educational standards and recognition of qualification are the most important factors to students. Ease of university and country admission was ranked second, followed by ease of employment during and after the course of study; finally, cost of living, accommodations, safety, and culture were ranked fourth most important. Students reported in the survey that lowering tuition, providing more scholarships, providing better services, and having more facilities were ways in which they advised British universities to improve.

Perhaps a less popular destination for overseas studies compared to the UK, USA, or Australia, is Mexico. Cantwell, Luca, and Lee (2008) studied students pursuing educational goals in Mexico. Using an online survey, the authors collected data from 312 international students from North America, Europe, and Latin America. In comparing the different international students, the decision to select Mexico as a study destination differed among the groups. North American students reported significantly higher results on selecting Mexico due to its cost of higher education. European students were

significantly more likely to report diversity as a reason, and they were more likely to have applied to different schools outside of Mexico. They were significantly less likely to pursue a degree in Mexico. Ranking and research opportunities were significantly mentioned more often by students from Latin American countries. In reporting expectations from international students coming from different geographical areas, the authors noted that North American students were more likely to plan to complete their degree at home, further their education at home, and look for work in their home country. European students were more likely to look for jobs outside their home countries and were more likely to complete their degree in their home country. Latin American students reported significantly higher scores on the items of completing their degree at a Mexican institution and furthering their education in Mexico. While Mexico is not a popular destination, what attracts students to the region aligns with other regions: reputation, diversity, costs, and research opportunities are factors mentioned in many other studies as well.

Malaysia, like Mexico, is perhaps not a destination many Western students would consider popular. Some authors, however, investigated student college choice at institutions in Malaysia. Padlee, Kamaruddin, and Baharun (2010) conducted a survey study in which they asked international students about their choice to join private Malaysian institutions. With 656 respondents, Padlee et al. found seven factors influencing students' choice of their destination. Quality of learning environment; decision influencers like family, friends, and the internet; customer focus like campus life, culture, regulations, and language learning; cost of education; facilities; socialization like possibilities of part-time jobs; and location were important. The authors also found

that quality of education was more important to African and Middle Eastern students compared to other students, decision influencers were more important to Middle Eastern students, customer focus was important to all students, cost was most important to Southeast Asian students, facilities were most important to African and other Asian students, socialization was important to Southeast Asian students, and location was significantly more important to African students than to the others.

Another study in Malaysia regarding international student choice was conducted by Pyvis and Chapman (2007). The authors reported, in their case study of an international campus in Malaysia, that an international program was highly valued by both Malaysian and international students. For Malaysian students, international campuses are attractive because corporations value students who experienced an international education. Additionally, these students viewed work opportunities offered in the program of study at some of these corporations as a major benefit. Many international students from other Asian countries reported in their interviews that the international study aspect would lead to self-transformation and growth. These students also selected an institution with a Western education and qualifications. The authors argued that the international aspect of the institution ultimately was the main choice factor. Secondary factors that influenced the students' program and institutional choice included cost, personal interest, career path, learning histories, reputation, accreditation, course content, and advice from references like family and friends. Some of the students named proximity of the campus to their homes as a factor that influenced their decision making. Moving from Malaysia to Korea, Korean students described their perspective on Korean, Chinese, and Western educational institutions.

Studying the student mobility of Korean students, Park (2009) used two surveys in different high school programs. Of the 1,800 surveys, 1,359 were used for the analysis of which factors drive students to leave Korea and which factors attract students to different countries. The push factors, or driving force factors as Park called them, showed dissatisfaction with domestic education which led students to consider the options abroad. Low quality of college education; excessive need for private tutoring; staunch competition for college entrance; and other factors like uncertain job prospects, questionable school practices, and unfavorable college environment were mentioned as the main drivers for students to seek education in a foreign country. The directional force factors, or pull factors, were divided between country image and institutional expectations. Students perceived the USA as a professional, reputable, liberal, competitive, and diverse location to study. China was described as developing, high potential, dangerous, restrictive, and boring. Traditional, prestigious, reputable, attractive, and reliable were words students used to describe the UK. Australia was called welcoming, comfortable, relaxing, fun, and liberal. The top five words to describe Korea itself were stressful, stagnant, boring, repressive, and expensive. As one can notice, the authors showed that students used more positive words in describing foreign countries in regards to higher education. Students reported to know more about the USA and China, than the UK and Australia in regard to higher education.

When asked about educational expectations, student reported to expect curriculum excellence, high reputation, high job opportunities, improved second language proficiency, and creative learning environments from institutions in the USA (Park, 2009). Improving second language proficiency, curriculum excellence, creative learning

environment, high reputation, and reasonable cost of living were mentioned in order when students described institutions in China. The same top three as Chinese colleges, but followed by good quality of facilities and a pleasant campus environment, were the expectations students had about studying in the UK. Higher education in Australia was described as an exciting place to live, improving second language proficiency, a safe environment, comfortable climate and surroundings, and a creative learning environment. Park (2009) pointed out that the students used more academic expectations for the countries they reported on which to have more information, like the USA and China, and more environmental factors when talking about the UK and Australia. In conclusion, Park noted that the positive factors mentioned about foreign universities closely match the dissatisfaction students have with higher education in Korea.

The literature has shown some studies conducted with particularly specific groups. Wilkins (2013) investigated the college choice decision of expatriate children in the United Arab Emirates. While this group cannot lead to broad generalizations, the factors mentioned in the study regarding international college choice remain important. Through a convenience sample of nine schools, Wilkins conducted survey and interview data. The author argued that all students reported to have gone through a similar systematic process, which included information gathering, country evaluation, and institutional evaluation. All students had used the institutional website for information gathering, and many had referred to university prospectuses. Students stated that university rankings and institutional reputations were important to them, and almost all took advice to heart from references like family. Other factors that scored high on importance were university accreditation, cost, and information received during open

days. From the interviews, the author highlighted that the students' home country before they emigrated to the UAE also had an impact on their college choice decision for both country as well as institution. Some students felt drawn to the system with which they grew up and others wanted to return to countries where family resides. These students lived in the UAE and planned to attend colleges in the USA, UK, and Lebanon but also remain in the UAE.

For the students who remained in the UAE, Wilkins et al. (2012) asked students currently enrolled at a UAE institution to report on their college choice factors. In their survey study, Wilkins et al. discovered that country factors draw students to some extent, but it is mostly the convenience factors that convinced students to select a branch campus in the UAE. Through a factor analysis of the responses from the 320 respondents, the authors came up with a convenience factor and a country attraction factor. The convenience factor included aspects like an employer who pays for the student's tuition, friends who attend college there, already having a social life in the UAE, avoiding hassle with taking flights, family in the UAE, avoiding language difficulties, and the possibility of a part-time job. The country attractions included the UAE being a safer place to live, a pleasant country, maintaining close contact with friends and family, being familiar with the culture, interactions with a diverse group of other students, and ease of finding a job in the area after college. The convenience factor explained almost 59% of the variance, whereas country attraction explained a little less than 10%. The authors found significant differences between male and female students, and students from different nationalities, when combining both factors. Pakistani students were most motivated by country attraction and African students showed the lowest scores on both factors. The highest

scoring reason for selecting the UAE overall was that the UAE was considered a safer place, followed by maintaining close contact with family and friends.

Another study regarding international students considering branch campuses was developed by Wilkins and Huisman (2011). Through a questionnaire given to 160 students, the authors asked international students about their reasons for selecting a destination and their willingness to study at a branch campus. Wilkins and Huisman ran a factor analysis on the reported survey results and developed five factors determining international student choice. The factors were named quality, convenience, development of language skills, value for money, and an attractive place to live and work. Convenience referred to the ease of application, but also cost of tuition, cost of living, accommodations, and parental influence. Quality of education and reputation were named under quality; and value for money referred to a cost benefit analysis of fees, employment opportunities, and value for money. Together the model explained 63.91% of the variance, with quality taking 26.71%, convenience just over 14%, language skills just over 9%, value for money at 7.7%, and attractive place to live and work at 6%. Female students reported significantly higher results on the quality and convenience factors. Results on those two factors also differed between levels of study. The different nationalities reported some differences in importance of quality, and Indian students listed language skills as significantly less important compared to other students. Most students reported that they would not consider a branch campus. While female students were significantly even less positive about a branch campus compared to male students, the majority of male students also were not interested. Grouping students by education level or nationality did not make a difference, and no group reported a majority of

students willing to study at a branch campus.

While this study focused on international students seeking to study at an institution in the USA, numerous Western students study abroad. Salisbury, Umback, Paulsen, and Pascarella (2009) focused on common factors among American students who study abroad. Through the analysis of national survey data, the authors found factors that positively contribute to the students' intent to study abroad, and some that negatively impact the possibility. Parental education, attitude toward literacy, openness to diversity, a major in social sciences or an undecided major, diverse interactions, and involvement in co-curriculum have a significant positive influence on the intent to study abroad. Receiving federal grants, being male, identifying as Asian Pacific Islander, high school involvement, going to a research institution, enrolling at a regional university, and attending community college have significant negative influences. Additionally, starting college with little financial capital and coming from a lower social economic class also have a negative impact. These factors all show demographic data, which correlates to students studying abroad.

Findlay, King, Smith, Geddes, and Skeldon (2011) and Brooks and Waters (2009) looked into reasons for British students to study abroad. Through their survey, Findlay et al. discovered that students chose to study outside the UK because they were determined to attend a world-class university and they saw study abroad as a unique adventure. A smaller percentage of students also reported that they viewed studying abroad as their first step toward an international career, felt there were limited course places available in the UK, and student fees in the UK were high. Additionally, some students reported being encouraged by family to take this opportunity. Brooks and Waters, as well as

Findlay et al., added to these reasons that some students described in their interviews studying abroad as a second chance to be accepted to a high ranked university. Other individual students reported several reasons for studying abroad. Some stated that strong institutional and student support was important to them (Brooks & Waters). One student mentioned that he felt some US institutions evaluated the student more completely instead of considering only grades (Findlay et al.). Another student added that setting oneself apart from competition in the job market was her reason to study abroad. The student was under the impression studying abroad would be valued by potential employees after graduation. Two students who were studying in Australia reported that it was the best place for their major, and one student loved the environment. While the pursuit of a second chance is not a commonly found reason in the literature, the other reasons why Western students study abroad referred to job prospects, cost, location, environment, and subject interest, which is similar to all other international students.

Several authors (Bodycott, 2009; Daily et al., 2010; Kemp et al., 1998; Lee, 2008; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Wilkins, 2013) mentioned the importance of the availability of information in international students' college choice decision, but some authors focused on information sources specifically. While international students might know which factors are important to them, why they have selected a country, and which aspects they are searching for in an institution, international students are unlikely to select an institution if they do not have information about this college.

Information Sources

Studying the college choice of Chinese students and the impact of their cultural values, Chung, Holdsworth, Li, and Fam (2009) argued, based on the results of their

questionnaire responses received from 319 Chinese students, that the students' choice to study in New Zealand related to their stated Confucius values. As preferred sources of communication influencing their university choice, the students ranked education fairs, advertised messages from sponsoring organizations, university open days, agents, and university web sites as most important. Chung et al. named scholarships as the most important source of information, as it connects to the Chinese cultural value of education and the prestige of scholars in society.

The literature also has shown studies that focus only on information sources and the influence of these sources on the students' college choice. Through a survey study of 803 Thai students across 28 Australian institutions, Pimpa (2003) studied the influence of peers and agents on international student decision making. The author found that information from agents has the strongest influence on the students' choice for international education. The information provided by agents is the most influential when it comes to selecting country, city, courses, and institution. In deciding to study abroad, competition among peers, like friends or colleagues improving their education by studying abroad, was the only factor stronger than information given by agents. Additionally, Pimpa showed that information shared by peers has a significantly higher influence on undergraduate students compared to other levels.

Centering on the marketing tools and how important institutional factors are for marketing, Ivy (2001) compared institutions in South Africa with the ones in the United Kingdom. With a self-completion postal questionnaire, the author received information from 81 responses from old UK institutions, 50 responses from new ones, 25 responses from universities in South Africa, and 18 from Technikons. To the respondents from all

institutions, recruiters visiting schools was reported as important. Respondents from old UK institutions ranked academic reputation, research output, open days on campus, school career counselors, reputation of faculty and staff, accreditation, and top quality teaching high as effective marketing tools. Respondents from the new UK institutions listed career fairs, school career counselors, and accreditation as very effective. Contact with career counselors was the only marketing tool named as highly efficient, besides recruiters, by the respondents who worked for the South African University. The representative from the South African Technikon recorded offering a broad range of courses, academic reputation, offering part-time tuition, close links to industry, and availability of scholarships and bursaries as important. The author grouped these factors for each university and concluded that old UK institution administrators tried to highlight their quality, reputation, and research output; the officials of new UK institutions emphasized their selling more by focusing on promotional activities; the staff of South African Technikon targeted fee conscious students; and the South African university marketers showed no clear marketing strategy.

If institution officials use certain marketing strategies to attract students and to promote the institution, they need to ensure the information aligns with the information students want to receive. Gatfield, Barker, and Graham (1999) studied college advertising materials by using content analysis of international student guides. The authors studied the materials of all public Australian universities and two private schools and sorted these materials based on elements deemed important by students. The authors found substantial gaps in information communicated and the aspects on which students desired information. The aspect of recognition, which included aspects like associations

with government, industry, and potential employers, often was missing from the college materials. Few institutions provided information on all aspects, including academic instruction, campus life, guidance such as pre-enrollment advice, and recognition.

While Gatfield et al. (1999) gave different factors influencing international student college choice and numerous reasons why international students select a particular destination and institution, there is no particular order to the factors. Some authors found similar factors, while others found unique reasons regarding international student choice. In order to determine which international students select an institution of higher education, I adjusted a domestic student choice model in which the decision-making factors of students can be outlined in a specific order.

In this chapter, I reviewed a selection of the literature on internationalization, college choice, and international college choice. Institutions tend to desire to host international students if this fits with their strategic mission on internationalization. Hosting international students can come with major benefits to the institution if administrators manage this approach well. The factors reported as important to domestic students when selecting a college are similar to those reported by international students. Authors who investigated international students' choice mentioned race and socio-economic status to a lesser extent compared to domestic student college choice, and perceptions of the country and visa application were important only to the international student's decision making.

Most of the articles reviewed applied quantitative methods, and there was not always consistency among reported factors that influenced international student decision making. Additionally, there is no agreement on a conceptual framework that would

provide insight into the different stages of international students' decision making. In order to gain insight into why and how international students make the college choice decision, this study needs to investigate the college choice process qualitatively. Using an adjusted comprehensive model for college choice, I attempted to gain insight into the international students' college choice decision making and to test how push-and-pull factors influence the decision.

Conceptual Model

To make the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) three-stage model of college choice more specific to international students, I combined the idea of push-and-pull factors into the model (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). During the *Predisposition*, *Search*, and *Choice* stages, international students could encounter these push-and-pull factors. Some predisposition factors might push a student to seek education abroad, pull factors might draw students to certain institutions during the search stage, and during the choice stage an easy application process might pull the student toward a certain institution.

In addition to the push-and-pull factors, I used the three-stage model by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) twice in order to stage out two important decisions international students make. First, students select the country in which they want to study, and then students select an institution at which they want to study. The model, therefore, had six different stages, all further elaborated by dividing the factors within the stages between push-and-pull factors. The push factors are negative factors that push the student from one's current situation toward the final decision, like unstable economy in the host country or no institution available for a specific major. Pull factors are positive factors that attract the student from their current situation toward a final decision, like a highly

regarded educational system or a large international population at an institution. Within this new six-stage model, the first stage is the *predisposition* stage for country selection in which students' predisposition factors, like wealth and parental education, might push or pull the student to study abroad in a specific country. The second stage is the *search* stage for country, in which the student experience factors like information from school counselors, which leads to the compilation of a list of potential countries toward which the student feels pulled or pushed. The third stage of country selection is the *choice stage* in which push-and-pull factors determine the final choice. Examples of these factors might be the perceived ease of acquiring a visa or global recognition of a foreign degree versus a local degree. The fourth stage would be the first stage of the institution choice, which deals with *predisposition* factors regarding institutional selection. Push-and-pull factors during this stage attract or deter a student from selecting certain types of institutions; e.g., a student might be deterred from community colleges due to predisposition factors like university-educated parents. Wealth and financial ability might increase the attraction of private institutions. The fifth stage would include the *search* stage in regard to institutions. During this stage, push-and-pull factors influence the listing of potential acceptable institutions. Here, scholarship offerings, ranking, and location are examples of factors that could attract or deter a student. The final stage is the *choice* stage for the institution in the selected host country. Certain push-and-pull factors determine the final single university selection out of all possible institutions. Examples could be pull factors like a strong engineering program or a specific faculty member, or push factors like the lack of students from the same nationality at other institutions.

While the three stages for each choice follow a linear process, the two separate choices can precede one another. An international student can first go through the stages of selecting a studying destination before narrowing down potential institutions, but one also can select a well-known institution and select a destination based on campus locations. Additionally, most factors can give a positive or negative influence on students' college choice decision; e.g., while some students prefer a close location to their hometown, other students might prefer a location as far from their parents as possible. Location can, therefore, attract a student if the institution is geographically desirable; or a location can deter a student from applying, if the college is too far or too close to home. To give direction to these influencing factors, I used the push-and-pull designation described by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) to designate if a factor has a positive or negative influence on a student's decision. Incorporating push-and-pull factors into the two times three-stage model of college choice assigned direction to the factors encountered during each stage. The direction showed that a factor either encouraged students to pursue education in a specific country at a specific institution, or that a student's current situation discouraged pursuing education in a specific country or a specific institution. Besides direction, the factors within the three-stage model could be specified to what extent they influence the decision to study abroad, to study in the USA, or to study at a specific institution. By coding what part of decision is influenced by each specific factor at the three different stages, the model can be narrowed. The adjusted Hossler and Gallagher model (1987) also gives a basic chronological order to factors like the ones mentioned by Lee (2008); Daily et al. (2010); Tan (2015); Wilkins and Huisman (2011); and Padlee et al. (2010). This order would be important if institutions want to

adopt recruitment strategies and interventions, as it determines at what stage and how a factor influences the college choice decision. Appendix D contains a visual representation of the model.

Criticisms of the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) three-stage model of college choice are that the model does not account for varying levels of access (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001; Callender & Jackson, 2008; Heller, 1997, 1999; Hossler, 2000; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; Kern, 2000; Kim, 2004; McDonough, 1997; McDonough, Antonio, Walpole, & Perez, 1998; Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Perna & Titus, 2004; Reay et al., 2001; Teranishi & others, 2004). Numerous authors have commented that especially financial concerns and socio-economic status have additional influence on college choice, which the Hossler and Gallagher model does not take into account. While cost arises as a factor that international students take into consideration, unequal access based on financial means is less applicable when international students study in the USA. All international students must show a minimum level of financial ability in order to study in the USA (Farrell, 2015; WKU, 2016b). Therefore, I argue that international students currently in US are not exceptionally influenced by a disadvantaged financial position. The three-stage model, therefore, did not need to put additional emphasis on the influence of socio-economic status for international students currently in the USA.

There is no comprehensive conceptual model to provide insight into international students' college choice decision making. I therefore tested the adjusted version of the three-stage model by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) expanded to include the country selection and push-and-pull factors, which can be found in Appendix D. In doing this

qualitatively, I hoped to gain insight in the international students' college choice decision making and shed light on why and how students select an institution of higher education.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain insight into the stages of college choice for international students by testing an expansion of the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) theoretical model that adds the push-and-pull factors related to the decision to study internationally. I used research questions to investigate the decision making within the different stages.

RQ1: Why do international students choose to study at a regional university in the United States?

RQ1a: How do *predisposition* factors influence an international student's decision to study at a regional university in the USA?

RQ1b: How do *search* factors influence an international student's decision to study at a regional university in the USA?

RQ1c: How do *choice* factors influence an international student's decision to study at a regional university in the USA?

There seems to be limited agreement on a conceptual framework for international student college choice and how it might differ from a conceptual model used to organize domestic students' college choice experiences. In order to better understand the international student college choice process, a comprehensive conceptual framework would benefit the existing literature. Additionally, a limited number of studies have qualitatively investigated the international student choice process of students who selected a regional university in the USA.

Why Qualitative Research

Qualitative methods are ideal to study the way humans assign meaning to experiences (Creswell, 2007). The focus of this study was the human experience of choosing a college, particularly when the student chooses to study internationally. I used qualitative research techniques to investigate international student college choice. College student decision making related to choice has been studied quantitatively extensively, as indicated in Chapter II of this dissertation. My interest laid in adding to the quantitative perspective, the qualitative details that aid in understanding why students choose the colleges they choose. As such, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain insight into the stages of college choice for international students by testing an expansion of the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) theoretical model that adds the push-and-pull factors related to the decision to study internationally.

Research Questions

In a pursuit to better understand the college choice experiences of international students, I used research questions to investigate the decision making within the different stages. The research questions were:

RQ1: Why do international students choose to study at a regional university in the United States?

RQ1a: How do *predisposition* factors influence an international student's decision to study at a regional university in the USA?

RQ1b: How do *search* factors influence an international student's decision to study at a regional university in the USA?

RQ1c: How do *choice* factors influence an international student's decision to

study at a regional university in the USA?

While most university administrators, leaders, and faculty members are keenly interested in why their college is chosen or how their college might be most attractive, understanding college choice requires that researchers take a broader view of the choice decision. In Bergerson's (2009) comprehensive review of college choice literature, she reminded readers that: "...the present focus on the needs of the institution (and the last stage of the choice process) may lead institutions to lose sight of students in the first two step of the process" (p. xiii). Understanding search and predisposition decision making by students may facilitate a better fit between the individual and the institution, and may guide the institution in developing an infrastructure that is attractive to international students who are most likely to be successful at a particular college. All of this might be done without printing a recruitment brochure. The focus of this study was on college choice broadly, as opposed to college recruitment.

Paradigm

In this study, I drew on case study design to answer the research questions. I primarily used the work of Yin (1994), who argued that case study research is appropriate when the researcher is interested in (a) how and why questions, (b) the researcher does not have control over behavioral events, and (c) the focus is on contemporary events. Additionally, case studies can address situations in which there are more variables of interest than data points, the design relies on multiple sources of evidence, and theoretical propositions guide the data collection.

When investigating international student choice, I wanted to answer why international students select a certain institution. The literature has shown that students

reported a variety of factors important to them in their selection, but I wanted to know why an institution was selected and why some factors were given more weight in the decision. I also was interested in gaining insight into how different factors influenced the decision-making process of the students; e.g., how does cost influence the decision making during the search stage and how does it influence the final choice.

Yin (1994) stated that case study research is appropriate when the researcher has limited control over events. Outside of a laboratory experiment, different variables and outside factors cannot be held consistent in the real world. In a case study, the researcher does not have control over different factors, cannot hold one variable consistent while manipulating another, and cannot guarantee the outside environment did not influence the subject of the study. In this study, the student decision making happened in the past, and the different factors could not be manipulated anymore. The information regarding colleges had been gathered and synthesized, and the decision had been made. I studied the experiences of the decision making reported by students after the fact, now that they had enrolled at an institution.

Besides studying a phenomenon that could not be influenced, the event of the decision making did not exist so far in the past that I could not ask the students about it. The decision only had been recently made and the student remained in the process of assigning meaning to the decision and its consequences. As I asked the decision makers about the experiences surrounding the decisions, the events could be called contemporary as opposed to historic. Yin (1994) argued that contemporary events are better studied using a case study design, in which interviews can be combined with document analysis,

compared to a historic analysis in which the researcher would search for documents reporting on the event of interest.

Yin (1994) also discussed that case studies can handle studies in which the context and the phenomenon cannot clearly be separated and are both important. International student choice is a complex and multivariable process. The decision to enroll at an institution is preceded by the decision to study abroad, collecting information, searching for options, weighing options, conversations with friends and family, and many other aspects. Emotions, rational thought, information processing, experiences, and assigned meaning are part of the decision-making process. It was, therefore, difficult to establish where the context influenced the decision-making process and where it did not. Case study design gave me the opportunity to study both the phenomenon as well as the context. Another advantage of case study was the use of multiple data sources.

Case studies use multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 1994), use a theoretical framework to guide the analysis, and can deal with many different variables without having an abundance of different data points. Through multiple sources of evidence, I studied international student college choice. Interviews provided a rich description of the decision-making experience, while documents provided a source for triangulation and verification of reported information; e.g., if a student reported that a scholarship offer influenced her decision to study at a particular institution, the scholarship offer letter could verify the information reported. Archival records could be consulted and physical artifacts could be studied if students referred to specific institutional characteristics that drew them to the university. While direct observations are allowed in the case study design, these were not applicable to this study, as the decision was made in the past.

Through a theoretical framework, case study inquiry can investigate to what extent the case studied aligns with the theory on student choice and where cases contradict the theory (Yin, 1994). As part of the purpose of this study was to test a conceptual framework, case study design was the ideal study method. The data were collected with the theoretical propositions of the framework in mind. Additionally, the collected data about the case were compared with the developed framework, and I noted where the cases follow the model and where student decision-making experiences differed from the framework.

Yin (1994), as well as Stake (1995), argued that cases within a case study have to be bounded in order for a researcher to investigate the case. These boundaries force the researcher to define what aspects will be studied and which will not be included, as the lines between the phenomenon and context often are blurred. Stake stated that the cases from which data are gathered have a *self*, which likely has a purpose and parts. A person or program fits the definition of a case, but events and processes do not fit well.

International student choice is a process performed by a student based on personal reasons, information received, predisposition factors, and many other variables. Stake argued that a process itself is hard to measure; but by studying cases involved in the process, knowledge can be gained about the process. Using case study to investigate international student choice was done by studying the case of an institution and its students in order to find out how these students experienced the process of decision making. Case studies in which subunits are given attention are described as embedded cases (Yin, 1994). As individual students were investigated to gain knowledge about their decision-making process, I used an embedded case study design. A description of

these subunits and their experiences give readers insight into why students were attending the institution and how different factors impacted their decision. The boundaries in this study were, therefore, set around one mid-size regional university, focused on its students, and investigated the college choice decision-making process of these subunits.

Propositions

Why students decided to attend a specific institution, how the college choice settled on a specific institution, how certain students experienced the decision-making process, how predisposition factors played into the decision making, how students selected a study destination, and how students narrowed down a list of potential institutions to a single one might be answered through propositions. Similar to hypotheses in quantitative studies (like experimental design), propositions give potential answers to one's stated questions and, therefore, direct the researcher where to look for evidence to confirm or reject the stated proposition (Yin, 1994). A proposition for the stated research questions could be that a favorable offer was made to the student, which confirmed aspects that were important to the student, like affordability. Using this proposition, the researcher could look for evidence if the strategy was perceived favorable and if it aided in the student's decision making. Another proposition could be that similar factors were perceived different by different students and, therefore, had a different influence on students' college choice in different cases; e.g., location could attract a student due to its proximity to home or deter a student due to its proximity to home. One will have to compare different cases to pursue this proposition.

To guide the initial data collection for this study, I proposed the following propositions that form preliminary answers to the research questions and guided my

search. It is important to note that these propositions and the data collection changed with additional information coming available through interviews or document analysis.

1. Students chose a specific mid-size regional institution because this institution offered factors most important to them.
2. Predisposition factors pushed the student to pursue education abroad.
3. Search factors pulled the student to pursue education in a Western country.
4. Choice factors pulled the student to pursue education in the USA.
5. Predisposition factors pulled the student to pursue education at a mid-size regional university.
6. Search factors pushed the student away from larger research institutions.
7. Choice factors pulled the student to study at WKU.

Factors mentioned in the literature regarding international student college choice are mentioned in Table 3 (Appendix C). These factors could serve as predisposition, search, or choice factors depending on their ability to initially enable the student, aid the student in assembling a potential list, or narrow down a potential list to one choice. If the factor had a positive influence on students selecting a country and specific institution, they could be designated as pull factors. These factors also could have a push effect when they have a negative influence on the decision, making the student move away from a particular country or institution.

Setting

The study was a case study of Western Kentucky University (WKU), a four-year public institution, bounded around their international students and the students' decision to study at that specific institution. WKU was founded in 1906 and is located in Bowling

Green, the third largest city in the state of Kentucky. With around 20,000 students (17,452 undergraduate students and 2,719 graduate students), WKU could be considered a mid-size university (WKU, 2015). About 1,400 international students enrolled at WKU in 2014, with Saudi Arabia, China, and Brazil representing the largest international student populations.

At the time of this study, WKU offered a wide variety of majors, minors, and graduate programs, and most of these programs accepted international students. Additionally, there were many offices to support the internationalization mission, like an international student office, an international enrollment management, a study abroad office, an office of international programs, an office for scholar development, a Confucius Institute, and a Chinese Flagship program. WKU also houses numerous student organizations, which can bring a strong support network for incoming students. The university offers different paths to admissions, including a pathways program in which students with inadmissible scores can work on improving their grade point average (WKU, 2016c). As proof of fulfillment of the English language requirement, the institution accepts TOEFL scores, IELTS scores, or completion of an approved intensive English program. One of the English Language programs, English as a Second Language International (ESLI), is housed on WKU's campus.

University officials advertised that WKU is a “leading American university with international reach” (WKU, 2016a, about WKU, para. 2), which shows an initial indication that internationalization is important to these administrators. WKU administrators, as well as members of the on-campus English language program, attempt to attract students to study at WKU. The WKU website shows that recruiters advertise

the countries, which they will visit, and that they can provide students with information on location (WKU, 2016d). International recruitment and increasing the number of international students on campus is part of the WKU's strategic plan (WKU, 2016e). Additionally, WKU is committed to increasing the number of international partnerships. As part of the same strategic plan, WKU recently built a new \$22 million dollar honors college/international building to host the international programs and the WKU honors college (Sullivan, 2015).

Participants/Sampling

In this case study, the unit of analysis was the institution and the international students at WKU who were embedded in the case. A breakdown of the top foreign countries with the largest representation of students at WKU can be found in Table 1 (Appendix A). As mentioned, Yin (1994) described embedded cases as case studies in which subunits are given attention. International students were investigated and their college choice experience was studied. The studied international students were examples of students who selected WKU as their college of choice. These students were, therefore, unique in their experience. After obtaining knowledge from the international students regarding their college choice, these embedded units were compared to the developed theory, and conclusions about the institution were drawn.

Yin (1994) suggested that case participants should be selected similar to the selection of experiment participants. Although the researcher did not look for statistical generalizations or representative sampling units, Yin argued that a researcher should be looking for *analytic generalizations* in which the empirical results of a case or subunit are compared to a proposed theory. When the case matches the theory, *replication* can be

claimed. The international students included in this case study were selected as they decided to enroll and attend WKU. The selected students were studied regarding their college choice motivations, which were compared to the developed modification of the Hossler and Gallagher (1984) three-stage model of college choice in order to determine how they matched or deviated from the theory.

The subunits, or international students of this case, were distinguished from other students at WKU, as they were all international students. These international students were unique and, likewise, had unique experiences. They all had chosen to study abroad in the US and at WKU and, therefore, had a unique connection to the topic of international student college choice at this particular institution. Through purposeful sampling, I selected international students who had this unique connection and with whom I had familiarity. Due to my history as an international student and my employment in international education on WKU's campus, I knew some international students personally. By selecting these students, I hoped to obtain a thick description of their experience, as these students were comfortable with me due to our relationship. Additionally, I asked these students to recommend other students for interviews in a snowball sampling manner. By selecting students based on recommendations, trust was established with these students, as their friends had participated in this study. I interviewed new students until I reached redundancy of information and saturation of the data. As all students had unique experiences, the analytic generalization was limited to the subunits, or students, included in this case study.

In summary, all selected students came from countries other than the US, all students were classified as international students at the institution, and all students had

selected WKU as the institution at which they wanted to study. Documents and institutional data were requested from the students and the institution to triangulate the data obtained from the students.

Data Collection

Yin (1994) described that there are multiple sources of evidence appropriate to be collected and included in a case study. The evidence I collected existed out of interviews, documents, and institutional data. I collected the descriptions regarding the college choice experience through interviews, which are useful to obtain targeted and insightful information. As I was interested in the college choice experience, I used interviews to ask the selected students targeted questions that probed them to describe this experience. If during these interviews respondents referred to information provided by others, the institution, or from agents which they included in the decision-making process, I attempted to obtain and analyze these documents. Additionally, I asked the selected international students for the documents they received when they were accepted as students, like their acceptance letter and welcome booklets. When describing their experience, students might refer to what they had read on the website or other information obtained. In these cases, I conducted a search of WKU institutional data in an attempt to study the information viewed by the student.

Therefore, with the selected students, interviews were conducted; but documents consulted during their college choice experiences also were included in the data analysis. Before the interview, I provided the students with a short questionnaire to collect demographic information and, at that time, I asked the students to bring their acceptance letters to the interview for inclusion in the document analysis. Besides the institutional

information to which the students referred in their interviews, I searched the institutional website, which showed published strategic plans for internationalization and public information university officials provided about international students. These documents were used to provide background information in describing the case and to triangulate some of the data mentioned in the interviews. Additionally, during the application process international students were asked about how they heard about WKU. I retrieved this internal application data as another source for triangulation.

Documents and institutional records are more stable and less subject to memory retrieval by the respondent. This allows a researcher to use these documents to triangulate and to verify some of the described information from the interview. Documents and records also can contain specific details and additional information to which an interviewee might not have referred. While the college choice phenomenon was the topic of interest, these documents provided insight in the way the institution communicated information that could have affected the college choice decision-making process. The documents included in this study were selected purposefully. If students named documents, which they received from the institution, from a recruiter, administrator, faculty or staff member, I attempted to retrieve the document and included the document in the analysis. Additionally, if a student referred to documents that influenced their college choice decision making, like a university prospectus, this document was included as well. Institutional data were selected to add another layer of triangulation to the interview and document data sources. Case studies are designed to include multiple sources of information in order to describe the case (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 1994). The documents and institutional data provided triangulation and a different

perspective on information sources provided by the institution. The sampling techniques are provided in Table 2 (Appendix F).

As the college choice decision for international students currently at WKU lays in the past, it was not possible for me to conduct direct observations of students in the process of deciding. I had to rely on detailed descriptions and documents in order to identify why and how international students decided to attend WKU. The collection of interviews and documents also came with some weaknesses mentioned by Yin (1994). Interview data rely on retrieval and recall of memory and experiences. This retrieval is subject to biases as people cognitively adjust experiences when they are recalled. Additionally, interviewees might feel motivated to adjust answers and their descriptions to sound more favorable. The descriptions also depend on the interview questions. Poorly constructed questions should, therefore, be avoided. I worked with a methodologist to construct proper questions. Documents can be challenging to use if they are difficult to access or reflect a specific thinking at the time; they have since been adjusted; e.g., some students might have selected WKU for a scholarship offer that has since been cancelled. While these documents might reflect offers in the past, they were important as they affected the students' experiences. Current institutional data and websites might reflect the most updated information, but it was important for the researcher to realize that the information during the time of the students' experience might have been different.

Interview Protocol

To give semi-structure to the interview, I created a list of questions based on the conceptual framework prior to the interview. The questions and protocol were developed

with the help of a methodologist and discussed with professionals in the international education field. In order to answer the research questions and to test the propositions, interview questions needed to be aligned with the research questions. In Table 4 (Appendix E), I showed a crosswalk between interview questions and which research questions they tried to answer. In Appendix G, the interview protocol is added with the additional prompts. These prompts were subject to change depending on how the interview progressed and what was described by the student. As I pursued rich descriptions of experiences from the students, prompts sometimes included the request for examples or stories based on the answers to the questions.

Data Analysis

To interpret the findings of the study, a researcher can use an existing theoretical proposition with which one can compare the cases (Yin, 1994). Using pattern matching, influential aspects on the college choices of the students can be compared to an existing college choice conceptual framework to see in what way the cases match the same framework or differ from it. Yin (1994) stated that there is no dictated way how cases need to either match or differ from the conceptual framework in order for the findings to be interpreted as a match. In researching international student college choice, I hoped to find that the cases used similar or clearly different aspects when making their college choice, like the way students narrowed down their list of potential institutions. The pattern matching also was used to compare cases in the study, as some may have matched the theoretical framework and others may not have matched.

The interview data were analyzed using *a priori* codes based on the conceptual framework. Based on the factors listed in Table 3 (Appendix C) that had been mentioned

by four or more authors, the six stages of the conceptual framework, and the push-and-pull designation mentioned by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), I developed the *a priori* codes listed in Table 5 (Appendix B). For each of the six stages, the 15 factors that were reported in four or more articles could have a push-or-pull effect within the college choice decision making. Additional codes were added when the respondents repeatedly mentioned a common theme in their interviews.

Reliability and Validity

There are different methods of qualitative research validation and evaluation (Creswell, 2007). As I mainly followed the case study design developed by Yin (1994), I used the methods discussed to guide my trustworthiness techniques. Reliability refers to the extent that a study is measuring consistently and that any researcher would get similar results if the study was repeated. Validity is concerned with the extent to which the study is measuring what it wants to measure. In this study I wanted to measure college choice experiences, not the extent to which the student was satisfied with one's choice. Yin described tactics on how reliability and validity might be maximized in case study research and during which phase these tactics should be implemented.

The first type of validity mentioned by Yin (1994) is construct validity. Construct validity refers to the extent to which concepts are being measured by correct operational measures. Yin advised to use multiple sources of evidence, to establish a chain of evidence, and to have key informants review the case study report to ensure construct validity. In the case of this study, multiple sources of evidence were used by finding documents and archival records that could verify key information referred to in the interview. This was part of the data collection. Additionally, I conducted the entire

project so the chain of evidence remained secure. Only the transcription of the interviews was performed by a third party. To ensure construct validity, I verified the transcripts by reading them while listening to the recording of the interview. The transcripts also were sent to the respondents for member checking the written data and to verify that the respondents' experiences were represented as intended. The faculty advisor and methodologist listened to the interviews and discussed the data with the researcher as a way of peer debriefing. Last, the dissertation chair who was involved in the entire research process and three other dissertation committee members read the case study report before publication. These experts were familiar with the topic and the research conducted and were involved in the creation of the interview protocol to ensure maximum validity of the operational measures.

Internal validity refers to the extent to which the case study can establish causal relationships and can exclude other relationships from being the cause of the phenomenon. While the purpose of this study was not to establish causal relations between variables and international student college choice, part of the purpose was to find an explanation why international students chose one particular institution. As suggested by Yin (1994), I used pattern matching to match the description of the international students with established theory. The pattern matching took place in the data analysis stage.

External validity was more difficult to maximize. This type of validity is concerned with the extent to which finding can be generalized to a larger population. In this study, I was looking only for analytic generalizations in which I determined the extent to which this case matched or differed from the theory. These generalizations

could be made only if I could establish replication with multiple subunits (Yin, 1994). As mentioned, I argued replication if my case or subunits matched the theory. If multiple international students seemed to match the theory, I was able to make the analytic generalization that the case of international students from WKU seems to follow the theory.

When it comes to reliability, researchers refer to the extent to which the study can be repeated. Yin (1994) stated that this can be accomplished by using case study protocols to develop a case study data base during data collection. In this chapter, I concluded how the study was conducted. Additionally, I used an interview protocol synthesized from the research questions and propositions, which guided the interview. The interviews and documents collected as a result of a reference during the interview were stored digitally. As case study research is concerned with the descriptions of unique cases and subunits that are uniquely connected to the topic of interest, replication of the results might depend on the selection of cases, but the replication of the study should be achievable by following the aforementioned theory and procedures.

Generalization

In the study of student cases for international recruitment strategies, I encountered similar arguments, stories, and perceptions among different cases. As more and more cases confirmed similar issues that influenced their college choice, I started making *petite generalizations* about the cases in the study, stating that all cases experienced a specific issue (Stake, 1995). When these issues were similar to the theoretical proposition, I could make a *grand generalization* about international student college choice. Yin (1994) rightfully warned that researchers using case study research can make *analytic*

generalizations but not *statistical generalizations*. Analytic generalization speaks to the confirmation of the theory to which cases were compared. Statistical generalization refers to making assumptions about the overall populations based on findings from the cases. Cases were not selected as sampling units that represent the population in order to make statistical generalizations; cases were selected due to their unique connection to the topic of the study.

Role of the Researcher

Stake (1995) made a separation between intrinsic case studies and instrumental case studies. Instrumental case studies refer to the study of a particular case in order to understand something else; e.g., one can study teachers in order to understand a new implemented grading system. An intrinsic case refers to cases in which there is an intrinsic interest. As I had been an international student at WKU, I had an intrinsic interest in understanding the college choice of these students. I investigated WKU as a case, and the students as subunits, in order to understand the college choice stages of these students.

As the researcher, I selected the students included in the case. Due to background as a practitioner in the field of international education at WKU and having been an international student at this campus, I had built professional relationships with numerous students. Based on these relationships, I hoped the selected respondents would be comfortable to participate in the study, to share their experiences, and to describe their decision making in depth.

I conducted the semi-structured interviews. When students were describing their experience and while they gave meaning to their memories, I believe it helped that they

knew I had been an international student. I understood some of the decisions described, as I had experienced these decisions. As a practitioner working in international education, I am also familiar with references to governmental departments, immigration status abbreviations, and different offices on campus. The students were able to describe their experiences without having to explain references to any of these aspects. My familiarity with the developed *a priori* coding also gave me the ability to prompt students regarding aspects that had been mentioned in the literature as influential aspects in the college choice decision making.

If students referred to documents and communication that influenced their decision making, I attempted to include these documents in the study for the purpose of triangulation. Due to my relationships with WKU, I was able to connect with different offices around campus and contact the specific university officials that needed to be consulted in order to retrieve these documents.

The coding of the data benefitted from my experiences and knowledge of the literature. Due to my knowledge of the international education field and literature regarding international college choice, the chances of misunderstanding collected data were minimized. Additionally, in giving meaning to the stories told, I was able to give reasonable explanation to cases that did not match the conceptual framework so that correct themes could be added and reasonable suggestions for future studies given.

I should note that during this study I was aware of my Western lens, and I knew that my experiences as an international student from a Northern European country had some influence on how I perceived college choice. I had not felt a push to leave a politically unstable country, nor did I have to cater to my family regarding my college

choice decision. By acknowledging the cultural difference between me as the researcher and some of the respondents, I tried to remove my biases and cultural interpretations from the results. It should be noted, however, that to some extent I have given meaning and a Western interpretation to the results found in this study.

Ethical Considerations

Qualitative researchers using a case study design might encounter sensitive information or data that could be used against the research subjects by others. I, therefore, had the ethical obligation to disclose any risks to the students before the study, and I tried to ensure confidentiality for the participants to the best of my abilities by removing identifying indicators and allowing interviewees to select pseudonyms by which they were referred in this study. While chosen names might still reflect cultural norms and gender, I explained to students their stories would be described using these names, and the students indicated they wanted the names mentioned in Chapter IV.

In no manner did I have power over participants, their grades, their immigration status, or their future careers. Students with whom I saw a conflict of interest were disqualified from participating in the study, like students enrolled in one of the courses I was teaching. Additionally, any participant was able to withdraw from the study at any moment, and all respondents were allowed to request that their data would not be published.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain insight into the stages of college choice for international students by testing an expansion of the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) theoretical model that adds the push-and-pull factors related to the

decision to study internationally. This study was a single case study of WKU bounded around its international students and their college choice decision. Through a purposeful sample of students who have familiarity with the researcher, international students were selected and interviewed. Documents and institutional data regarding international students and their admission were collected. Both documents and interviews were coded using *a priori* codes, which were developed based on the conceptual framework and reviewed literature. With the data analyzed, analytic generalizations were made regarding WKU and its international students.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

In order to attract international students, it is important to know why students select a particular institution and how they experience the selection process.

Additionally, there seems to be limited agreement among researchers on a conceptual framework for international student college choice and how it might differ from a model used to organize domestic students' college choice experiences.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain insight into the stages of college choice for international students by testing an expansion of the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) theoretical model that adds the push-and-pull factors related to the decision to study internationally. In order to do so, I developed one main research question with three sub-questions that guided the inquiry into international student college choice decision making.

RQ1: Why do international students choose to study at a regional university in the United States?

RQ1a: How do *predisposition* factors influence an international student's decision to study at a regional university in the USA?

RQ1b: How do *search* factors influence an international student's decision to study at a regional university in the USA?

RQ1c: How do *choice* factors influence an international student's decision to study at a regional university in the USA?

To answer these research questions, *a priori* codes were developed from the conceptual framework and the literature, and Nvivo codes were generated from the data. Using pattern matching, the conceptual framework was compared to the cases included in this

study. I can show that the conceptual framework largely matches the cases, but additional factors need to be included to capture the entire case of these international students at a mid-size public institution. Some factors could be specified to better illustrate the nature of the international students' college choice decision making. More details about the influence of push-and pull-factors within the different stages of the decision making could add nuance to the theoretical framework.

All the findings mentioned in this chapter apply to the case of WKU. This study used a single case study design in which I selected subunits that uniquely represent the case of WKU. The reader should, therefore, be mindful when applying the findings from this study to other settings. As data saturation was reached and respondents indicated having experienced similar influences on their decision making, analytic generalizations can be made regarding the fit of the WKU international students with the theoretical framework.

Predisposition Factors

Predisposition factors refer to factors that set the parameters around students' college choice. These factors determine when a country or institution can be considered as an option. Respondents talked about predisposition factors that brought them to select education outside their own country. Other predisposition factors influenced students' ability and decision to consider particular institutions.

Before the interviewed students could start making a list of countries and institutions at which to pursue education, predisposition factors enabled studying abroad and encouraged students to select a certain type of institution. These factors often were the first step in focusing on opportunities abroad without specifying countries or

institutions. The respondents indicated that mainly family, advisors, costs, environment, and quality influenced their decision to study abroad and which type of institution to select. Program of study and the admission process had some influence on which countries students were able to consider as options.

For country selection as well as institutional selection, the predisposition factors pushed and pulled students included in this case study. For some of the interviewed students, family pulled them to study abroad, whereas other family members pushed students away from pursuing education in their home countries. While seemingly contradicting, factors can attract students to certain places, which I indicated as pull; but factors also could discourage students from options, which I indicated as push. To some, a factor like family can be a strong encourager of studying in the US. Family also can discourage students from studying in a particular country or even from pursuing education in one's home country. In both cases, family would be the determining predisposition factor; but for one student, it had a push effect and for the others a pull effect.

Search Factors

After predisposition factors had set the parameters for potential countries and institutions, students started to create lists of acceptable options. This list of potential options were established with the help of search factors. Search factors refer to factors that encourage students to consider certain countries or specific institutions; e.g., the competitive cost of an institution might convince a student to consider to study at this specific university. Based on these search factors, lists were created and narrowed down. The interviewees discussed several factors that influenced why certain countries and

certain institutions were considered as options.

For their country selection, as well as institutional selection, I describe in the following sections how family, advisors, cost, environment, opportunities, quality and reputation, program of study, and language influenced the students' process of generating a list of potential countries and institutions at which they were comfortable studying. Similar to the predisposition factors, some pulled students toward certain countries and institutions, whereas other factors pushed students away.

Choice Factors

With their list of acceptable institutions, students moved into the choice stage of their decision making. Choice factors led the decision maker to select one country and one institution over all others. Some of the interviewees decided on a preferred host country relatively early in the decision-making process, and others had a preferred institution that was located in a specific country. The majority of interviewees, however, gave the country selection serious thought. The completing stage in the students' college choice decision was the determination of institution. For a couple of students, the pull toward one institution influenced the entire decision-making process, but the majority of students were swayed by the choice factors after composing a list of potential options. Interviewees described how choice factors mostly pulled them toward one institution but, at times, students felt pushed away from an alternate option due to a specific factor.

The final study destination was decided based on family, advisors, cost, environment, quality, prospects, language, and admission processes. At times, a country was selected as the result of the decision to attend a specific institution. Regarding the final decision to study at WKU, respondents reported that the concluding decision to

enroll was influenced by family, other advisors, cost, environment, quality and reputation, opportunities, and the admission process. It is noteworthy to mention that, again, respondents seemed more often influenced by the attraction of these choice factors toward the university than discouraged to go elsewhere.

Decision-Making Process

Taking all stages and all influential factors combined, these respondents have shown through their stories that international student choice is a multivariate process that can be different for individual students but is rarely based on one factor. When interpreting the stories and experiences of the interviewees, I came to the conclusion that relationships with family, friends, agents, faculty members, and other advisors, both abroad and in their home countries, have been the most predominant influencers. Combined with appealing offers, environments, and opportunities, students are pulled towards a specific country and institution. These same factors can deter a student from studying in another country or at another institution.

Through quotes from the interviews, I show in the following sections how students were influenced by identified factors during the different stages of their decision-making process. Based on these stories, I answered the research questions. This chapter ends with a conclusion and pattern match of this case study. The factors below are listed in order of importance based on the number of times and intensity to which they were referred by the respondents, as well as the interpretation of the researcher.

Family

Through the conversations I had with the interviewees, I found that family and close friends had a strong influence on the college choice decision. Throughout the

process of deciding on a destination country and the selection of an institution, family enabled students to study in certain places, where at other times they discouraged them from pursuing other options.

Selection of Country

Respondents discussed the influence of their family throughout the predisposition, search, and choice stages of selecting a country. At times, parents preferred their child to study in one country over another, but for others their influence was shown through emotional and financial support.

Predisposition. To all respondents, family played a major role in the initial decision to find educational opportunities abroad. For some students' parents, other countries pulled them to send their child abroad. Sophia, a student from East Asia, stated:

At first, it's because my mother. She wants me to explore the world. Because she is a journalist, and she works at the [national] central television station. She can experience a lot of different cultures or different views. She was like, "It's better for you to go outside, to see what the world looks like." That's one reason.

Parents of numerous respondents wanted their child to explore other countries and find education abroad. This parental support was the predisposition factor that allowed students to look abroad for education. Not all parents wanted their child to look abroad for the sole reason of exploring other countries. Leonard's parents were pulled by the quality of education abroad. Leonard, a student from Africa, mentioned:

The reason is the education system in my country is not very strong. That's why my parents thought it wise to take me outside, outside the country where I can

acquire a very quality education, and obviously outside U.S., UK, college is a very ... They give out very quality education. My parents thought it wise for them to send me outside. That was the main reason really.

While I could not determine the quality of education in Leonard's home country, he and his parents had this negative perspective on the educational system there. Some of the respondents also discussed how their parents felt pushed to find them opportunities abroad. Khan, a student from the Middle East, said:

Studying was never in the pipeline. Actually it happened courtesy of my father because the nature of my job, and the level of pay I was getting. My dad was really troubled seeing me that, "You should look an alternate for your future and all," because I was working extra hours and all. Whatever words for it you can imagine. It actually started out with my father coming up to me and it was like, "You should start looking for something else, maybe outside the country."

Much like Khan's parents, James, a student from East Asia, described how his mom was disappointed with the education he was receiving at the institution in his home country: "I was not thinking to come out, because I got into college in [my country]. My mom just pushed me out, 'Get out.' Something like that. Family thing." Later he described: "She thinks you guys have better education here, also because at my old schools' teacher. Because [my] major you need to rely on your private lesson teacher, so my teacher in [my country] is kind of eh, so she's 'Get out.'"

For some other respondents, the push to study outside their home countries came from more immediate environmental pressure. Baylee, a student from Africa, described:

First, we start to think about that for me study in a foreign country due to the

situations that currently happen in my country, in [my country] particularly because there was unstable situation in the country. My parents they decided to take me from [my country] and send me to some foreign countries.

And later, during the interview, Baylee said, "In [my country], I didn't have that option to study. I mean, my parents they were really scared about me to leave me in that kind of environment. They were not even considering as an option to stay in [my country] further more." Other family members also influenced the decision to study abroad for some of the respondents, but this was reported less often than influence from parents. Gia, a student from South East Asia, talked about being frustrated by the education in her own country and becoming aware of other options by looking at her brother:

Then, because I was frustrated and I was not happy about being there or about going to classes. Then I started to think, "So, how can I get out of this? I'm not to have to deal with this anymore." It just happened that I knew my brother was here and he was getting his master degree here at that time in Washington. He went back and say, "Oh. It's so different and you're like literally, you can ask your professor any questions that you want to. It requires a lot of like self-study or you have to do research on your own." He mentioned about how when you sit in the classrooms, you sit in a circle and everybody can raise their questions and express their opinions, things like that. It happen that, "Okay I had the need, right? To escape." Then apparently, my brother is having a good time. Also because, I had high respect for my brother so whatever he say, "Oh, that's good." I wanted to experience that myself. That's what it is.

Family members, especially parents, supported most of the respondents' education

abroad opportunities financially, which meant that for many respondents the cost of studying abroad had to be considered before making a decision to study abroad.

Search. Besides enabling students to look abroad, family played a major role for many of the interviewees in their search for acceptable countries. Brand, a student from East Asia, described how he felt pulled toward studying near his sibling: “Because my brother, he was there. My elder brother, he was there. My plan was to study together with him.” For some students family was more involved in selecting options, like Junior, a student from Central Asia, as he noted: “Yes, actually they [parents] choose many countries. For example Peru, like kind of the 4 countries. First it was Spain, England, Canada, or America.” For others, parents gave advice based on their own experiences of things to keep in mind when selecting a country. Khan shared a cautionary tale based on his father’s experience:

The problem is you should keep in mind your living expenses and all. Because he is living in Central London, and that in itself is very expensive. He was telling me that when he was there in London first way back in 2004, it was hell living there for him.

Expenses were a concern for parents and many of the other interviewed students.

Choice. Family members provided advice and support, both financially and emotionally, while students reduced the list of potential destinations. When it came to the final decision of determining in which country the student would study, parents sometimes still drove their child into a certain direction. Paola, a Latin American student, described how the idea of going abroad alone scared her:

He (referring to a cousin) told me about WKU. I was like, "I don't know if my

English is good enough, like I don't want to go, I'm going to be there by myself," then my dad pushed me. He was like, "No, you got to go, you got to go, you got to go, you got to go," and I graduated high school in January, then I came here mid-March.

Paola felt pushed by her father but supported in the fact that a family member was present at the location. James also was pushed by his parents away from his country toward the US:

Almost at the end of that semester, she [James' mother] called me. "We made the decision that you should go." I was like "What. Huh?" I was like "What, why?" I'm like "Eh, I don't want to go." "We made the decision, you will go." "I don't want to go." "You will go." "Okay, I will go."

On the other hand, Gia felt pulled toward the US because of stories she heard from her sibling: "Another thing that my brother talked about was the diversity. How in the US where you have people from different countries, different parts of the world came here to work or study or emigrate."

Selection of Institution

Similarly to family members influencing the decision-making process of country selection, these close individuals provided the respondents with opinions and advice about the selection of a particular institution.

Predisposition. Family members can encourage students to attend a certain type of college or study in a certain area. At the same time, some family members discourage attending certain institutions. While family members might have different reasons to encourage or discourage, it brings a push or pull to the decision making of the student.

Brand described how his father discouraged a certain state as a potential study location: “Yes, at first, they chose another university in Virginia. My father, he refused. He said, there are so many people from my nationality.” Brand explained: “My father was concerned, he was thinking if I go to Virginia, I will find some friends, find my nationality, and I will forget to study, I will play with them all the day.” Leonard mentioned that his parents shared their potential budget with him as a factor he should keep in mind:

I did yes, I went ahead and did that, and even now, that's when my parents stepped in and guided me too. Yeah, because also costs, they've got to consider the cost too. I mean you don't want to say, okay it's going to be 40,000, and then there is a 12,000 school somewhere that's comparatively the same. Yeah, so that's where my parents stepped in and they guided me towards that too. Then okay, let's just, its fine. Let's just go with that yeah.

Opposite of Leonard, the parents of Jeremy, a student from East Asia, told him not to worry about finances, enabling him to select an institution based on other factors:

At that time I my parents are very just supportive of all this idea because they told me that "you do not need to worry about the financial issues, if you like to go overseas and choose the major you desire and want to pursue, you can apply by yourself and we can find a local agent for you to help to apply."

Family members pushed their children away from certain institutions while encouraging others. While at times other reasons than financing were important to family members, cost was clearly a strong predisposition factor for both the students and their parents. Shi Wang, a student from East Asia, summarized this point in her interview: “Yeah, because

they are the people who provide money ...”

Search. Throughout the search stage of the institutional selection process, in which students started to list potential acceptable institutions, many of the interviewees were influenced by their loved ones. Khan, for example, stated:

Parents? Well, no. Parents never did. One of my sisters, the sibling effect and all you have. I spoke to her and that was the only thing, and a couple of friends maybe. Our parents are like, "We will trust you. Just pick your option, we will trust you. It's up to you but don't let us down."

Family members of some other respondents were more actively involved. Baylee described how his mother and agent worked on a list of potential options together:

My mom and agency they were discussing the ratings, the cost, all that kind of stuff. Then from there, from the ones that they picked up, they showed me and they showed which they think is best. I said, okay. For me to be sincerely, the geographical location didn't matter at all. I didn't had any preferences in West Coast or East Coast or any particular state. It didn't had any difference from me.

Maame Abe, an African student, told me in her interview how her father expressed a desire for potential options to be located around a familiar area:

Because my dad said I've not been anywhere else in the United States and that was where I had to stay for a whole academic year, and that's where my host parents are, so why don't I find a school that is closer to them? That was his whole reason for letting me apply to schools there.

For Gia, the presence of a family member actually led her to remove that location as a potential option:

Yes, I did. I think it was Washington State. I did consider Washington State University. I think because I thought at that time I didn't even want to live close to my brother. I knew that I would not be able to have freedom, my own privacy. Even when I was in [my country], I was bothered by that. I'm much more a private person and I like to have a freedom to make my decisions. Unfortunately, within the culture, you don't have that. You don't have much of that.

Choice. In the final stage of the decision process, in which students made the decision where to attend college, close friends and family were important to most of the respondents. Paola was convinced to join her institution as her cousin studied there:

Yeah. He [cousin] and his father told me about WKU. [My cousin] was already here. I think he was starting WKU and was on his last semester in ESLI, because he came to ESLI too. My mom didn't want me to come, but she had the idea to contact [my cousin], since she knew he was here. She was like, "If you're going somewhere, okay, go to where he is, because you'll have someone."

Baylee was less concerned with a specific institution and referred to his mother in the decision-making process:

I'd had influence for my mom. She financially supports me. She pays for my studies. For me, it didn't have any difference. It was more of her concern. She told me that we can get into this university, we can be accepted on this one, we can pay for this one and I say, "Okay. I'll follow that." To be honest, we decided with my mom the country. We said America. Probably my mom and the agency, they decided the location where and which one. It wasn't my choice. I just accepted it. Suly, a student from the Middle East, noted how his parents, as well as his

brother's studies, influenced the institution he attended:

Yeah, to be closer to my brother. He lives in Alabama, Florence, Alabama, three hours and a half away from here. He can drive once in a while and check on me if I needed something, especially the first year that I was over here. He was checking a lot.

His parents pushed him toward a certain institution and away from larger cities. Suly mentioned how he was not fond of the decision his parents made: "My father was, yeah, he's the one who decided to come to Bowling Green. I didn't want to. I didn't like any pictures. It looked like nothing. It looked like I'm just going to a place in the woods and throwing me over there." Suly described how he managed to honor his parents' wishes and still accept the decision to come to Bowling Green, KY: "Yeah. I'm like, I'll go there. The idea is to come over here and stay for a little bit, to get into scholarship, then move immediately." Other students relied on family for advice and for them to share their expertise. Max, another student from the Middle East, for example, told me that he asked his cousins to make sure his option was acceptable;

I went the other day and told him, "Okay." Before that I looked online and also I asked my cousins, who are in the United States. They said, "I've never heard of that place but let me ask my friends." They asked their friends and they said, "It's a cool place." That's why I came here.

Gia connected with a family in the area after meeting them in [her country] years prior. She explained:

I knew a family here. I knew at that time, even at that time before I came here, I knew that there's no way I can do all of those things on my own from the

beginning without receiving the help from somebody else. Also, because I did not have any experience of going away from my home. I still live with my parents at home at that time. That's why I picked up WKU.

Maame Aba had a friend in the US and asked him to help her to get accepted to the institution he was enrolled in: "I contacted a friend, who is now an alumni, and he helped me apply for school here." She also knew a family, who had hosted her during high school, whose advice she valued: "Oh, yeah, and they [host parents] were in full support of it. We even came here before I went home." Jeremy was mostly concerned with his program of study, but still considered his friends' advice when making his decision: "Also other reasons is that my friend who already just studied here and the campus and the reputation of the MBA program is really important and I think not that should be other information influence me to make the decision here."

For Brand, the decision was collaborated with his girlfriend:

Well, it was not the main reason. The main reason is me and my girlfriend, we decided both, because we were going to America together... I need to find some place that she is satisfied with and I am satisfied with... We both like Bowling Green.

Brand explained that his agent also influenced the decision with her advice: "We both decided to study abroad, and then we choose a school together, and also my agent. She chose this school for me. Like I said, she was okay with Bowling Green, so, I was okay with Bowling Green. We're here together."

Conclusion

From the interviewees and the descriptions of experiences, family was an influential factor to the students. To all students, family exercised some influence in the decision-making process, and many respondents emphasized their families' wishes repeatedly. Compared to other factors, family was among the themes that continuously reoccurred during most interviews with respondents.

Other Advisors

Family members were not the only advisors mentioned by the students as influential in their decision-making process. Possibly as important as the recommendations from family, the respondents noted that agents, teachers, and academic advisors enabled them to consider certain countries as options, discouraged attending other nations, and shared judgment with them regarding institutions. Like the advice from family and friends, students listened to the input from their advisors. As the advisors often were the main source of information for the respondents, their opinions carried some weight.

Selection of Country

In their selection of study destination, the interviewees listened to the advice of others. The students described how encouragement from key individuals made them feel enabled and how their guidance steered them toward certain countries.

Predisposition. Shi Wang described how a retired educational agent talked to her about studying abroad and why education abroad is worth pursuing:

When retired, he actually really want to tell his story. When he come to our class, he keep saying "If you have a chance, you need to study abroad because it give

you a time to learn how others learn." Because in [my country], people think we learn in effective way. Why? Because we put all the time to study but we are not best.

For some students, agents enabled them to study abroad, as several of the interviewees described a lack of knowledge on how to start the study abroad process. Max said, "When I talked to the agent, how this went, I went to the agent when I asked him want to study abroad. He said, I can do everything for you, with only 3,000 [local currency]." For James, a teacher was the individual who enabled him to go abroad. He described how he first told his mother, who wanted him to pursue education abroad, about the faculty member:

She just talked about the school. I played for her. She told me a little bit. Actually I didn't really tell anything to my mom. Normally we tried online. After almost half year, I was like "Oh, I met a doctor, a professor, a fancy professor from US." She's like "What? You never tell me that." I'm like "Because I really don't care." I was like "What is American professor going to do to me? Nothing. It's like nothing going to change."

James then described how she could only provide information, but not the same level of support many educational agents offer: "We started working on a Visa. Actually, we started working on emailing her about information, but she really doesn't know anything about international students." Different sources of reference provided different levels of support and service. Even among educational agents there was a difference of service provided, which one interviewee described. Leonard mentioned experiencing this difference:

Until the final, until me finally landing on that specific agency, I had gone through several agencies, yes, but they did not really help out a lot. They were telling me that I should do most of the work. They were just telling me okay just, this is a university, just go home, research about it and blah blah blah. Come back to us, no.

Some references helped the students fill out their application forms and prepare them for visas; other interviewees were tasked with these themselves.

Search. As the point of contact and main source of information, agents, teachers, and advisors were influential in the decision making during the indexing of potential countries. When listing potential countries, agents had the power to tell the students to which countries they could provide service. Shi Wang described her first interaction with her educational agent: “Then, the second resource is I went to a lot of agent, which can help me to study abroad. Before I decide, I didn't tell them which country I want to go, I just tried to ask them ‘This is my major, then what is your suggestion.’” Similarly, Max went to different agents and asked for recommendations, which helped him narrow his list: “Because when I looked online and when I went to agency back home, it asked where's the best place to study abroad? All of them said; United Kingdom, America, Australia.”

Some students heard recommendations against attending school in certain countries. Maame Aba experienced her agent pushing her away from a country:

They had Mexico on there. I could have gone there, because there was this Mexican series I was watching and my sisters and I always said, "Oh, we would like to go there for vacation," so I could have chosen that, but the reason why I

came here is because majority of the people doing this program are always brought here, so the agent said it's much easier to process the steps. Where majority is, it's much easier to process the steps than having a single person go to a different country, because it's like you will be put behind.

Choice. Where agents, teachers, and advisors helped students create a list of potential countries at which to study, these actors also provided direction during the final stage of the decision making. Maame Aba told a story about her agent somewhat deciding in which country she would study:

The way things are said, even though you have options, but then you have no other country to choose, rather than the US. Yeah, because they've made it look like this where the majority of the students go to. And, if you look at it, even after you get here and you meet all these people from different countries, it's actually true; this is where everyone wants to come to. With the high school, it's whatever country your host parents are in, so you don't get to choose.

To James and his family, it made sense to go to a place where he had a connection; “Yes. It's still like we say, if you have people you know in another country, always go with her, him, there.” Pedro knew he wanted to go to the US but needed assistance to realize this decision:

What he just helped me was in the process to going to the US, which I didn't have a clue how to do it. The visa process, I mean nobody knows. I just know about there is this something called OPT that you can work, CPT but ... I didn't know how to get the appointment with the embassy and stuff like that.

Selection of Institution

Besides weighing in on country selection, the advice of third-party actors affected college choice through the enabling of institutional option and focusing university selection.

Predisposition. Similar to recommendations from agents, teachers, or other advisors in regard to study abroad, references can push or pull students toward a certain type of school. Paola described an experience when she was first looking into study abroad possibilities:

Also, I had an advisor in high school, and I talked to her about this too, and she was like, "I recommend you go to a smaller university first, and then if you like you transfer to a bigger one." She recommended that, too, so that also had a part in my decision to stay here, at first.

This advice pulled Paola toward smaller institutions. Max was told by his agent that there were some states he could not attend if he wanted to qualify for his scholarship, pushing him away from these areas. Max recalled:

I went to the agency and told him that I want to go to America. He said, "Okay, but which state or which city or which university?" I said, "I don't know anything about America. The only thing I know is Washington DC, New York, Texas. That's it. From movies." I don't know anything else. I know that one of my cousins in Colorado, Denver, the other one is in Wisconsin, Milwaukee. That's what I know. Then I told him I want to go one of those two places. He said, "If you go there you will not get a scholarship because there are a lot of [students from my country] at that area."

The conversation between Max and his agent continued, as described by Max:

Then I told him, “Okay, I don’t know anything about United State, I’m scared. Pick me a place that is nice, small city, less danger.” He said, “If you want to be in a safe place don’t go to America,” but he said, “I will try my best to find a cool place for you that suit you.”

As Max illustrated with this conversation, the environment and safety were of concern to most of the interviewees, and he hoped his agent could help him eliminate unacceptable options.

Search. Agents, teachers, advisors, and other individuals who provide recommendations that students take to heart have a major influence on the formation of the list of institutions from which the student will eventually choose. Several interviewees reported how recommendations influenced their decision. Leonard described that his agent provided him with potential options:

I did get a few schools in the UK too. Then I had to just weigh the options that I had, and then just landed on Western. She did give me a few pamphlets to go through for the UK, some of the schools in UK to look over them and make the decision, but I did land on Western and she also talked positive about it.

Baylee explained why he felt that recommendations from his agent were the best way of selecting potential options:

They gave us a list of countries, universities. This company, it actually sends students for foreign countries. They already send in students to come here in America. I believe that they also send students for ESLI but maybe not specifically here in Kentucky. They might send it in other states. They've been

doing this kind of work for a long period of time, so they were experienced in that field. That's why we felt that through them, it was a better chance to actually get accepted to America or to university here.

Other agents were more aggressive in encouraging or discouraging certain options. Brand described how he combined his research, preferences, and the advice of his agent.

Well, like I said, I checked some websites, and my agency recommended this university to me, and, my agency, she told me, "first of all, you don't, you don't have to think about, like, you can't, you don't have choice to, like, choose a city, for play. You can't just play." She told me I can't choose big city, first.

Some students followed the recommendations of other people or selected institutions based on the presence of certain individuals. James described: "Yeah. I mean, yes. I mean if a good teacher at a good school, that will be the best, but still teacher is still the top thing. It's not the ranking."

Choice. Third-party advisors informed the respondents of positive aspects of institutions, negative aspects, and sometimes advised on which institutions could provide factors students desired. Max talked about his request to his agent to find him a school that would qualify for a scholarship;

After 15 minutes of waiting he looked at me, he said, "Do you want Kentucky?" That was funny moment because I replied, I said, "No thank you, I'm not hungry." It's just because the KFC restaurant, we call it Kentucky back home. He looked at me, he said, "Do you want Kentucky?" I said, "I'm sorry, I'm not hungry. Thank you." He laughed, he said, "No, it's a state called Kentucky." I said, "No, you're

kidding. There's no state called Kentucky." He said, "Look it online." I looked it online, I saw it, I said, "Okay. Kentucky, that works." He said, "Okay, I'll give you a day, if you want to search about Kentucky, Bowling Green. Then let me know if you want to go there." Then I went back to my house and looked online, of Kentucky, Bowling Green. I asked the [country] student organization here if it's cool place.

The agent provided Max with an option that Max believed fulfilled his preferences. That one feasible option was sufficient to Max:

Yeah, I didn't apply for any other university. I didn't even look at other universities. I didn't even ask the guy to find another universities. I just said, "Okay." The only thing that, on me, since I was young, if there was one option I just go to it. I don't find another option. Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's bad.

Junior also took his agent's word and based his decision to some extent on her recommendation: "Yeah, but I mostly believed her about like she said me that it's a really good town." However, Junior described how his agent's recommendation was not what he expected:

Yeah, she said it's kind of good, which is good, but I was sure about its small town. It's not really popular cities. She lied. I would like to move before to big cities, to enjoy, but here, just to study, honestly. Which is good, but she was wrong in everything. Even she was wrong with the paint here. With the apartment. With everything. So she was a bad manager. Even now, I don't use manager.

Some students checked on their potential choice by asking others how their experiences

with the institution were. “Another reason why I trusted my decision to come here was because I was able to connect with the [country] Student Association here,” Gia noted. Max also contacted a student organization before he acted on his agent’s recommendation:

Yes, when I looked at the replies at least four people replied. I said, "That's cool," so [students from my country] are family here. Outside [my country] they help each other because in [my country] we don't help each other that much, but outside we help each other, even if we don't know each other.

It was important to James to know someone at the institution if he was going to enroll there. He mentioned how knowing a faculty member at the institution made all the difference to him:

Otherwise, I don't know English, my parents don't know English at all, so we don't know what's going on here. It was like "We have no people there." Now I just go with her. Also she can speak a little [my language]. Not perfectly, but still okay. I can understand it.

Conclusion

Similar to the advice of their parents, students in this study built their choice based on recommendations from key individuals. Expanding on recommendations, several respondents required help and suggestions on how to pursue their desire to study abroad, and third parties fulfilled this need. When the recommendations from parents often were determinative on parts of the decision, most students took the suggestions from third parties into consideration but composed the final decision themselves with the help of their parents. In conclusion, recommendations from third parties were of the

utmost importance and influenced the students' decision making nearly as much as family.

Cost

Students discussed the endorsements of others throughout all interviews, and these seemed most influential to the respondents. The suggestions from third parties regarding country selection and institutional choice often were weighed by the students through cost-benefit analyses. At times, even the advising party would consider cost before endorsing a specific option. The cost of education and living was repeatedly mentioned, and I counted it among the top three influential factors in the college choice decision for the students interviewed.

Selection of Country

Students might not consider the US among the more affordable when deciding in which country one might want to study. To most respondents, however, the benefits of studying in the US weighed favorably against the cost. All respondents were able to afford studying in the US, at times through family funds and, other times through a government scholarship. Even in comparison to other countries, respondents perceived the cost as acceptable. The cost of study abroad influenced the decision process from enabling students to defining the list of acceptable options.

Predisposition. Family members, especially parents, financially supported most of the respondents' education abroad endeavors, which meant that many respondents had to consider the cost of studying abroad before making a decision to go. In order to study abroad, students and their families had to be able to afford the tuition and living expenses, or qualify for financial support that paid these costs. Like several other

respondents, Max described the need for a scholarship in order to cover expenses:

I came from an average family back home, like an economy or something. It's not average, it's kind of less than average. My family cannot afford the money of me studying abroad. They barely get the money for me to come here, study for four months, and then get the scholarship. If I lost the scholarship I would not continue studying here because my family cannot afford the money.

With all respondents, education abroad was considered costlier than domestic education. Scholarship opportunities pulled several of the respondents to study abroad, because costs were no longer an obstacle. Less common among respondents was the perceived push to leave one's home country due to a dissatisfaction with the cost of domestic education. Maame Aba was one of the few whose father decided to send her abroad after increased costs of her home's education options. After completing her senior year of high school in the USA, Maame Aba described:

Even with my high school diploma here, if I went back home to attend college, I was going to be charged pretty much as an international student, so my dad thought of it as, "If I'm going to pay a whole lot of tuition to get not so good of an education out of it, why don't I just bring you back here and pay almost the same price for a good education?" So, yeah.

In Maame Aba's case, her family decided that the decreased difference between domestic education and foreign education was now small enough that they might as well invest in foreign education. Cost of education often is weighed against benefits as a result of the degree. For some students and their families, education abroad was viewed as an investment opportunity.

Search. In selecting suitable countries, the respondents mentioned that almost all of them had a budget that determined where education was an option. Several of the interviewees were dependent on receiving a scholarship from their governments or the institution. Due to the need for a scholarship, Max had to cross some countries off the list of potential options: “I was planning to go to England. At that time the scholarship said: Nobody goes to England. A lot of [students from my country] are there. If you go there you have to pay on your own money. We won't pay anything.” Pedro mentioned how this budget narrowed down his list of acceptable locations:

Yes, because if I wanted to go to Australia it was going to cost me a lot of money. Especially the dorms. Euro, money, and I didn't know the language. Canada was a little bit more expensive than U.S. I get accepted to some colleges in the U.S. as well. Price of colleges in the U.S. is expensive but I think it's a good investment. Additionally, Pedro considered the return on investment when considering the US.

Choice. When countries are viewed equally favorable, the cost of the education and living can pull a student toward one country over another. Jeremy stated plainly why he preferred the US: “Because only I compare with Great Britain, I know that American is cheaper” (Playdon, 2017). Gia preferred the US for perceived opportunities at that location, but financial means was a factor she had to meet before she could select her preferred country. She stated:

First of all, as far as in the US, they're okay with it. Of course, second thing more important would be finance so you know, my family be able to afford to pay for that. [...] The location like US the country is the top reason and because of the potential to do stay and work. Then comes next is financial ability whether or not

we will be able to do cover the tuition and the living cost around here.

Selection of Institution

A number of colleges became unacceptable to some of the respondents due to their advertised tuition fees and the cost of living associated with the area in which the college was located. Additionally, some universities were preferred over others due to their economically beneficial location.

Predisposition. To most of the interviewees, cost was a major factor in their decision making and allowed certain institutions to be options, while others fell out of reach. “Yes. That's a secondary thing but first and foremost is can you afford the college?” said Khan, illustrating the importance of financial means. Gia said it was perhaps not the first aspect she or her parents looked at, but it was a required checkbox for her to study abroad: “Yes. With my parents, it would be the first one, the first reason, Oh, is US? Check. The second, finance. In the finance ... Oh. We can pay, then check.” While some of the interviewees were not given a budget by their parents, cost still deterred them from a selection of institutions. “I don't want to spend my parents' money, so that's why I got a job to pay just for my apartment, for food. Of course I can not to pay for my education, it's just impossible,” described Junior.

Search. Similar to the selection of potential countries, students had to consider which institutions they could afford and which universities were worth their cost. “Yeah. The agent will ask you how much money you can afford. Then that maybe our top line for that Boston one but I don't want to go to my top, the most expensive one,” shared Shi Wang. She discussed later in the interview that a scholarship opportunity pulled her toward one institution over another:

I think also when they gave me the acceptance letter, they say they will provide 3,000 and 500 scholarship from Western University so it will save tons of money. Then, I start to searching the program, I started searching program who can training for the new media. Then, some program is 5,000 so I find out if I finish this degree in Western Kentucky University, it maybe cost, for example, 10,000, but in Boston, their two-year maybe cost me 30,000 so which means ... that was my thought. I would just experience life here. If I understand how they teach, how they live, then, after two years, maybe I'm already familiar with this, I got my degree. If I still want to learn the skills for new media, I will pay that program, so that's my thought. That was my thought, yeah.

For some respondents, a scholarship offer was required for the institution to be acceptable. "First thing we looked at if they're already enrolled in the acceptance of the scholarship," Suly said. He elaborated that cost of living in the area of the university could push him away from certain institutions:

That was one of the factors. "Are we going to be able to live over there with the scholarship? The scholarship going to pay, but they're going to pay a certain amount, not extra amount. Do I need an extra amount? An extra amount won't be provided from my parents because they cannot pay that."

Choice. Cost could set parameters of financially acceptable options for students and their families. These parameters sometimes reduced the list to one preferred option. Baylee stated:

Our decision was based also on a budget of how much would the course cost.

That was also one of the factors why we decided Western Kentucky. We believe

that cost we are able to pay. That's why we decide to stop and that to make our decision.

To others, low costs surrounding studies at a particular institution served as a pull factor. “That's one, another one is the living expense is cheaper here,” Shi Wang noted. Others were pulled by scholarships that lowered the cost of their education. Gia shared (WKU, 2016i):

...another reason why I chose WKU was I had a high GPA as a transfer student. I knew that with 3.4 GPA or both as a transfer student, you can get a scholarship to study at WKU. That really helped because my family could not pay the total full amount when I'm without scholarship.

Suly looked for institutions with students who qualified for a governmental scholarship;

The ranking wasn't the highest, but it was one of the accepted ones for the scholarship. We were kind of looking for that too. The SACM has a certain amount of universities that you can attend. Their ranking is okay. The ranking is okay for them, so as long as they say yes, we're okay with that too, because the main reason we're looking at that is to get into scholarship so we don't have to deal with money.

For students like Suly, the scholarship enabled them to enroll at an institution. Without a scholarship, studying abroad would become much more difficult if not impossible.

Besides, Suly, Max, Khan, Leonard, and Pedro were all interested in options that provided them with scholarships. Pedro described how the tuition cost was an aspect that had a major influence on his decision: “The most I cared was the tuition and making a good decision to be in a school where the business school is good. That was the only

thing.” However, Pedro experienced a discrepancy in the expected tuition cost and the actual cost of studying at his chosen institution:

Yeah the thing is, the problem with this miscommunication was, that the agent, was the one that at the end has all my papers for the admission to the ESLI University. Once I get accepted, he told me literally in the email, "Congratulations [Pedro]. You get admitted with half a scholarship at Western Kentucky University."

When I asked Pedro how promised scholarship influenced his decision making, he said:

Of course. I was trusting in this agent, and I thought that I was going to pay this amount of money because of the scholarship. It did influence me a lot because once I was here at WKU I was about to transfer. Once I finish ESLI in one place I could have transferred to another school. Like immediately. I was about to transfer to Texas A & M University because I contacted him and say "Hey, why you tell me this and that." He get me admitted to this university with a better scholarship. I always went to international student office and told them about my situation and in the end they decided to give me the scholarship. That was one of the best days of my life.

In this case, the institution was able to convince the student to remain at the university by providing him with the scholarship promised. This scholarship initially influenced Pedro to come to this particular institution and later convinced him to stay.

Conclusion

Students did not consider cost as the primary factor in the way they considered

recommendations and wishes from their family and advisors. First, respondents wanted to study abroad and cared about their family's wishes. Second, they relied on the advice of third parties to get started. After the decision to study abroad, cost set parameters of countries and institutions students could consider due to their financial budget. Even though all students had to show sufficient financial means in order to obtain immigration documents, the differences in costs were still important to most of them. Costs that were perceived as high pushed students away from certain institutions or locations, but the respondents in this study accepted the cost associated with studying at WKU.

Environment

Recommendations about institutions and connections at the university made the respondents more comfortable with potential choices. Economic considerations influenced students to weigh tuition and cost of living, and to compare these against potential benefits. Many of the students also reported throughout the interview to be drawn by the environment of the institution, often emphasizing the safety and location of the institution. While I interpreted that students considered the importance of the environment after the recommendations and wishes of family and advisors, and for most students after contemplating cost, the expected experience on the college campus was mentioned often.

Selection of Country

Interviewees were interested in a welcoming, safe, and sometimes exciting environment. The respondents perceived that some countries fit their description of a desirable environment better than others. These perceptions regarding environment influenced their selection of host country.

Predisposition. Study abroad not only provided great opportunities for many of the respondents, but some of them believed it would provide a better environment and experiences than an education at home. Gia described being pulled abroad: “I think I want to come here to study also, because I was dreaming about having my own freedom, having the capacity to make my own decisions.” Others felt more pushed due to a dislike of their home environment. Junior talked about the lack of personality he was allowed to show through his clothing without being negatively affected:

I just don't like and I don't like the culture [at home]. The way you have to wear exactly the uniform [in school]. If you will wear the long t-shirt, something like here in America, people are going to avoid you like you are crazy. That's why I don't like.

Some of the respondents came from situations in which their environments no longer felt safe, which pushed them to think about options abroad. Khan talked about his perception of the environment at home and said: “It's actually politically getting unstable. Politically it's getting unstable and you know what's going on there. Although it's not as bad as what's coming up in the media, but it's still bad so you can be concerned.”

The anticipated experiences of being abroad and experiencing the environment abroad also were mentioned as influential. Suly stated regarding studying abroad, “I kind of wanted that, wanted to live by myself, mainly leave everything behind and start a new life, a different life.” Brand mentioned that a more independent life, in which he was forced to stand on his own two feet, pulled him abroad. Brand described how there had always been someone at home who took care of his needs: “I think, to study abroad, it can train myself. I can be trained because I have never been independent before. I

couldn't even wash dishes, and I couldn't even wash my own clothes, at first.” For some of the respondents, looking forward to an experience abroad was sufficient to persuade them to take the leap.

Search. Some students felt drawn to specific countries because of the perceived environment and how they imagined life abroad. Other students were repelled from a country because of its perceived atmosphere. Junior was determined to never study in Australia: “Never, because I heard about their English is weird, first of all. Like really weird. It's so hard to understand people. Secondly, there are huge spiders.” Pedro had selected four potential countries but was narrowing his list because of how he perceived the environment in the US: “I didn't only try to the US, I also searched for Australia, Canada and Germany, and UK I really wanted to study in the US I don't know, maybe because of the, I don't know, the sports and also the business culture here in America.” The US became additionally appealing to Pedro because of the way his parents perceived the country's safety: “They were really comfortable with the U.S. because they know that it's safe.” Perceived safety pulled some students to one country over another. Baylee described his search experience with his parents:

Well, they consider to be safe here than what we had before. I mean, ideally kind of what would be safe here option. When we were picking out between America and Canada, of course, we don't know the whole situation in the country. From our perspective, it was more safe here in Canada. We've seen a lot of gun shootings in America, a lot of murders for no reason and that pulled us back. Actually my mom, she was really against America when we were picking out between America and Canada.

Parents were not only concerned with safety, but in Max's experience they also cared how far the country was away. Max explained:

They want me to go to United Kingdom because of many reasons. One of the reasons, it's an important reason for my mom, it's because United Kingdom is close to [my country]. Its five hours by plane, so if they miss me they can buy a ticket and go back home, even in the weekend. It would work. That was one of the reasons. America, I cannot. If I have one week I cannot go back home because I'll spend two days going back, two days coming here.

Choice. The perceived environment was sometimes the determining factor in convincing students to attend an institution in one country over another. Sophia described:

Before I came here, American culture, to me, it's very open culture. Because I watch a lot of American TV shows and movie before I came here, so I would like to really experience what it's like, the true American culture. Another thing is, I was kind of familiar with this American culture because I watch a lot of American TV shows and movies, so I think it's kind of familiar for me.

In Sophia's case, she believed she knew the American environment due to the things she had seen on television. She also thought that the US was safe: "Actually, it's much more safety than in [my country]. Really. Here, especially here. Because in [my country], I don't know if you know, a lot of families, they have an iron door." Suly had a similar idea about the environment in the US, which pulled him toward this option: "Yeah. We go back as the stereotypical, that we think that all people are friendly, so you'll be safe all the time." To another student the US environment was simply interesting and attractive.

Junior described how it was for him: “So for example I really enjoy the American culture. The way how they're active and it's really free country. That's why I really want to stay here. I wouldn't want to come back to my country never.” He stated in the same interview: “Actually I haven't thinking about for like the cost. Yeah, of course I think about. Mostly I was thinking about America. Just America. This is a big subject and about English. That's all.” The United States’ environment and its English language instruction were the determinate factors for Junior.

Selection of Institution

The perceived environment can differ from one institution to the other, even within one country’s borders. To respondents it was important at times how the institutions’ environments were perceived and where the universities were located.

Predisposition. Interviewees and their parents were pushed away from certain environments while being pulled toward others. Leonard described how the environment has a major impact on his decision for multiple reasons:

Honestly it was just the environment that I'll be going to, like I said, and then there's the type of community that I will be going into. Because during then it wasn't that common that all these conflicts... My parents just didn't want me to go to a very rough environment. That's what they were really pointing out to make sure you just kind of find somewhere safe. They mentioned that. Get somewhere safe, and then obviously had to look through and see what type of facilities the engineering department had too. I went in depth of that. The type of labs, obviously it was just through the internet and the pamphlets that I had.

Leonard did not look only for a safe environment, but he checked to what extent the

study environment for his major was acceptable.

Search. Respondents talked about their ideas and perceptions on traveling abroad and the environments in which they would study. Many of the students wanted to select institutions that provided them with a desirable environment. Jeremy noted:

I wanted to experience the local, very just natural, the real American cultures. Not just the on the both coast, like California or New York. They have a lot of [students from my country] and I want to have fewer [students from my country] there so I can experience the real American culture.

Similarly, Sophia's father wanted her to experience a certain environment and pushed her away from other institutions: "The location, location. Because one of the universities she selected for me is on Hawaii, but my dad said, no. I want her to experience the mainland culture of America, not Hawaii, no." Shi Wang felt pushed away from a certain institution because of information she received about the environment from her agent:

Also, he list another advantage for Boston because across Northeast University is Harvard University. Then he said, "You are already 22 ..." 23 I think that time ... then, it's important to find a good boyfriend, so if it's close to Harvard, that you maybe a find a very good [man from my country] there." At that time, because my personality, it's not really my thoughts at that time, so I maybe even more rejected that option. That's not my purpose to come to here.

Safety and certain services around the institution were essential to some of the respondents. Khan shared that he wanted to confirm a list of services provided before selecting the institution:

Relatively safe enough because even you have crimes over here. Even Chicago,

you consider it a big city and you have big crimes and all. When I went through some statistics before I was choosing, it had a relatively very low crime rate as opposed to other cities. Well, that was the last thing that I was going through like how to manage and all. I remember the last thing that I was going through was looking for some food places and halal places to eat which I didn't find. I had gone, "Shit, what the hell am I going to do?" I'm glad I've made it through for two years.

Other respondents also confirmed the desire for a safe environment. Brand said, "Yeah, if you want to study abroad, you must choose some place that's safe. Because I have seen some news in my country, in [country]." Leonard mentioned: "My parents just didn't want me to go to a very rough environment. That's what they were really pointing out to make sure you just kind of find somewhere safe. They mentioned that. Get somewhere safe..." Similarly, James noted while referring to his parents: "I mean, they don't play roles anymore. I mean they still say safety is the number 1 for them." Paola discussed how the institutional environment was important to her but that included the language environment:

Major, good education, the campus, safety. That it was a small place. I didn't want to study like in Miami, or where everyone else goes in [my country], because if they go study abroad, it's either Miami, New York, or California. I didn't want any of those places. I wanted a place where I could speak English all the time. I didn't want to speak Spanish, because I wanted to improve my English and all of that. That was also important factor in Kentucky. I didn't know anything about Kentucky and I knew it was going to be a good place to study. Small town, not a

lot of distractions, not a lot of Spanish speaking people.

Choice. Students' final decision on institution would determine the environment in which they were going to spend some of their college careers. For many of the interviewees, this was an important factor to take into consideration when moving abroad. Brand told me:

You don't have to spend much energy to play and for entertainment, just for study. It's quiet enough, it's peaceful enough here. I think Bowling Green is really good for students to study abroad. Also, when I am here, the people here are nice. I'm getting new friends and I'm getting used to here.

Some of the students named the environment as a defining reason why they selected a particular institution. Max stated: "The main reason that I came here was the size of the city. When I looked online I saw it's a cool place. When I looked at campus I saw that campus is really cool place." To others, the environment was a factor that needed verification after the institution had accepted them and studying there became a feasible option. Maame Aba said:

Yeah, and even besides that, I like to do my own research. I mean, it's not like major research or anything. I'm a little curious, I would say, so I did a little research on WKU after my friend started, and I saw the campus, the environment and everything, and I'm like, "I kind of like this school." So, yeah, I went with it.

Other interviewees mentioned safety as the main aspect of the environment that needed to be acceptable. Paola described that safety was important to both her and her parents:

I've been in the US before I came to school, but Bowling Green is so safe. I don't know how to explain it, but my dad was looking for that too, because he is a

politician in [my country], so we've been through stuff and he was looking for safety. Probably that's one of the reasons he wanted me out of the country, too. I think that plays a little bit there.

Jeremy attested that, for his parents, safety also was a requirement: "... But my parents said that 'if you want to go to study there ...' the safety will be on their priority and Western have the ... because they are listed as the safest city or college city in the United States so that convinced my parents a lot." Like Jeremy, safety was a concern to Gia's parents but also to her personally:

I also was able to find out information that WKU campus is safe, one of the safest campus in the US. I asked [advisor] and he say he didn't see any things that I should be concerned about in terms of safety. Even though when I was in [my country] because of movies and other things, I was concerned about how violent people could be around here since that you have access to guns and things like that. I was worry and my family was worry. The fact that I knew somebody that was living and working here and I trust that person and the person confirmed to me that it was safe, I feel much better about my decision.

Gia mentioned that she knew the campus was one of the safest in the US, possibly due to WKU's designation as a *safe community*. In 2014, the National Safety Council accredited the university as a safe community (WKU, 2016f). Institutions can apply for this designation at the National Safety Council through an application that requires the university to build a coalition with the mission to increase safety through review, implementation, and evaluation of safety measures (National Safety Council, 2017). The community is then evaluated based on motor vehicle safety, fall prevention, substance

abuse, workplace safety, violence and suicide prevention, and emergency preparedness.

To some parents it was important that the campus was located in a certain area. Suly described that his parents pushed for a specific area at a specific cost: “No, we have a certain amount of money. We have a location we're looking for to be close to your brother, and that's all.” Leonard told me that knowing the exact geographical location made him feel better about the potential institution:

Yeah I did care about that too, yeah. Even the location of Bowling Green itself on the map, where it is. Is it, like you said, is it close to maybe the ocean or sea or whatever. Yeah I did look into that. I wanted a map, and I think it was during that same time I was with the agency, yeah they had a map and they told me, "Okay so this is the exact place you'll be going to." They gave me a just brief geographical background about the place and all that. Yeah.

To other students, the location was important only if it provided them with facilities and services they viewed as essential. Max described how the lack of certain services made him feel better about his choice:

Yes, one more thing. I'm not a religious person, but it's more than average. When I looked at ... Because I don't drink alcohol, when I looked at bars or night clubs, there were only few in Bowling Green. I said, "That's cool. I'm not going to drink one day because there are only few." If I go to large city all my friends are going to drink. Everyone is going to go to the bars. I might go one day with them, I might drink, which I don't want to do that. When I look that there are only few bars, I was so happy. I told my mom, I said, "Hey guess what, there are only three to five bars. I'm not going to drink at all because I'm not going to go there one

day."

Max continued by stating the services and provisions that were vital to him: "The main thing that is, is it safe and is there a Mosque. Can I find at least one Arabic market?"

While she was the only one of the interviewees, Paola and her father decided to check and verify the environment and services in person. She described:

I came here with my dad. My dad drove me here. I come from [my city], the largest city in [my country], so it was a huge change, like this small town. My dad was like, "Are you sure you want to stay? Like, we can go back and then look for another university," and I was like, "No." I liked it. I love the campus. It was the first thing, the campus.

Conclusion

After considering the recommendations from others and the cost associated with studying abroad, students considered what they would like to have included in their experience. The interviewees mentioned safety, location, and services provided as aspects they wanted to see included in the environment in which they would spend their college careers. Overall, students considered their chosen institution as safe, which seemed to be important to them as well as their families.

Quality and Reputation

Students in this study had their own perspectives on the quality of education in different countries and judged the reputations of institutions based on information they obtained. In the college choice process, respondents ranged from verifying an institution's acceptable quality to significantly being influenced by the reputation of a foreign study destination.

Selection of Country

In this study, students viewed some countries' education systems as more prestigious and of higher quality. Some students believed the US was the ultimate number one in quality of education, while others aimed for any Western educational system recognized in their home countries.

Predisposition. From a broader perspective, some respondents discussed in their interviews that it was not just certain recommendations and environments that brought them to search for educational opportunities in other countries, but also the perceived overall quality and reputation of certain educational systems. Suly described his perspective on education outside of his home country:

After that, we had a conflict then fought a little bit, but I insisted on coming into U.S., either U.S. or United Kingdom. I was like, "Whatever, I just need to go out of [my country] to study," because better education. It's not necessarily better education but that's a stereotypical, you know, you get a better education in ... what do you call, first world country, no?

For some students, the perceived quality was not only higher abroad, but the options of acceptable quality were limited in their home countries. "In [my country], we didn't have enough good education system for the major that I'm pursuing. In [other study abroad country], there wasn't an option as well, so we were forced to search something outside to my home countries," Baylee said, referring to a country in Africa and one in Eastern Europe, describing a strong push to study abroad in another country. Others were less desperate but believed that a foreign education would benefit them. Maame Aba described her initial reason to look abroad instead of in her own African nation: "One, to

get the experience, two, to get a better education. It's not like our system is not good, but he just wanted me to get ... I will still use the word, 'a better education,' outside the country." Some interviewees were convinced by others that the quality education abroad was worth pursuing and that these advisors could aid them in grabbing this opportunity.

Search. Perceived quality and reputation of educational systems in different countries aided interviewees to list potential desirable countries. Gia described how her family was more supportive of her attending college in one country over the other:

I think also because it's just weird that my family thought that America was superior to Australia, so they supported me to come here more than Australia. I mean, which is true to some extent because like most of the things that consider fancy, consider best quality in [my country] and at top, it would be from the US. Everyone there just had the perception that, "Oh, US is the best." If you can choose a better one, why not?

Jeremy had a similar experience in which his family and friends convinced him to keep the US high on the list of potential options. He told me:

For me the United States because all my friends and all my family members said that "United States is most advanced country and their education should be the best in the world and if you want to go overseas this country should be the first one you need to think about, put it as priority and then you can just list another countries but US should be always be the first one you need to consider. I know it's the tougher one but you need to do that." That's the reason why I do that.

Choice. Many of the respondents decided to study abroad to pursue educational opportunities that they perceived as better in quality. Pedro emphasized that, besides the

strong way of managing the educational system, the United States is well ranked. He said:

It's world-wide known, that the U.S. has some of the best colleges in all around the world. You can see the rankings. You can see colleges from all around the world as well in the top ranking, but if you see, most of the universities are from the U.S.. In the U.S. you have tons of universities that are good.

Pedro was not the only interviewee impressed with the quality of education in the United States. Besides the interest he expressed for the American culture and language, Junior also mentioned: "First of all, I was thinking about that always for my life. I just wanted to move to United States because many people's say that in the United States it's the most of the best education." Sophia felt similarly to Junior and voiced that an investment in United States education was perceived as less risky:

Just United States. Why I choose this country? Because I think the education in America, it's better than other countries. The public universities especially. Of course, the private school here are very good, but the public universities is also good. In [my country], I read about an article, talking about foreign countries' education, and it mentioned that America's education, it's not based on money. It's not based on, how do you say it? They are not focused on get the tuition. Still, they still put a lot of energy, money, and want to have a good education for international students. Some other countries, personally they seems like they focus on getting more international students because international students bring a lot of money to the school, so they don't really care about what are you going to learn. They just care about money. The article mentioned that America, it's not

like that. Most of school in this country still dedicated to education.

The majority of the interviewees viewed education as a good investment, but the size of the investment influenced students' decisions as well, which often depended on the choice of institution.

Selection of Institution

Perceived quality was important for many students and their parents, even when the reputation of a country did not always define all areas within it. Respondents perceived the quality of education of different institutions in their own way, which at times explained parts of their decision making.

Predisposition. Junior described the potential option of Chicago as, “Cool city, but education sucks.” He felt pushed away from bigger cities due to his perception of the quality of education there: “Even like when I came here the first time, my English was not really good, but I could speak better than him. Even though he was study in Chicago, what's the result? Nothing.” Other interviewees also were pushed away from potential institutions due to a reputation the university had built. Suly illustrated: “That plays a role with people who's coming over here, either from [my country] or from different places, like, oh, that student is great but he didn't do well. That's mean university is not working well with the students.” This reputation influenced the students but also their parents, who had a major impact on the decision of many of the interviewees.

Search. Institutional quality and reputation can refer to many different aspects. To some students national rankings are influential, whereas others find performance by its sports teams important. Baylee mentioned: “Well, we said that we're interesting in medical field. We believe that in America the field that I want to graduate in is good. We

asked to see the rankings, rankings.” Pedro discussed that accreditation was important to him (WKU, 2016g):

For me I think, when you're doing an undergraduate, and I think if you do it in a college where you have the good accreditation. For example, in the business college I think is the AACSB. I think that's enough, because probably in the future you can do the masters and you can do it in a better college and you won't be spending a lot of money just in the 4 years of undergraduate. Spend that amount of money in the graduate.

He continued by describing additional standards potential options have to reach in order for him to consider that institution (*Forbes*, 2016; *U.S. News*, 2016):

First of all, accreditation. I looked at all the university has the same accreditation. The ranking was in all the rankings, like *Forbes*, *U.S. News*. I compare those according to the rankings, then I looked at the reviews of the universities. I just searched and see the reviews. Also, for me, sports are kind of important, because you can see for example if university usually is in division 1, if it's a division 1 university it has a better reputation than the university that is in a division 2 or division 3. I made sure that each university that I chose was going to be a division 1 university. That's kind of like, you see how the universities are separated from the others. I think that there are like more than 120 universities in division 1. I just wanted to be in 1 of those universities. That's how I made my ranking I can say.

Pedro perceived a strong athletic program as an indicator of institutional size and quality. Institutional reputation also was important to other students who put emphasis on other aspects. Shi Wang described how she was pulled toward an institution's reputation based

on another type of educational quality (WKU, 2016h): “Yeah, Pulitzer Prize but we only even have one in [my country] like in whole country, only have one, then this university have more than 10. I was surprised even I'm not in this major so we tried to look for the items in this university.”

Choice. Respondents confirmed that ranking and perceived quality made a difference in their decisions. When asked why she selected Western Kentucky University over other institution, Sophia said, “The communication major ranks better, yes.” Brand found an article online, like *U.S. News* (2016) that ranked WKU 10th in the list of top public schools, or Fox (2015) that named WKU among the 30 most beautiful college campus in the South, praising the university’s campus: “Because, I checked it online first. It says WKU was one of the best university with good environment.” To Baylee, it was important to find an option that met his and his parents’ standard for quality:

First of all, it was based on personal likes or dislikes. Again, the level of the university itself. We had a right think of universities that I could enter. Then, we narrow down our spectrum, our source of area. We find out that Western Kentucky which was in a good level, writings. We stopped at that university.

Similar to Baylee, quality was an aspect that had to be verified for Gia:

More checking box. To make sure that everything's okay. I read stories even when I was back in [my country] or people came here. They were fooled to study in that school that was not accredited. They lost all their money. That's something I need to take into consideration but they were more like a minor thing.

Sophia also checked to make sure the institution met a certain level of quality. In her

case, the quality standard was set by her father and her home country's government:

He [father] talked to me like, "There are a lot of universities or college in California and in New York, but with very poor quality. They're not real college and universities." He watched some TV news about it. He searched those three schools, and WKU is public school, founded by the state, with a good quality, and he think, "That's good." It's a accept by [my country's] government.

Conclusion

To a few students, quality and reputation helped to determine their final choice. Together with cost and the environment, Pedro mentioned that ranking helped him determine his choice. At other times, factors like quality and reputation were important to students in a way that they became check boxes of required aspects provided in a specific country and at a specific institution, but respondents did not emphasize the influence of these factors throughout the entire process. The ranking helped students decide between institutions that were selected due to more influential factors like recommendations, costs, and the environment.

Prospects and Opportunities

Like quality and reputation, some factors were mentioned only as influential to a select number of the stages in the decision-making process. Prospects and opportunities mainly influenced the selection of country for the students I interviewed. For most of them, pursuing education abroad could lead to other opportunities. These students believed that some of these opportunities were connected to the country, which they selected, and the institution, which they attended.

Selection of Country

A number of interviewed students believed that a degree from specific countries would bring better prospects down the road. Additionally, some countries were perceived as having unique opportunities during the time the students were attending college.

Predisposition. One of the benefits from a foreign degree can be that it opens doors to better job prospects after graduation. Several of the respondents discussed job prospects as influential to their decision. Paolo mentioned that, “In [my country], I think everywhere else, if you have a US degree, you already got a job for sure. That's a big part of it.” The value of a foreign degree pulled Paolo and her family to choose foreign studies over domestic education. Other students like Brand feel pushed toward foreign education, as they felt a degree from institutions in their home country was insufficient. In the interview, Brand stated, “I don't think I have so many chances to get a good job” when referring to finishing his studies at home. He later continued to explain:

They have still, so many people in [my country], so if you study abroad, if you can graduate and you come back, first of all, the boss of the companies, they will first check your diploma. If you can study abroad because they think the people who can graduate from America or Europe countries, they think that kind of people there are awesome.

Besides better job prospects after earning a degree from a foreign country, studying abroad also can lead to prospects for continued education. Jeremy described how he felt pulled toward continued education abroad:

Yes, but I have 2 options, if I do not accepted by Western I prepare to find a job,

continue finding a job and at same time applying for a kind of master degree in [my country] and so but the MBA, the reputation of the major is not as good as Western's and because in [my country] I know that if you are not in the top college, the master degree is kind of a waste of your time because you have to help your advisor to do their own jobs.

Besides the possible increased recognition of a later earned degree, some students felt pushed to continue education abroad due to their limited options at home. Max told me how one bad year in high school ruined his chances to get accepted at a quality university: "At that time, because I wanted to study abroad because there was no way I was going to get accepted in college back home, so I just wanted to go anywhere." Due to the way of calculating GPA, Max was going to be punished for bad performance in his second year. Studying abroad provided him with a second chance due to the different acceptance requirements of United States universities.

Search. Opportunities during and after higher education was a factor some students took into consideration when evaluating potential host countries. While Pedro believed education in the USA was a good investment, he also considered other options:

That's why I decided also Canada, because Canada is almost similar. The universities compared to the U.S. is almost the same. That's why I decided Canada. Also you have better working opportunities when you graduate when you're in Canada. The OPT for U.S. only is only for 1 year but in Canada is for 3, so you have that option. [...] In Australia because they also offer a lot of opportunities. Especially for the ones that's private.

Pedro was not the only interviewee who considered opportunities when searching for

acceptable countries. Gia considered future job opportunities, scholarships, and even potential emigration:

I didn't have close friends who went to England, but I did have close friends who were staying in Australia. The difference is they went there through governmental scholarship, so they have to go back to [my country]. I think seeing that my brother was able to get the visa to stay and got a good job gave me the idea that, "Oh, if he can do that, maybe that will happen to me too." Then with Australia, most of the time people I knew, they would go back home. I like [my country], it's my home country. When it comes to job opportunities, it's terrible. I think my friends they went back because they had to. The government gave them the money to study abroad. They have to go back. When they went back even with a PhD or an MBA they could not get a good job because it's bureaucratic in [my country]. It's more about your family backgrounds and who you knew and things like that.

Unlike Pedro, Gia was pushed away from countries like Australia, as she believed they did not offer good future prospects. Other students were drawn by opportunities while studying, or pushed by the perceived lack of opportunities in a certain country. Shi Wang described her desire to gain work experience while at college:

Probably, but I think from my information, they all pretty much the same. Yeah. Then, most people, they will say it depends on how you spend the money like the second week I'm here, I find a job but because I have that prepare, I say because I'm not a college, I'm older than 21, then, I may be have more option than ... so I prepared to work somehow no matter I'm here or not or there. The news from

England, most people, they don't work. Yeah. Because it's different value, different stuff, whether it's true or not.

Choice. When defending their choice of country, respondents mentioned in their interviews that the United States had distinct advantages over other countries in terms of future prospects. Paola mentioned feeling pulled toward the United States: “In [my country], I think everywhere else, if you have a US degree, you already got a job for sure. That's a big part of it.” Similarly, Brand described: “They are fantastic at studying and they're independent enough. They will first check your diploma. If I can get American university diploma and go back to my country, I will have advantages.” Another student who felt pulled toward the United States was Suly. “Of course. That's a major thing, actually, why I wanted to come to U.S. is mainly resume and I'll say life, or resume of life, which is how I'm going to do in the future,” he said.

To others, opportunities served as an additional pull to choose the United States over other countries. Junior mentioned his desire to immigrate: “I mean, I don't care actually. I just want to stay here, but of course I prefer better job.” Pedro believed that more opportunities are available to students, even during their studies in the United States. “Not really, because here ... How can I explain this ... There are a lot of opportunities, not only in the university, but also for work opportunities in organizations,” he stated.

Selection of Institution

Prospects influenced the decision for some students to select the United States over other countries. When it came to the selection of an institution, opportunities helped respondents to make a final decision when weighing costs and benefits from different

institutions.

Choice. Most interviewees expressed a hope that their education abroad would bring a strong return on investment. They perceived that prospects as the result of one's study at a specific university pulled respondents to their selected institutions. Junior was convinced WKU would offer a strong possibility to reap these benefits in the future: "So yeah I heard about this University is really tough. If you will get a degree, you will get a good job." For Baylee, future prospects convinced him to select an American institution over others: "We know that American education or diploma is more valuable around the world so we decided to gamble. We decided to make our choice in favor of America and we did." Job opportunities while enrolled also influenced a few students to select a particular institution. Shi Wang told me:

Also, the work experience here is also value for me. I find out - because originally I really worried about what whether this leadership major in Western Kentucky University won't attract the good job in [my country] - but these two years I find out that people don't care about which university you work, because they value your experience.

Conclusion

Interviewees talked about opportunities they considered as part of their choice, but not before recommendations, costs, the environment, and quality. The potential opportunities during their college career were attractive benefits, for students and the future prospects convinced many of them to study abroad. Potential opportunities were not always limited to the US or WKU and were, therefore, less influential to the entire decision-making process. Most often, prospects were a subset of the benefits analysis,

opportunities making up for some of the costs. Nevertheless, prospects and opportunities influenced the college choice process for country more than institution.

Program of Study

Educational quality and reputation of institutions as a whole seemed important to the interviewees. Some also mentioned, however, that specific programs of study influenced which institutions in which countries were acceptable.

Selection of Country

Some students believed their major and field were best studied in the United States. Others had made a list of countries that were known for developments or training in the field of the students' interests.

Predisposition. In certain fields, developments and training are more advanced in some countries compared to others. Even though countries are always progressing, Sophia described the perceived pull of students in her country:

Okay. I guess it's a trend in [my country] to be an overseas student for, I would like to say, almost ten years. Why? Because in [my country] there are a lot of areas, academic areas, that's not completed, as a very matured academic field. But in America, or other countries like Australia or England there are. You have a lot of universities that offer options for international students and they can come to study. That's one reason.

James felt more pushed to look outside of his country due to a lack of transfer opportunities:

From what I know, we don't have that kind of system. We don't have "I don't like it here, I can transfer to another school." The only thing you can do is you stay at

the last year of the high school, with the previous year of high school, and retake the test and try to get into the school you want. I don't think we have the transfer system in there.

Search. The quality and reputation of the entire country mattered to students, but some respondents were pulled toward specific fields of study and their perceived quality in certain countries. Baylee described:

Most of all, it wasn't something professional. If we start evaluating countries in the medical field only, then not only America is advanced in the medical field.

There are a couple of other countries and area that are also as good as America in medical field. It would be even closer to Europe.

Students felt pushed away from other countries due to their perceived quality in a specific field. The interviewees used this perception to exclude some countries from their list of potential options. Khan, for example, mentioned: “No. Arab countries? No way. All these guys come for the medical school over there, and there's no point going into them with a standard of education lower than them. There is no point going there.” Paola felt pulled toward a certain country as an option due to the reputation and quality of certain institutions in her field of study. She described: “Well Honduras because there's a good agriculture school there that I was interested in when I wanted to study that.” Paolo also mentioned that her advisor from whom she received information about studying abroad specifically recommended one institution. She continued, “Then Canada because it's safe country, good place for study, too, and there was a university. I think it was British Columbia. They really got me into it. They just sold the university to me.”

Choice. Some countries were perceived as the best country to pursue a certain

topic of study, according to the interviewees. Pedro described how he believed that specifically the United States would bring him opportunities in his major:

The second one was because, I used to run and I like business. Business is my major. I decided to go away to go to a country where I can put those things together. Especially the business part, and I decided to go to the U.S. because that's the best place to start a business, and for me. It started like that way.

Pedro's business perspective on the United States also influenced his perspective on the quality of the United States education system. He described:

I think it's because of the university model that the U.S. has is better than some models that universities in all around the world has. What I mean by that is sometimes, is like a soccer team. For example, if you compare soccer teams from an underdeveloped country, you'll see that is just a soccer team. You just play, get some money from the entries and that's it. If you see a soccer team or a football team from the U.S., they see more the team as an enterprise so they market the team and do everything. The same thing happened with the universities. What I mean by that is they have a really good system when they can show all the values that the university has, and apart from that is world-wide popular.

Selection of Institution

Respondents often wanted to make sure that they could study their program at the institution that they might select. While some institutions are better known for some programs of study, to most of the interviewees their major was simply one aspect that had to be offered in order for the university to be considered.

Search. Being able to pursue one's major and qualify to obtain a degree in a

specific field can be important when searching for potential institutions. Khan mentioned that the availability of his major was the most important factor to him: “Basically I just started with my program of study that they were offering. The program of study was most important...” To others, program offerings were a part of many important factors that pulled them toward an institution. Shi Wang described how she searched for potential institutions based on her program of study:

Then, the most difficult part would be choose the university because at that time, we don't use Google in [my country] of course then, it's just ... I feel like it's more than four universities, then, when I start this process is when I was junior in college. At that time, I still really love my major, broadcasting, so I'm still try to focus on find a university who have a chance on broadcasting.

The interviewees described program of study only as a pull toward an institution. While students could be deterred from institutions that are not offering their program of study, none of the interviewees described this.

Choice. Some students felt pulled toward an institution, as it was known for having a strong program in which the students majored. For example, Brand shared:

Also, I came here, I chose WKU because of my major. My major is computer science, so in my country, if I want to study this major, it's really hard, but you can't even find a good job in my city because it's really popular jobs. So many people, they all choose this major.

Similarly, Sophia said that the program of study was the first factor on her list of aspects she wanted to see in a potential institution: “For me, why choose WKU? Because first, my master degree is in communication, and WKU's communication is good. That's one

reason.” Jeremy mentioned that his high quality program of study (The Lane Report, 2013) was one of the main reasons he decided on a particular institution:

Yes and combined with the cost and the safety issues, we choose Western and also the reputation of the MBA program because the MBA program at that time told us that they are the top 20% or not at that time but they are 1 of the best major at Western so that's another important factor as well is to choose here.

Conclusion

Almost all respondents perceived the United States as strong in their fields of study, and all of them selected to study in the USA. At times, it was a general perception that the educational system was strong and that the chosen institution has the major of interest; other times, students believed the United States was best in their field and WKU was among the highest ranked for a specific major. Program of study could have pushed students away from the United States and WKU if their major was not offered. As the interviewed students chose a major offered at WKU, the overall influence of the factor often was limited to a level at which students’ verified the program’s availability after other factors influenced the process toward choosing country and institution. While a few students cared about their program’s quality and ranking, the majority of respondents just wanted to make sure they could study in their preferred field in the country and at the institution of their choice.

Application and Admission

Among the interviewees, it was not uncommon that an advisor or agent helped with the application and visa process. Without successful completion of both the visa

interview and application process, the students would not be able to continue with their selection.

Selection of Country

While institutional admission among institutions in different countries may vary, the visa processes predominantly influenced the interviewed students' decision of country selection. An approved visa application and meeting the admission requirements enabled students to consider certain options. For most students, these applications started to influence the college choice once the majority of the decision process was completed and students attempted to gain access to their destination of choice.

Predisposition. The application process, receiving an acceptance letter, and obtaining a visa are crucial steps that students need to complete successfully before they can study abroad. Pedro described how the application helped to guide him through the process of going abroad:

I just look it up, look all the web pages and I try to apply. I saved a little money to apply to some colleges. I saved money to take the TOEFL. That's how actually I started to know more about colleges, because once you get to the pages and get to know the requirements. You say okay I'm missing this test, now I'm missing this test. That's how I first get to know how to study abroad.

When the applications are complete and students are accepted, they need to apply for a student visa to move abroad. Without this visa, students are not able to pursue education abroad. Khan described how a visa denial decided his educational future: "I was waiting for a couple of more but instead my parents told me you have got an offer, just take the chance with that and apply for a visa. The funny thing is I got refused a visa the first

time, and I was okay with that.” Afterwards, it was Khan’s father who convinced him not to give up on the possibility to study abroad:

A week later my dad comes up to me, "No matter what you have got the offer. Just apply for a visa again." I applied and I got the visa, and interestingly they never questioned the same reason that they refused first. They just stamped it and said you can go. They kept my passport for six weeks, and I was really curious about what's going on, six weeks.

The college and visa application are two aspects that affected students’ decision making, as they provide guidance and sometimes test the students’ determination to study abroad. College applications in one’s home country also can influence the decision making, as it can require students to complete additional steps. One of the interviewees encountered an unusual experience in which she was prevented from being accepted back home due to a decision to study abroad earlier. Maame Aba described how she studied abroad her senior year and missed her senior exam, which led college administrations to consider her an international student in her own country:

... Because I did not have the high school diploma from back home. Back home, we have the system that we go to high school for three years, well, it was three, then they changed it to four, and then they changed it back to three. Your last year, we have the standard exams that you write, and it covers everything that you studied for the past three years. It's pretty tough, and I'm so glad I did not have to write that. So, yes, they do use those results to place you in schools. You do choose the schools, but after the results come out they kind of like give you the school according to your results. [...] Not having anything from there, or the fact

that I did not write that exam and I don't have any [local] high school certificate, but here, I will be considered as an international student. It's just like coming here and I would use the in-state and out-state PR system, yeah, pretty much.

Application requirements and educational policies can encourage or discourage students from pursuing education in one country over another.

Choice. Several students decided on a particular country and had to reevaluate their options after a denial of a visa. Jeremy explained:

If you cannot ... I don't know the choose but I know the student, if they cannot pass the interview after three times, it's kind of impossible for them to pass in the future so they after three time failures they will decide if to just find another country or just get rid of it.

The U.S. Department of State (2017) published a list of reasons online why applicants might be ineligible for a visa to the United States. A number of the interviewees were denied for their visas at least once. Brand described how it pushed him away from his original choice and became the most important influence on his decision:

Again, I want to say that I wasn't concerned which one. We picked up. I guess, after the failure in Canada, we were more concerned whether we can get there or not. That was our first priority to get to the university in America. Anything else was just not that important. For my parents it was. For me, no. Not that much.

The visa interview cannot be scheduled until the student has been accepted at an institution and is in possession of the appropriate Form I-20. At this time, most students have chosen their desired country and have applied to one or several institutions.

Selection of Institution

A denial of one's visa application might discount options of study destination and institutions, but not being able to meet admission requirements, or believing that one could not meet the requirements, also can help reduce to the list of potential universities at which one might study.

Predisposition. Similar, to the predisposition of country selection, respondents had to be able to obtain acceptance to institutions before they could select them as potential options. Baylee mentioned how, based on his transcripts, he was accepted by institutions in multiple countries and could, therefore, consider multiple institutions: "That is why maybe I was accepted. Not only in America and also in Canadian university. Yes. We had to provide those. We had to translate them into English. Yeah, that's pretty much all." Sophia discussed how having her test results was important so she knew which schools she could get accepted to: "First, they say you need to take the test first. If you pass the test, like TOEFL or GRE, then we can really talk about the schools. If you can't even pass the test, no. First phase is prepare for the test. Then, select schools."

Not meeting acceptance requirements to certain schools pushed interviewees away from even applying or considering these institutions as options. Shi Wang stated: "Because my GRE is not high so I don't ... and also, my college is also the second level college so it took me ... I cannot go like ... I have my thought, I cannot go to Harvard or those kind of university so I tried to find one can use my strength." In order to enroll in certain institutions, the interviewees had to be able to obtain a visa to the hosting country based on acceptance to that university. Khan told a story about the way in which

institutions sometime decrease one's chances of obtaining a visa:

Well, it was tough and if I am to be honest most of the time it's like a guessing game. Like, this is good, this is good. We make up things that this is good, this is good, this is good and these kinds of things. Eventually it's a lot of risk whatever we think of the colleges. Because I remember I was in one of the seminars where the US Consulate, she was there and she directly pointed out of the universities that one of my friends got an offer from and she was like ... The University is the Wichita State University. They just tried to get money out of the people, and we don't give the ... You have to have a very, very strong reason to get a visa for that university.

Khan's story described how an institution's reputation at an embassy could influence the students' chances of getting a visa. While I was not able to verify this effect, Khan perceived it as influential and made sure the university was well received.

Search. In their search for potential institutions and their process of reducing the number of options, students needed to consider the application requirements of institutions. Strong admission standards can push students away who cannot obtain the required scores, but it also can pull students toward the institution, as it makes the university more selective. Additionally, speed of admission decisions provide students with higher levels of certainty about their acceptance earlier, which can convince students to enroll at one of the options for which they received acceptance. Khan mentioned how he dismissed an option when the institution made their admission decision after other institutions. He described:

Five universities. I got rejected from one of them, and one of them I heard from

when my visa was approved, and I was literally done with everything. After that I was like, “I'm sticking to what I have, and let's see what my future holds.”

Because considering like this, this, this, this option and all will leave me in trouble. What you have, please go with it.

An unclear application process or lack of help from the institution during the application process can push potential students away. Maame Aba mentioned a similar experience:

As naïve as I was, I did not know how to pay for application fee, so after two weeks I called the schools that I applied to, because usually I know it takes about two weeks to get a response from them and I did not. So, they asked if I paid for application fee and I said no, and they said, “Well, that's the reason why you've not gotten a response or feedback from us.”

Jeremy reasoned that stronger admission standards indicated a better quality education:

Actually Western Texas A&M would be my last options because I know that if I apply for a kind of master degree, they are not require for a GRE score even so I am question about that, so I believe that the college who require additional academic requirements would be better. I just assume ... so that's the reason why I leave that as the last one. Yes, yes.

Choice. To settle on one specific institution and enroll there, students have to be accepted to this institution. Next, the student receives an acceptance letter and applies for a visa. Once the visa is granted, the student can enroll at the chosen institution. The application requirements set standards for the students, but the application process differs in speed, length, and required documents between institutions. James described how his

application process became easier by going to a specific institution; a faculty member whom he previously met worked at this institution. “Because we need audition, and I was auditioned already during that meeting,” James stated. Leonard felt pulled toward his chosen university, as they were timely with their acceptance letter and he could continue to the next step in preparing for his study abroad voyage. Leonard said:

...the agency contacted me because they sent it to the agency address. They contacted me and told me, "Hey, your offer letter from WKU is here, but the others have not yet come," because we applied at the same time. I was like oh really that's good, that's good. Then let's just go with that. Let's not waste any more time, that's it.

Like Leonard, Maame Aba felt confirmed in her decision by the arrival of her acceptance letter: “Immediately the acceptance letter hit the mail I was like; I'm not even looking at any other school.” The admission requirements (WKU, 2017), like the required GRE score, convinced Shi Wang that the institution was within her reach.

For a number of respondents, the timeline between graduation, the decision to study abroad, required preparations, and the enrollment deadline resulted in pressure on the student. The added weight of the timeline influenced interviewees to choose options where they could start late or received time to meet all admission requirements. Jeremy, for example, stated:

Yes, yes because of conditional admission at that time made sense to me because I was a graduate, I need to get acceptance letter as soon as possible and Western offers that option it make me easier to ... I can prepare for the visa interview very soon. Then, it gave be another option to prepare to enter the real college in the

United States because if I go through the ESLI program and then enter the college it could give me conditional at least to one semester to get used to the environment and learning with and talking with native teacher and students and then once you enter the college you compare with others, you might have ... you will be more prepared for it and then then. This conditional admission is also a kind of as I see it's a kind of opportunity for me to just allow me to have one actual terms to just experience the America and then I can enter the college.

Like Jeremy, Paolo selected the intensive English program at Western Kentucky University, as they accepted her later into the semester. She explained: "Then [my cousin] talked about this one, and since I hadn't had any options at that time, it was like, 'Okay, I'm going there.' There's no other option. I can't apply right now. I was too late, so I came here." The intensive English program on campus helped Paola by providing her with an option to experience the institutional environment before fully enrolling at the academic level. She told me: "Yeah, I was just coming to ESLI and see if I liked it and I would like to stay here, but I already had it in mind, so I already looked at the civil engineering program and all of that."

Conclusion

The standards set for visas and admission requirements influenced the students, as they excluded them from being able to select certain options. Two students from different parts of the world were denied to study in other selected countries, and more than half of the respondents had been refused a visa to the United States at least once. While the reasons for denial were not always clear, these discouraged some of the students from pursuing studies in Canada, while others needed additional encouragement

by family to continue to pursue their plans to study in the USA.

For a select few students, stronger admission requirements encouraged them that the education at that institution was more worthy, but most students were happy just to be accepted so they could focus on getting to their selected choice. Visa and admission requirements influenced the overall college process, but most of the time not until the college choice was already made. Therefore, admission processes determine a threshold that mostly influences the college choice decision making if they are not met.

Language

While perhaps a minor influence throughout the decision-making process, the majority of respondents reported to consider only countries and institutions that provided education in their native tongues or in English. Students stated that they did not want to learn an additional language or spend additional time learning a new language before they could start their program of study.

Selection of Country

Most interviewees considered English-speaking countries in which to pursue higher education. A few of the interviewees also considered nations in which they spoke other languages with which the student was already familiar, but the preference seemed to be given to countries that used English as their primary language. The language preference enabled students to look for a specific set of countries and it influenced the students' selection of acceptable options.

Predisposition. Closely related to fields of study, several interviewees mentioned the English language as an influential predisposition factor, which convinced students to look abroad for their education. Suly explained that he desired to have a near-native

mastery of the English level to serve future opportunities: “Companies want more [nationals] or local people but they speak English, and a fluent English. They don't want, ‘Yeah, maybe this.’ No, they want fluent English so they can work with other companies, either internationally or in the country.” Junior described a push away from his home country because he felt that speaking his native tongue would lead to a regression in his English ability: “They always like me to, for example, come to Christmas or during summer, but I don't want to come back, because I mean I mostly prefer to speak in English.”

Search. Several interviewees stated firmly that learning a second or third language was not part of their educational plans. These students, therefore, selected countries that provided education in a language with which they were somewhat familiar. Max stated clearly: “I want countries that is good at specific field but also I want the country that speaks English, because English is a second language international, and I cannot learn any other language.” For Junior, the language of instruction reduced his options even further: “It's really cool, different accent, especially British accent, but I don't know. I just like American accent, that's all. I also curious about Canadian accent. So in other words, I'm interesting about North America.” Others felt pushed away from learning an additional language due to the additional time it would take them to complete their education. For example, Khan shared:

The problem is that over here first of all people don't understand that [my country] has a huge number of population that speaks English. A huge number of population that speaks it better than those who live here as well. For that matter one thing was an English speaking country, and a minimum amount of time.

Because I'm growing older so the minimum time that I can put in and all kinds of stuff.

The language of instruction tapered the lists of potential countries for many students, as it pulled them toward English-speaking countries and pushed them away from countries that provided education in a language with which they were unfamiliar.

Choice. For some students attending an English language environment was a requirement. For Junior, this even led him to come specifically to the United States. He described: “Also the way why I choose American, because I mostly prefer to use American accent.” For Suly, it was part of a mixture of influential factors: “... That's one of the reasons so I could come over here and either help me with English or just have a friend from a different country.”

Selection of Institution

In the process of choosing an institution of higher education, a few students considered how they could practice their second language at the potential institutions. While instruction in English was acceptable for all respondents, some felt more comfortable knowing that services were offered to help them get used to the new language environment.

Search. It was important to several respondents to select an institution with an environment beneficial for learning. To many of them, languages spoken around campus was a factor to consider. Shi Wang noted the lack of speakers of her native language as an advantage:

That's how he tell me. He kind of list all the advantage for both city. One, it is very local city, but maybe it's very also original, US, but also, at that time, it was

only about less than 200 [people from my country]. I try to go to city have less [people from my country], otherwise, maybe I only have chance to speak [my language]. That's one of my thought. I want to, at least, even I couldn't learn anything from US, at least I need to practice my English. That's my thought.

Gia wanted to avoid a living situation in which she might resort to her native tongue:

I do have a brother in Seattle but I wanted to be independent from him. I want to not to have to speak [my language] too much. If I go to Seattle, I will stay with him and that means I have to speak [my language] too, would probably took me too much.

Besides considering the language environment in which they would end up studying, respondents mentioned that the availability of English practice and a language program were a pull factor for some of the students. Pedro wanted to complete an intensive English program and was drawn to one that provided multiple future opportunities:

I really wanted to do an ESL first. For example, if I went in University of Oregon, I would have done an ESL first. ESLI compared to other ESL programs, the other ESL programs you just can do it in that university. ESLI you can do it in 1 university but then you can transfer to many.

Choice. The availability of an on-campus English language program comes with some advantages to an institution. Like in Paola's case, they were able to enroll students later than the university could. The program also provided students with the option to work on meeting full admission requirements, like the English language requirement, while experiencing the environment abroad. The threshold to choose Western Kentucky

University was made easier to James by the availability of an intensive English program:

No, because we have to take TOEFL. Even though you have the full scores in high school, or whatever, it doesn't matter. You still have to take the TOEFL.

Also, if you need to take TOEFL now, you go to a class in [my country]. My mom said "If you need to study, why don't you just go there and study? I think it would be better for you. Which is better than you just write on papers, try to ..."

You know, [local] TOEFL is fucking crazy. I was like "Eh, sounds better."

Gia liked the option of improving her English while getting used to the new environment:

At that time, even though I had a 6.0 IELTS, which make me qualify to study at WKU along with my GPA, I knew that, as you need to improve my English. Like I say, I had friends back in [home country] who were Americans or Australians or British. The more I communicated with them, the more I realized, "Wow. It's not enough just to take a test and hope that you will be able to communicate well with English speakers." I also knew that in order to succeed at a university in the US, it's important to know how to do research, write research papers. In [my country], even when I was in college there, I didn't get to learn that skill. I think a lot about how I can be a good student, how I can succeed, how I can graduate with a high GPA. I knew that in order to get there, I have to be prepare especially when it comes to language proficiency. I think that's the key to help you understand what's going on around you. I decided to take a course at ESLI.

English training on campus was one of the opportunities that pulled some students toward Western Kentucky University as their preferred option.

Conclusion

The students included in this study wanted to study in an English-speaking environment. Language learning desires pulled some students abroad and the offered language of instruction made some options more attractive to students. To the overall decision-making process, language excluded non-English speaking countries to most students and made some institutions more attractive due to their English language training programs, but the overall influence on the final college choice decision was limited. It made students look for English-speaking countries, and a few of the respondents verified that the institution had additional language training, as they needed these for admission purposes.

Other Factors

Outside the main factors affecting the decision making, some respondents mentioned factors that, even though they often affected only one stage, seemed influential enough to be mentioned during the interviews.

Selection of Country

The only other factor mentioned as influential to the selection of country was the selection of an institution. In the cases in which a student wanted to attend a particular institution, the country was selected as part of this institutional college choice.

Choice. Some students simply decided the institution in which they were interested and considered this more important than the hosting country. Leonard described how he selected the institution he wanted to attend and it just happened to be located in the United States. Leonard stated:

Yeah. I do not really know much about the USA either. I was totally blank, going

somewhere not knowing anything about it, and just knowing that okay, I'm just going to Western Kentucky University you know? I didn't know anything about even other states too. Even about Kentucky too. I did not know anything, it was just the fact that okay, Western seems to be a great school, let me go and give it a shot.

Maama Aba had experience at a high school in the United States and, therefore, selected the same country to which to return. She noted:

I, personally, even though I did a little research around, and the agency also was wanting ... I think back then China had become a pretty big deal for a student that wanted to travel outside [my country], and it was suggested that I go there, since it's going to be more than half of what I'll be paying here ... No, less than half of what I'll be paying here, but I did not really like it. Like, "I came here. I like it, and I'm coming back here."

Selection of Institution

To some students, the information they had obtained about an institution, through the website and brochures, convinced them that one institution might be a better fit for them. Others were convinced to attend a college after a sufficient offer was received.

Search. In order for students to refine the list of acceptable institutions, it was important for them to find the information on services and facilities that are important to them. Leonard, for example, mentioned: "... And then obviously had to look through and see what type of facilities the engineering department had too. I went in depth of that. The type of labs, obviously it was just through the internet and the pamphlets that I had." Specific facilities were important to Leonard. Brand, on the other hand, wanted to check

basic information to verify that the institution was acceptable. He noted: “I did background check; I checked the history of the school, background of the school. I saw so many pictures and I saw so many stories of this university.” Like Brand, Khan conducted his own research into institutions:

I got a couple of brochures. I had ordered online. I went through, and I was Googling through. There were certain US government agencies and on their websites, they listed the names of the universities. Most importantly, I was looking for some university. Over here, I figured it out that it was better to get into some State sponsored university, and public university is better than getting into the private sector university. They get money more and then you have some kind of scholarship as well.

To Leonard, besides information regarding facilities, it also was important that the institution answered his questions and provided him with information and support. He described:

That was, yeah yeah yeah. I did ... Like I said, I was asking so many questions. If I get there, is there going to be somebody to guide me, to take me? I would ask all these very useless questions. They were not really useless, because I just wanted to know. I did not want a situation where I would get there, arrive there, and then there'll be nobody you know? Then I get stranded, start panicking and start crying.

Moving to a different country can induce significant stress, and administrative help from institutions can influence the comfort with which a student like Leonard perceives the institution as an option.

Choice. In the interviews, a few students mentioned that the obtained information drew them to one particular institution. “Their vision statement. I like the vision statement. I look up the videos. I look up the social media and I saw that, oh okay, this university has value. It has a meaning. That's why I liked it,” said Pedro. Khan described how he really appreciated the service the international student office provided in supplying information and answering questions:

Well, I had an e-mail exchange with [advisor] here. I had an e-mail exchange with [advisor] during that point of time. There was nothing. There was quite a few questions that I wouldn't even think of right now. Like those silly questions that I had put forth to Eric and all this kind of ... I remember when I got my I-20, I had all these kind of funny questions. I put up an e-mail and thanks on [advisor]'s part she replied each and every point of it. Once I did that. I remember when I did that, and I told that to my sister. I showed her the e-mail, and she was like, “What the hell is wrong with you? What the hell is wrong with you?” [...] Yes. It actually helps if someone can help you around with that.

The information helped students narrow down their options by confirming expectations and making the option feel tangible. While perhaps not a factor that influenced the decision-making process throughout the different stages, information weighted in the favor of the chosen institution.

In the interviews, a few students confessed that the decision to attend a particular institution was not always made through a clear and logical process where the student weighed pro and cons. Some students, like Leonard, expressed that his chosen institution offered a solid opportunity and that was simply enough. He explained:

Well I didn't think it was the best option, but I thought it was a good point for me to start. It was a good starting point for me. I was okay with that. Plus they had told me once you go there you can always stay for a while and then transfer. I've been pointed out that too. I was like okay, let me just go and see how things work, and when I got here I was really satisfied with everything. It wasn't really a bad school or anything. I think it's a good school. I do know a couple people who talk bad about it, but personally, for me, I think it's a good school.

After receiving her WKU acceptance letter, Maame Aba said other options no longer mattered: “No, I just let all the other schools slide by. I did not really care about them anymore.”

Conclusion

In weighing recommendations, cost, the environment, quality, program of study, and language, some students selected the first institution that scored acceptable on the majority of these factors. Others double checked the institution's facilities and tried to get a better idea of the environment by obtaining more information before settling down on one final choice. One student even mentioned that the choice regarding institution was more important than the one for country. Overall, these additional factors had a minor influence on the decision-making process, as they mostly seemed to serve as verification of the decision the student already made.

Summary

The results of this study indicate that international student college choice is a multivariate process. Jeremy illustrated this well in his statement:

I chose Kentucky and WKU as my final decision because on the website it said

it's a safety, cost, and great location. Those three major convinced me and my parents. Those two classmates helped me a lot about making a decision, whether what type of school in need to enter in, what country, and what area I need to go. In one statement, Jeremy indicated that safety, cost, location, family, friends, and country all mattered in his decision making. Through stories, the students listed numerous factors that had influenced their decision making when selecting to study abroad. The respondents also illustrated in their stories how some factors were more important to them. All students repeatedly mentioned family and other advisors as strongly influential, most of the students were cost conscious, and over half of the students cared about their future study environment and quality of education. Other factors were named during the interviews but far less frequently, which I interpreted as less important across all stages of the decision-making process.

A combination of essential and desired factors pushed and pulled students throughout the three stages of the decision-making process, for country selection as well as institutional selection. During the predisposition stage, in which students considered the viability of institutions and countries at which to pursue higher education, all predisposition factors mentioned played a role. While I interpreted that some factors were more influential, family, other advisors, costs, quality and reputation, environment and safety, admission, and language requirements were all mentioned by the interviewees in their college choice stories as factors pushing them toward or pulling them away from certain institutions.

In searching for institutions and creating a list of potentials, respondents reported that family and friends, other advisors, cost, perceived quality and reputation,

environment and safety, admission process, the program of study, language, and information offered all served as aspects that pushed or pulled them away from certain institutions. The final reduction of the list of potential options to one institution takes place in the choice stage of the college choice decision-making process.

The choice factors helped students narrow down their lists to one single institution. Most times positive factors pulled them toward a specific country, but at times factors like denied visa applications and determined parents pushed them to abandon alternative countries in favor of the United States. In this stage, family, other advisors, cost, environment, and quality played the most important roles.

As suggested in Chapter III, I used pattern matching to compare this case study of international students at Western Kentucky University to the theoretical framework mentioned in Appendix D and the *a priori* coding system noted in Appendix B. The findings from the interviewees largely match the theoretical framework and coding system. As predicted by the theoretical framework, the interviewed students described a progression through the six decision-making stages, except the students who selected the country in which they wanted to study based on the institution they selected. Within the stages, different factors pulled students toward one option, while others pushed respondents away from alternative options. Also predicted was the large number of possible influential factors indicating the multivariate nature of the decision-making process.

The cases differed from the theoretical framework and predicted coding in certain details. The factors named in the coding system were based on commonly mentioned factors in the literature. Western Kentucky University and its students showed that these

factors were insufficient to capture all experiences and influential factors. Program of study, for example, seemed influential to respondents' decision making but was initially not included in the coding system, as relatively few previous authors had mentioned it. Additionally, I was able to narrow down some of the factors, like family and friends, which had separate influences on the respondents. Other factors more accurately described the students' experiences when included together; e.g., environment, location, and safety were used interchangeably among respondents. Some described the safety by using environment, whereas others really meant the feeling of safety when discussing the advantage of Bowling Green as a small city.

The theoretical framework did not indicate some of the small differences of pull and push factors encountered in the study. When the respondents had reached the choice stage of their decision making, the final determination was influenced mostly by pull factors rather than push factors. Once students started narrowing down their search lists and highlighted one university over another, they focused more on the positive aspects that they liked about a certain institution.

Between the different students, or subunits of this case, the interviews showed similar factors that influenced different stages. Some cases clearly differed, as one student had chosen to study abroad to pursue better education, while another student was forced to study abroad due to an unstable situation in his home country. However, even between these cases, there was a large overlap in similar factors that influenced their decision making. Both the student who is pushed to study abroad and the student who is pulled abroad were looking to pursue better opportunities abroad, both of their families strongly influenced them, and both of them were cost conscious in their selection of

institutions. While there are small differences among students, and one student put more emphasis on one factor while another student kept repeating another aspect, the influential factors mentioned among all students were very similar and often repeated in different interviews. Comparing different students might indicate different factors being important at different stages, but no student was unique in their experience of how they moved through the decision-making model, and all factors mentioned were repeated at least once by another student.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain insight into the stages of college choice for international students by testing an expansion of the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) theoretical model that adds the push-and-pull factors related to the decision to study internationally. In Chapter IV, I answered the research question, *RQ1: Why do international students choose to study at a regional university in the United States?* through answers given by the respondents of this study during their interviews. The decision-making process was divided into six stages, which were influenced by numerous factors. Chapter IV illustrated through three sub-questions how different factors exert different levels of influence during the stages of the decision-making process. In this chapter, I explore the results other authors found in regard to international student decision making and how my findings fit the existing literature, either confirming or countering their results. Additionally, I discuss practical implications of this study.

Discussion of Results

This study was based on an adjusted version of the three-stage decision-making model by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) to code and organize the findings. Other articles in the literature did not make the same stage differentiation between *predisposition*, *search*, and *choice* as I did in regard to the factors in this study. Additionally, many authors wrapped the study destination decision in the institutional selection decision and mentioned influential factors intertwined, whereas I have separated them as influential on different decisions. To compare the findings from this study with previously published

articles, I briefly discuss each factor and the influences they can have during different stages. Often, the search and choice factors were mentioned together as the differences between countries and the differences among institutions, which caused students to abandon certain options during the search stage and often led to the final selection of one country and institution.

In Appendix C, I reported a list of factors other authors mentioned in the literature regarding international student college choice. I bolded the factors that were mentioned by the interviewees.

Family

This study shows that family was a major influencing factor on the decision-making process of international students selecting a country at which to study and an institution at which to enroll. Respondents reported the importance of family throughout all six stages. During the predisposition stage, in which students were empowered to study abroad and to select a certain type of institution, family support was crucial. None of the interviewees reported to be unsupported in their endeavors to study abroad, and family even influenced at what point in time students were allowed to go. During the search stage, in which students considered potential options, the opinion of family, especially parents, mattered to students. The influence of family ranged from approval to co-decision maker, and interviewees did not report having selected a country or institution that was not approved by their parents. At the final choice stage, in which students confirmed their decision, some parents just offered their blessing where others found the institution of choice for their child. Some interviewees even reported that they were hesitant about studying abroad but they wanted to respect their parents' wishes.

From the thick descriptions given by the interviewees regarding family and their influence, I interpreted this as the most influential factor on the decision making, considering all stages together. Appendix C shows that six author studies emphasized the importance of family and close friends on the college choice decision-making process. One can also note that it is not the most cited factor, even though this study shows how important family was to respondents selecting WKU.

Comparing students by region, I did not interpret family influence to be related to country of origin. Overall family strongly impacted the decision-making process. The students who reported less active steering by their families came from a region that also brought students whose parents played a strong role in the decision making. To some extent, more undergraduate students reported that their parents were co-decision makers, whereas graduate students spoke more about family suggestions and opinions. One undergraduate student reported strong individual decision making without his parents.

Other Advisors

Similar to the influence of family, students relied on the recommendations of third-party advisors when making college choice decisions. During the predisposition stage, advisors provided students with steps to complete in order to enable them to study abroad. These advisors suggested which countries and which institutions to consider during the search stage. At times, the suggestions were based on a set of aspects students requested; in other occasions, the advisor provided a list of options and these were the only ones the student could select. When it came to the final decision in the choice stage, respondents often still relied on recommendations from trusted third parties. Gia communicated regularly with an administrator; Suly, Baylee, Sophia, Max, Brand, Pedro,

Jeremy, Shi Wang, and Leonard relied on their agent; Junior worked through a manager; Khan was connected to a soft-landing program at location; Maame Aba trusted a friend at the institution; and James knew an instructor. These advisors did not make co-decisions like some family members, but they often were the main reason a choice was made. This factor is the second most important factor reported by the respondents.

I found several authors in the literature that named references as important factors, as is noted in Appendix C. As was the case for family, references, or advisors were not the most cited factor; but the recommendations from others seemed influential during the interviews. All interviewees balanced recommendations from family and other advisors, and one might wonder who actually made the final choice. The results of this study are in line with the study by Pimpa (2003), who stated that information from agents has the strongest influence on deciding international students. The majority of interviewees worked through an agent who channeled different levels of influence on the students' decisions. Some agents provided a list of institutions from which a student could select their choice; others told the students one institution that fulfilled all their demanded factors. Hemsley-Brown (2013) stated that word-of-mouth promoted most applications. In this study, recommendations from others affected almost all students and their decision making.

The background of the students did not seem to influence the extent to which students valued the recommendations from others. All students were influenced by advice, regardless of their cultural heritage, study classification, or gender. In making the decision, advisors, especially agents, fulfilled different roles to different students; for some, only giving options, but to others, determining where they could apply and which

institution would provide them with the factors they requested. For James, the source of the recommendation mattered more because this teacher would be the main contact throughout his entire college career. To others, like Gia and Maame Aba, recommendations were weighted as more important because their contact was at the study location.

Cost

As a factor, cost influenced the decision making of students throughout all stages of the college choice process. In the predisposition stage, students and their families had to be able to cover the cost of study abroad and institutions in order for a student to consider this endeavor. When listing potential countries and institutions during the search stage, cost was weighed against benefit, and students considered prices and scholarships of different schools around different countries. In the final choice stage, students often used cost to select the institution that provided the best quality and services for a price acceptable to students. Some students also chose their final institution because it provided discounts or scholarships to set off some of the cost of attending.

In the reviewed literature, numerous authors referred to the impact of cost on international student college choice, and two additional articles mentioned the importance of scholarships (Appendix C). Cost was among the most cited factors in the literature I reviewed, and from the interviewees I found that cost affected the decision of almost all the respondents. While international students are required to provide documentation that they will be able to afford their chosen higher education option before being granted a visa, the students in this study reported that cost was considered before considering study abroad and continuously during the selection of options. Even the students, who reported

that their parents told them not to worry about the financial part of studying abroad, still considered how much of their parents' money they were spending. Additionally, some students counted on scholarships that became crucial in order for them to successfully complete their degrees.

Students from different countries were not differently influenced by cost due to culture or gender. Two of the students from the Middle East, however, were counting on scholarships from their governments in order to afford studying abroad. The dependency on that scholarship strongly influenced their decision making, as they looked only for countries and institutions at which they would be eligible for those scholarships. Even though graduate students had to consider only two years of financing compared to at least four years for undergraduate students, the decision making among these groups was similar. Some of the graduate students had their own money and job opportunities to help carry some of the financial burden of their studies, but all students were at least partially financed by a third party, most often their parents. As the sample students were drawn from students enrolled at a United States institution, the influence of cost on students who could not afford going abroad might be underestimated. If costs prevented students from pursuing study abroad, I did not capture these participants in this study.

Environment

Students discussed their study environment as important throughout their interviews, but interchangeably referred to the location, safety, and the perceived atmosphere on campus. I grouped them together, as students highlighted similar experiences when mentioning these aspects. Environment was influential throughout all stages of the decision-making process. In the predisposition stages, an undesirable

environment at home led some students abroad, whereas others were pulled by the perceived environment at an institution elsewhere. While searching for countries and institutions, students had expectations and desires for the type of environment they wanted. When students narrowed their options to one selection in the choice stage, some students verified that certain environmental factors were present, as they deeply desired them on campus.

Several authors mentioned environment in the literature, and additional articles cited safety and location (Appendix C). While environment and environmental factors were not the most cited in the reviewed literature, the interviews showed that the respondents mentioned them abundantly. Students started to consider in what kind of environment they wanted to study once they had taken the advice from family and others into account and the cost could be covered. Almost all students mentioned the desire for a safe environment, which also was a priority to their families.

Some students cared more about an exciting atmosphere, while others cared about being in a smaller city. All students mentioned what they searched for in a study environment, but all students talked about this after they knew how to pay for their study abroad endeavors and parental requests were granted. Middle Eastern students from a Muslim background explained that they looked for grocery stores with halal-food options and mosques around campus when comparing schools. A few other students described how they considered how they could survive and thrive in the locations of potential options. While the students' backgrounds sometimes led them to search for different facilities and services in the environment, all students considered the environment throughout the decision-making process. All students wanted a welcoming and safe

environment, whereas at times the wishes of the parents for a perceived safe environment outweighed students' wishes for an environment in which they perceived a social life would be easier to obtain. The overall perception of the safety in the US varied among the interviewees. Most students were aware of news items regarding shootings and violence in the United States, and one even preferred Canada to the US due to safety; but all students mentioned their perception of WKU's safe environment as a comforting factor.

Quality

The perceived quality of education and the reputation of countries and institutions mattered during all of the decision-making stages according to the respondents. In the predisposition stage, students considered the quality of options available at home and abroad, oftentimes feeling better served by the potential of study abroad. When students considered options around the globe and compared potential institutions, quality of education was important after suggestions from others were considered and cost was potentially covered. Most times the perceived environment was more important than quality of education, but not always. To many students the quality had to be acknowledged at home and the school needed to be accredited before a student would consider the selection as final pick in the choice stage.

As noted in Appendix C, authors mentioned quality, recognition of qualifications, reputation, and accreditation as important. During the interviews, quality and reputation were named interchangeably, and some students referred to accreditation and recognition of qualifications as an indicator of quality. In the interviews, the students from Asia and one from Latin America seemed most concerned with the quality of education in the

United States and at WKU. For two students from the Middle East, quality was important, but not as important as the approval of their scholarships, which also was used as a verification that the quality of education was acceptable to their government. About half of the students actively looked for signs of quality, like ranking and accreditation, while others verified that the quality was acceptable and recognized in their home countries.

Prospects

Many international students considered attending college abroad due to the prospects and opportunities they expected to have if they left their home. Respondents in this study reported that prospects influenced their college choice decision making on all stages except the predisposition stage of institutional selection. Students reflected on potential future benefits when considering leaving their home countries during the predisposition stage. When searching for different countries and institutions, they also considered the opportunities they might encounter in each country at different institutions. Finally, some prospects made one option more attractive over others, which helped students decide on one particular country and institution during the choice stage.

In the literature, I encountered references to future job prospects, job opportunities while in college, and future opportunities in higher education. Additionally, two authors noted the prospect of migration as potentially influential as well. In the interviews, students seemed to assume that studying in the United States would lead to better opportunities in the future, but few students talked about prospects as the most important factor. After meeting their families' wishes and suggestions from others, students looked for a good experience through low cost, a good environment, and

high quality education. Students did not think of prospects and opportunities until the experience was likely going to be positive.

The interest in opportunities did not seem to fluctuate between students from different regions. One graduate student was interested in employment during her studies, and one student was interested in being connected on campus; but the majority of respondents simply stated that their studies abroad were expected to provide them with good job opportunities in the future, and that was important. One student told stories about weighing present employment opportunities at home against potential future opportunities in which she encountered sexist advice from co-workers and educational agents. The sexist comments from others pushed this student to counter the arguments and to follow her choice of studying abroad, which her direct family fully supported. Her stories confirmed that the future opportunities, or potential lack of future opportunities, were less influential than near-future experiences.

Program of Study

Similar to prospects resulting from studying abroad, students reported that the desire to study a specific program of study influenced their college choice decision making to some extent. Program of study had some influence during every stage of the decision-making process, except the predisposition stage for institutional selection. Students considered how study abroad would enable them to pursue their desired course of study during the predisposition stage of country selection. When comparing countries and institutions during the search stage, students considered which options would allow them to pursue their program of study. In the final choice stage, students wanted to make sure their field of study was available at the institution and country of their choice.

During the decision-making process, most students checked that their program of study was available. The verification of availability was in most cases the extent to which program of study influenced the college choice decision. After family wishes, advisor recommendations, costs, environmental desires, and quality had been met, students verified future prospects and the program of study in which they were interested. The literature mentioned a few authors who discussed course availability and some references regarding course content (Appendix C). The number of articles discussing program of study seemed low compared to other factors; and from the interviews, I interpreted the impact of this factor as such. Students mentioned their desire to study a specific program, but a number of the respondents did not look at the program until the decision was already made. Additionally, some students discussed their willingness to change majors and switch their programs of study, depending on the institution they selected.

The graduate students who I interviewed were more interested in their program of study, compared to undergraduate students, as part of their college choice decision, possibly because they had background education in a specific field. The interest in program of study seemed the same among students from different cultural backgrounds. Gender also did not seem to make a difference in the extent that program of study influenced the college choice decision.

Application and Admission

The admission process, including the institutional application and visa process, had a unique influence on the college choice decision-making process. Before students could consider different countries and institutions, they had to be able to complete the

admissions process. During the predisposition stage of the decision making, students considered how they would be able to access particular countries and institutions, even though they would not find out if their estimation was correct until they completed the applications. When comparing options in the search stage, the admission process influenced only the selection of institution, as the student would compare admission requirement from different institutions, assuming they would be able to complete the visa process. As the admission process would grant students acceptance or denial to their chosen country or institution, this factor also had a major impact on the choice stage. As some students focused solely on their first acceptance offer, the speed of acceptance to the institution also influenced the choice stage. The admission process was unique in their influence, as denial of a visa or acceptance would overturn the student's college choice decision and force the student to consider other countries or institutions.

As can be noted with the use of Appendix C, I reviewed several articles that mentioned admission requirements as influential on the college choice decision making, and a few authors noted the visa process. It is somewhat surprising that no more references were made to the admission process, as this study shows that refusal of a visa can change the entire process for students. Some interviewees shared how their initial plans were to study in Canada but could not get admission to the country. Three others noted that they had been denied visas to the US and they ended up at only WKU because they persisted in their attempts to obtain a visa, often with strong encouragement from their family.

The visa denials were mentioned across the student sample, but it is unknown how these denials were related to specific countries of origin. While the students did not

know why they were denied visas to Canada or the United States during a certain time in their application process, as a practitioner I have experience with embassies communicating doubt about students' intentions to return home after their non-immigration visa would expire. As mentioned, other reasons were published on the website of the U.S. Department of State (2017). The students who mentioned an experience with visa refusals, either to Canada or to the United States, were undergraduate and graduate students, but all were male. While admission requirements influenced the respondents, with some of them expressing hesitation to apply to Ivy League institutions, the admission requirements to Western Kentucky University had an appealing effect on students; and all of them considered the institution seriously because they believed they could meet the requirements. One student even perceived WKU as more attractive because they required some standardized testing standards that the student believed all quality institutions would require.

Language

Students who participated in this study did not want to study in a country in which the population spoke a language with which they were unfamiliar. Respondents indicated that they did not want to take additional years to master another language, and some were excited about studying in English and perfecting their second language skills. I did not find language as influential to the predisposition stage, compared to other stages, as students only described language learning as a benefit of studying abroad. As the sample was taken from enrolled international students in the United States, students who were discouraged to study abroad due to language were not captured. During the search stage, language became more important, as students considered language of instruction when

evaluating countries and institutional options. At the time of their final decision, students checked to make sure the instruction in the country at this specific institution was in a language they understood to some degree.

Four authors mentioned language as an influential factor in the international college choice literature I reviewed (Appendix C). As is somewhat indicated by the number of references who cited language as an important factor, I found that language was less influential throughout the decision-making process and often was nothing more than a check box on a list of aspects a desirable option should provide. While some students mentioned countries they did not consider due to their language of instruction, not all students had mastered university-level academic English. Several students enrolled in an intensive English program before enrolling at the institution, and these students praised the University for having a language school on campus. Intensive English programs can offer language training but also a soft landing for international students on campus. For two students, the intensive English program's admission requirements allowed them to arrive on campus after the enrollment deadline for the university had passed, even though they did not require additional help to meet language proficiency requirements.

Students who were required to enroll in an intensive English program before entering the university spoke more elaborately about language in their interviews. I did not find differences in the level of importance students assigned to language when comparing countries of origin, gender, or level classification.

Other Factors

The interviewed students illustrated that their college choice decision was first

based on family wishes and recommendations, followed by advice from others, cost, the environment, perceived quality, prospects, program of study, admission, and language, in that order. Some students were additionally influenced by a few other factors during particular stages of the decision-making process. A few students selected their country of choice because the institution they liked was located in this particular country. Others were influenced during the search and choice stage by the information they found on specific institutions. These students wanted to research their potential options and their preferred institution in order to verify factors they cared about and to learn more about the school. This information made these students feel more attracted to their already preferred option, which narrowed their search and helped finalize their decision.

In the reviewed literature, several authors listed the availability of information as an influential factor (Appendix C). Four other authors listed provided facilities as a factor, which was one of the questions an interviewee checked when researching his potential school. The students, who reported that they consulted available information, did not deviate from the students who mentioned they had not conducted their own research. Additionally, the time at which students did their own research often was after the decision was concluded or the student had a favorite option but wanted to verify it had everything she wanted.

Practical Implications

Based on the stories I heard from the respondents and the data I analyzed, I noted some practical implications for practitioners in education and decision makers who could influence the field of international education. Each factor that impacted international student college choice provides opportunities to influence the decision-making process.

Family

Family should be carefully considered when trying to attract students. Families enable if and where students can study abroad and at times act as co-decision makers. Additionally, some of the interviewed students showed that they chose a country and school in which family or a close friend was already studying. It is, therefore, important that family members have a positive perspective of a country and institution. Negative experiences from family members or close friends, regarding the entire country or only the institution, will have a negative impact on students who will not select options without their family's approval. Unfortunately, that also means that family members who have a negative opinion of the United States due to politics, news articles, or even a bad experience on vacation can influence a student who is considering study abroad. Institutional administrators and staff must work hard to obtain a favorable reputation with families and realize that negative experiences with students on their campus can influence entire families and friend groups. Additionally, practitioners should view international student decision making as a process in which multiple actors are involved and the opinions of all these actors will have an influence on the final decision.

Recruiters should make an effort to meet and to provide information to all decision influencers, especially parents. Translated websites and documents can make parents feel more comfortable about certain options, and every way in which institutional administrators can increase the level of trust between them and parents will benefit the institution. Additionally, recruiters could benefit from working through family members that are enrolled at the institution. As shown in the data, students might be willing to attend the school where they have family present.

Other Advisors

As with family, it is important to maintain positive relationships with advisors who are important to potential students. Agents recommend an institution to students and teachers who speak positively about their institution and pull students to this university, and alumni who had good experiences are likely to convince their friends an institution is worth attending. It also would be beneficial for administrators to reach out to agents and other advisors, and to ask what services students prefer and how they can meet some of the students' wishes. Additionally, administrators and staff should do everything in their power to maintain a positive reputation and to promote recommendations from others. Positive advertisement could come from former students and teachers, but also agencies and governmental embassies. Keeping a number of stakeholders satisfied is not an easy task; but based on the results of this study, I would argue that it is of high importance. Student satisfaction can be influenced at all levels of the institution, from good experiences in the classroom to having a positive residence hall experience, and it will therefore be beneficial for university employees to work toward student satisfaction and success. Additionally, good relationships with university employees could foster relationships that attract new students and make them feel comfortable about coming to a foreign environment. As students are influenced by authentic advice from others, institutional employees could attempt to fill this role.

Cost

Cost can be a factor easily influenced but also difficult to justify. In order for students to consider studying abroad at a specific institution, they need to be able to afford it. Furthermore, when students compare costs among schools, they will consider

what price is asked in comparison to the services offered, as well as competitor offerings. I would, therefore, suggest that administrators are clear about their costs and that of competitors. If an institution needs to add an additional fee for a student related service, they should explain these increases and allocations to students so students do not feel they are being used for purely financial gain. This study also suggests that administrators who want to use international students specifically for financial gain should act with careful deliberation, as cost impacts the student choice decision. Additionally, cost of living, which is considered among the overall cost, matters to students, even though administrators and staff members might encounter challenges when attempting to influence the cost of living for an entire area. University officials could consider offering affordable housing and meal options. The students in this study praised the low cost of living surrounding WKU, and it was noted among the main advantages over other institutions.

Another suggestion for practitioners is the benefits of granting scholarships. Two students specifically made their decision due to scholarships, and three other students stated clearly that they preferred WKU to other institutions in part due to their scholarship offering. While scholarships do not reduce only cost, students reported that they perceived to be valued, as the university was willing to offer them a scholarship. Additionally, administrators should consider the mission of their institution when offering scholarships. All respondents included were able to afford attending WKU, but this study did not include responses from students who might have been pushed away by the required tuition and fees. Prospective students from developing countries might be

interested in studying abroad if an institution is willing to offer scholarships for an amount of money sufficient to cover most tuition and fees.

Environment

The environment can be an important factor in international student college choice, which key individuals can influence on multiple levels. At a macro level, all practitioners have to work on the perception of the environment in the United States. As students mentioned in their interviews, the environment in the USA was considered attractive and welcoming, but not always safe. If foreign policy sends a less welcoming message, however, this can affect students' desire to attend institutions in the United States; and students might select other countries that can provide similar opportunities at similar cost.

At a community level, the town which hosts an institution of higher education should provide a welcoming and safe environment that offers services that students require where they study. Students mentioned halal products and mosques, but transportation and housing offerings would be required as well. Potential incidents regarding international student safety need thorough investigation and improvements should be advertised. Students will need to feel they can get used to living at the location without additional stressors not related to academic work.

At the micro level of the institution and classrooms, administrators, staff, and instructors should attempt to provide students with an agreeable environment. Institutions could provide halal options in dining facilities, places for worship, student support networks, mental health counseling, on-campus health services, legal help, and training for university employees. All these aspects can help international students adjust

to their lives abroad and would increase the likelihood of happy students, which then increases the chances of good recommendations to others. WKU has succeeded in offering many of these services and in making students feel safe, in part through their *safe-community* designation. The city of Bowling Green also provides a wide-range of international grocery stores, mosques, and community services. While students can still feel unwelcomed because of isolated incidents or a political message at the macro level, practitioners can emphasize the benefits of the environment by publicly condemning incidents and showing support for international students.

Quality

Practitioners have used indicators of quality, like rankings and accreditations, at almost all institutions of higher education. In an effort to attract students, I would suggest to use these indicators, as they are important to a portion of the students. Based on this study, I also would caution administrators of four-year regional universities against overemphasizing quality indicators. While quality is important, students seemed more interested in competitive costs and a welcoming environment. Students expect a threshold level of quality and quality indicators, but the interviewees did not report heavy emphasis on rankings. Students reported to have completed their own research regarding reputation and quality, and they seemed aware what to expect from a regional university that is not nationally ranked. The accreditation of the business school and WKU's rank in safety seemed important to students, but the national ranking was less noted. WKU might emphasize the small-town feel and attention to individual students when advertising, instead of ranking. All students referred with satisfaction to the smaller city environment in which they still had access to all services within reasonable distance.

Prospects

Students believed their study abroad endeavors would benefit them in the future. For practitioners, it would be beneficial to emphasize future job possibilities in the United States and abroad, and to highlight international student success stories from alumni students. This study indicates that close experiences are more influential than future opportunities, but many students might not have known what future prospects connected concretely to their studies in the United States. As improved prospects were mentioned as an abstract factor, students might be more influenced if they can understand how their future would be impacted when obtaining a degree at a particular institution. Additionally, administrators and staff members could generate more enthusiasm regarding the institution by providing students with opportunities while studying at the institution, like on-campus employment, job training, and internships. At WKU, several of these opportunities were provided, but they also could be advertised as opportunities to prospective international students.

Program of Study

Practical implications regarding the influence of program of study are minor. Institutions might have some additional success if they offer programs in which international students are interested. According to this study, however, students care only about the program of study once other factors like family, other advisors, cost, and environment have been met. Interviewees reported a direction of study interest, but only a few mentioned being set on one specific program. I would recommend institutional administrators to offer a variety of high quality programs in different fields. Especially if the United States is viewed as having strong quality training programs in a specific field,

institutions could benefit from making sure they offer programs related to this field. An example mentioned in this study was programs related to the medical field. WKU does not have a medical school, but the student was still interested in this institution, as he could major in pre-medicine. Additionally, mutual agreements between two institutions in different countries could encourage students to pursue their program of study at a partner university, as credit transfer, accommodations, and reasonable fees can be worked out as part of the inter-institutional agreement.

Application and Admission

From a macro perspective, visa regulations bring the practical implications that students who cannot obtain a visa will never study in that specific country. This can bring more substantial consequences if a political administration implements regulations in which all citizens from an entire country are banned from obtaining visas to this particular country. When this regulation would be implemented, practitioners in education can expect that no students from the countries under the ban will study at their institutions while the ban is in place. From the institutional perspective, practitioners can influence the college choice decision by setting admission standards and by correctly issuing immigration paperwork to host international students. If an institution wants to host international students, they need to obey federal regulations when issuing immigration paperwork and while hosting international students.

Admission standards can have an attraction and deterrent effect. If admission standards are high, some students might believe they cannot meet these requirements and will not consider the institution as an option. Other students might be attracted to an institution with higher admission requirements, as they would perceive the institution as

more competitive and selective. Based on this study, I believe students were attracted to WKU due to their ability to meet admission standards, while not perceiving the institution as accepting anyone who applies. This is a challenging balance and administrators should consider which type of students they would like to attract. If an institution is interested in being perceived as exclusive and prestigious, admission standards should be higher, but fewer students will attend. Administrators who are interested in attracting the maximum number of international students should make sure the majority of students can meet the admission requirements. Additionally, administrators could consider offering soft-landing programs in which students can be admitted under the conditions of completing certain requirements before they can enter their desired programs of study. In these soft-landing programs, language training and remedial courses can be offered while students adjust to the academic environment of higher education in the United States. Last, no matter the admission standards, administrators should be concerned with the speed of admission; some respondents noted that they selected the first institutions from which they received an acceptance letter, as this institution satisfied most other factors. If students perceived two institutions as similar, the speed of admission could affect the final choice.

Language

Most respondents were attracted to English-speaking countries. Students did not want to spend additional time and money studying a different language. A practical implication is that the perception of the English language as internationally important gives the United States and other English-speaking countries an advantage in attracting international students. Additionally, students expressed that an intensive English

program gave them necessary training, but also flexibility in enrollment timeframe.

Based on the results of this study, I would suggest to institutional administrators to obtain a strong relationship with an English language program that is flexible in enrolling students. During the time that students sharpen their language skills, they will have time to adjust and to integrate into the university before their classes count for college credit and their GPA determines their future success at the institution.

Other Factors

Based on the mentioned factors, administrators should keep websites up to date and ensure institutional information can be easily accessed. Students noted that they visited the WKU website and felt validated in their choice. It is comforting for students to find answers to frequently asked questions, being able to explore pictures of one's future accommodations, and obtain information about the institution at which they could potentially enroll.

Additional Implications

In their interviews, international students described the way in which their college choice decision making was experienced and how different factors influenced the final decision. Institutional administrators who are interested in attracting international students to their institutions should note that the international students in this case were not swayed to come to the United States and WKU based on one single factor. College choice is a multivariate process influenced by family, advisors, costs, perceived quality, environment, application requirements, language, information provided, and perceived opportunities. All of these factors should be considered in recruitment practices and strategies. Additionally, one specific factor could push a student away from a country or

institution and, at times, it is not within the power of an institution to change these factors. University officials should have realistic expectations on the level of influence they can assert on international student college choice through recruitment policies and advertising strategies. Some factors also influence students in different ways; while one student might feel attracted to an institution with high admission standards, another student might feel pushed away from this institution. Institutional employees should consider the institution's mission regarding recruitment and which students they wish to attract. The push-and-pull direction of factors depends on the student and, therefore, adds another layer of difficulty for administrators to navigate.

International students who are in the process of making a college choice decision might feel overwhelmed and unsure about which factors should be taken into consideration. This study gives students a review and description of experiences from others that could serve as an educational lesson and guide for future students. Additionally, the adjusted model theorized in this study could be offered as a sense-making tool for international students who went through their college choice decision and now try to understand why they selected a certain institution and hosting country.

Design Differences

This study differed from other research studies in the literature due to the conceptual model and the organization of factors by the adjusted three-stage model (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Readers of the study should be careful to consider the contextual details of WKU before applying the findings to their own institutions. The theoretical concepts found should be tested at other institutions, particularly other institutional types. Quantitative studies might be developed that seek large

generalizations related to the factors found.

Study design, sample population, scope of the study, and organization of the factors also might have influenced the results found in this study and could explain some of the differences found among articles in the literature. In the following sections, I highlight some of these differences in order to illustrate how future researchers could build on the gaps between these studies.

Data types. I used a case study design to investigate the college choice decision-making process of international students. I used interviews and some documents, which allowed me to highlight experiences of students during the different decision-making stages; and I was able to emphasize factors that were important to international students who chose to come to Western Kentucky University. Much of the data from this study were in narrative form to which I gave meaning by coding these stories through an adjusted version of the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) three-stage model. Other authors in the literature have used different designs to study international student college choice. The case study design allowed me to investigate a specific case and, through interviews, I could obtain a rich description of the students' college choice decision-making experiences. I explored this rich-description for factors that influenced the students' college choice decision-making process. On top of the interview data, I was allowed to collect documents that could verify and shed additional light on students' decisions. Lee (2008) also used a case study design implemented at a different institution.

Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003); Cantwell et al. (2008); Daily et al. (2010); Kemp et al. (1998); Mazzarol and Soutar (2002); McCarthy et al. (2012); Padlee et al. (2010); Park (2009); Wilkins and Huisman (2011); and Wilkins et al. (2012) all used a

quantitative research design that used survey methods. Through survey research, the researcher obtains data that rank factors; e.g., on level of importance. As these data are quantified, researchers are able run statistical analysis on these data, comparing groups and looking for statistical significance. Some surveys add open-ended questions in which students answer questions in a way that is not limited to a range, but these questions cannot be compared for statistical significance. For many authors that used survey methods in regard to student college choice, it is an advantage to be able to compare factors for importance and to run comparisons. On the other hand, students will rate only factors that are given by the authors and it is, therefore, unlikely that students will add unknown factors to the list of influential decision makers.

Chen (2008), Wilkins (2013), and Tan (2015) combined a survey study with interviews questions, which gave them the ability to run statistical comparisons while at the same time asking students open-ended questions in the hope to find all factors that influenced their decision making. Bodycott (2009) used a survey method combined with focus groups, which are similar to interviews but focus on group conversations. Lee (2008), Maringe and Carter (2007), and Pyvis and Chapman (2007) combined interviews and focus groups, obtaining qualitative data similar to interview-only data, but enhancing it with group conversations in which students might stimulate each other's recollection of the college choice decision. Hemsley-Brown (2013) and McMahon (1992) used secondary data that were collected from institutional databases. Secondary data often are recorded and stable, no longer subject to the recollection by an individual student. This data can be analyzed in different ways and studied for different aspects and factors. A disadvantage of secondary data is that the research cannot ask for elaboration or deeper

meaning behind the data, as it were recorded in the past.

At the beginning of the interviews, I asked students to complete a small survey with influential factors that influenced their college choice decision. The results of the survey can be found in Appendix H. In the survey, I listed the aspects that were mentioned numerous times in the literature and on which I based my *a priori* coding. The interviewees checked different factors, and no factor was not checked. From the interviews, however, I heard more factors than were checked on the survey; and aspects like references, for example, seemed to be highly influential, even though only three students had selected this factor before the interview.

As different authors used research designs that were different from this study, and with other populations, some factors found influential in this study might not have been included in previous survey research or mentioned in other case studies, as they involved other cases. Similarly, students might not have been influenced by the same factors as students who selected a different country or institution, and some surveys might have listed factors that students did not recall in their experiences.

Group comparisons. Data obtained through survey search can be used to compare groups. Many authors in the literature compared groups in their study among others based on gender, country of origin, level of study, and country of selection. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) compared student groups from India, China, Taiwan, and Indonesia with each other; Cantwell et al. (2008) compared students from UK, USA, Australia, and Latin America; Padlee et al. (2010) compared groups based on national origin; Park (2009) compared Korean students who selected UK, USA, Australia, and China; and Wilkins (2013) compared the students from different countries who studied in

the UAE. Chen (2008) compared undergraduates, graduates, and post-graduate students on what they considered important when studying abroad and selecting an institution. Daily et al. (2010), Lee (2008), Tan (2015), and Wilkins et al. (2012) compared their results based on gender. Bodycott (2009) studied which factors were important to students and compared them to factors important to parents.

While group comparisons provide useful data and additional information in regard to international students' college choice, students in this study were not selected to be compared for statistical significance. Students were selected due to their unique representation of the case and not to represent their entire country or gender group. Additionally, case study research might not be the most appropriate method to compare groups, as some quantitative studies can make statistical group comparisons.

Hierarchy of factors. Similar to group comparison, survey study design and other quantitative methods allow the researcher to assign hierarchy to factors based on the scale used during collection. In the case of international students' college choice, most authors used scales of importance. Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003); Bodycott (2009); Chen (2008); Lee (2008); Maringe and Carter (2007); Mazzarol and Soutar (2002); McCarthy et al. (2012); Padlee et al. (2010); Pyvis and Chapman (2007); Tan (2015); and Wilkins et al. (2012) gave some level of importance to different college choice factors in their studies. Case study design, and especially one that uses interview data as its main source of information like this study, is not developed to quantify data and to assign hierarchy to the factors mentioned. I could have requested students in the interviews to assign ranking or mention the most influential factor, but this would have asked students to put a value on their experience. Instead of asking students to assign

values during their interviews, I interpreted the scale of importance based on the students' overall descriptions and repeated references to the factors. In order to name one factor as statistically more influential than another, a different design needs to be used.

Different countries. This study was not designed to compare students from different countries or cultural backgrounds. Nevertheless, I broadly compared students from different geographical and cultural areas and how they experienced different factors. Country of origin affects students' abilities to enroll in higher education in the US. For most countries, only the more affluent families can afford study abroad, as the visa application requires families to show significant assets that can easily be liquidated. Some governments provide larger educational scholarships for students to pursue study abroad. If institutions that want to encourage diversity on campus could offer significant scholarships, the influence of financial means would diminish.

In addition to financial means, it is easier for students from some countries to obtain a visa to the United States. For example, I have experienced that most students from Western Europe have fewer difficulties obtaining a visa than students from the Middle East. While there might be reasons for the State Department to make these decisions, the impact on institutions is that a lower percentage of applications will be able to obtain a visa.

Last, the cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2017), like collectivism, might make students from certain cultures feel more inclined to agree with family members when it comes to the college choice decision making. In this study, family seemed to be the most influential factor on the college choice decision, but the effect of family might be diminished in high individualistic cultures. Additionally, depending on the country,

gender also might influence the decision-making process if study abroad for one gender might be more culturally accepted than for the other. One participant mentioned some opinions by family members who believed it was inappropriate for women to obtain additional education. If this student was less supported by her parents, she might have followed the wishes of her other family members. While there were minimal differences in the description of experiences with factors between students from different genders, I did not select participants to obtain the best comparable sets of students.

As mentioned, I studied international students at Western Kentucky University in the United States for this case study. The articles cited did not study students at this institution and oftentimes not in the United States. Which factors are important to one's college choice decision might be culturally influenced. Students from different countries might, therefore, value different factors. Additionally, factors that lead students to select an institution in the United States might differ from factors that lead students to select another country. I, therefore, want to note which population each author cited in the literature studied, as it might explain the aspects that did not align with this study. McCarthy et al. (2012) were the only authors who studied international students selecting the USA exclusively. Chen (2008) studied different populations selecting Canada; Bodycott (2009) investigated Chinese students who selected different countries; Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) looked at India, China, Taiwan, and Indonesia for students selecting Australia; Kemp et al. (1998) studied Indonesian and Taiwanese students selecting Australia; Maringe and Carter (2007) students from Africa selecting UK; Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) and Hemsley-Brown (2013) different populations selecting UK; Cantwell et al. (2008) students selecting Mexico; Padlee et al. (2010) and

Pyvis and Chapman (2007), students selecting Malaysia; Park (2009) Korean students selecting UK, USA, Australia, or China; and Wilkins (2013) and Wilkins et al. (2012) expatriated students selecting to study in the UAE.

Future Research

Based on the findings discussed in Chapter IV and the fit of this study with other articles in the literature, I wanted to suggest some recommendations for future study. The differences in research design between this study and the articles cited from the literature illustrate some gaps that would benefit from additional studies. In order to gain better insight in the college choice difference of students from different countries of origin who selected the United States and a regional four-year institution, research needs to be conducted that selects a large sample through a method that allows between-group comparisons. While survey methods might not be the only possible methodology that allows for group comparison, it would be a logical next step to develop a survey instrument based on the conceptual model developed in this study. Additional groups could be compared based on age, level of study, program of study, and other demographic indicators.

Qualitative research methods also could shed additional light on the cultural difference in college choice decision making. Through rich descriptions of cultural dimensions, a researcher can gain a deeper understanding of one population. Additionally, researchers could spend time submerged in international student cultures on United States college campuses, and even in foreign educational systems. With better understanding of cultures, practitioners might be able to communicate to students in a way that speaks to them and makes them feel comfortable about exploring education

abroad. In this case study, I selected respondents to represent the case of the institution as a whole. Studies could be designed to specifically sample one population at an institution to gain a better understanding of their unique process of how they made college choice decisions. Conducting research on the selection of institutions in different countries could enrich the literature, as would qualitative studies at other institutions in the United States. As I come from a Western country and grew up in a Western culture, my Western lens influenced my interpretations of the stories and experiences. Investigating the topic of international student college choice by a researcher with a different background also could benefit the existing literature.

Through a survey based on the results of this study, a comparison between the six stages of the adjusted model could be conducted. In order to better understand international student college choice, it would be useful for researchers and practitioners to understand which stage has the most influence. Additionally, a hierarchy of importance between factors and stages might help practitioners decide where to best invest in intervention practices and recruitment activities if resources are limited.

The analytic generalizations drawn based on this study apply only to the participants, or subunits, of this case study. The extent to which the students of WKU fit the theoretical framework will not necessarily match other cases at different institutions. Therefore, replications of this study with other cases are necessary in order to make broader generalizations regarding the international students' decision making and the applicability of the conceptual framework. Furthermore, quantitative studies could be conducted to verify that the push-and-pull decision factors found in this study are

experienced by other students and that these factors are statistically similar in numerous settings.

Agencies have been proven to exert different levels of influence on international student college choice decisions, and other authors have noted them as influential in the decision-making process. It would, therefore, benefit practitioners and college choice scholars how agents specifically influence students and why they recommend certain institutions over others. Additionally, some institutional administrators maintain relationships with agencies as part of their recruitment practices. To understand how these recruitment practices influence college choice decision making, and at which stages the practices are most influential, would benefit practitioners as well as the overall literature on college choice.

Due to my work in international education, I am aware that there are international students at WKU whose sole reason for attending WKU is to remain close to a spouse. This study did not include any students I knew before the sample selection, that were not the main decider in their college choice decision and the choice of moving abroad. While these students might perhaps have followed a family member, I believe they often decided to attend an institution or influence the college choice decision of the family member. I would recommend future researchers to focus on these dependent students, as they might influence the college choice decision making for a particular group of international students.

I encountered numerous students who expressed that, during the college choice decision-making process, they experienced negative emotions ranging from doubts about studying abroad to dreading having to study elsewhere. Some factors pushed students

through these doubts and convinced them to study abroad at a particular institution. Additional studies should be conducted on international students who might have changed their mind and decided not to study abroad. Researchers also should focus on factors that convinced students to study abroad and why these factors outweighed any negative emotions about the decision to study abroad. This study focused on why international students selected a mid-size public university in the United States and how predisposition, search, and choice factors influenced the decision-making process. I focused on factors pulling students abroad or pushing them away from home, but my goal was not to focus on factors that could potentially prevent students from studying abroad.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain insight into the stages of college choice for international students by testing an expansion of the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) theoretical model that adds the push-and-pull factors related to the decision to study internationally. I have listened to international students telling the stories surrounding their college choice decision making, and I tried to code these rich descriptions through an adjusted model based on the Hossler and Gallagher three-stage model for college choice. Through the coding and the conceptual framework, I learned that international student college decision making is a multivariate process in which predisposition, search, and choice factors can pull students toward a specific country, push away from other countries, and pull students to a specific institution while pushing away from others. Additionally, I discovered that international students who selected WKU fit the theoretical model with some additional factors and nuances added.

Institutional administrators who are interested in attracting new international

students should provide internationalization strategies across the entire institution that consider family, advisors, cost, environment, quality, prospects, programs of study, admission, and language, in that order. College choice decisions are made by students and their families based on recommendations and the perceived level that each of the other factors are met. The entire institutional staff, and even country officials, should attempt to affect these factors positively if they wish to pull students toward the United States and their institution.

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APPENDIX A

Breakdown of International Populations at WKU

Table 1

Top 10 Foreign Countries Represented at WKU (WKU, 2015)

Country	Total	UG	GR
Saudi Arabia	594	577	17
China	176	124	52
Brazil	157	157	0
India	74	7	67
Vietnam	56	38	18
UAE	32	25	7
Nigeria	29	14	15
Pakistan	23	9	14
Iran	19	9	10
Taiwan	17	7	10

APPENDIX B

Coding System

Table 5
A Priori Interview Coding System

Stage	Push/Pull	Potential Factors
Predisposition Stage of Country	Push	Application Process, Cost, Environment, Facilities, Friends/Family, Future HE Opportunities, Information Availability, Job Opportunities during Study, Job Prospects after Study, Language, Location, Quality, References, Reputation, Safety
Predisposition Stage of Country	Pull	Application Process, Cost, Environment, Facilities, Friends/Family, Future HE Opportunities, Information Availability, Job Opportunities during Study, Job Prospects after Study, Language, Location, Quality, References, Reputation, Safety
Search Stage of Country Selection	Push	Application Process, Cost, Environment, Facilities, Friends/Family, Future HE Opportunities, Information Availability, Job Opportunities during Study, Job Prospects after Study, Language, Location, Quality, References, Reputation, Safety
Search Stage of Country Selection	Pull	Application Process, Cost, Environment, Facilities, Friends/Family, Future HE Opportunities, Information Availability, Job Opportunities during Study, Job Prospects after Study, Language, Location, Quality, References, Reputation, Safety
Choice Stage of Country	Push	Application Process, Cost, Environment, Facilities, Friends/Family, Future HE Opportunities, Information Availability, Job Opportunities during Study, Job Prospects after Study, Language, Location, Quality, References, Reputation, Safety
Choice Stage of Country	Pull	Application Process, Cost, Environment, Facilities, Friends/Family, Future HE Opportunities, Information Availability, Job Opportunities during Study, Job Prospects after Study, Language, Location, Quality, References, Reputation, Safety
Predisposition Stage of Institution	Push	Application Process, Cost, Environment, Facilities, Friends/Family, Future HE Opportunities, Information Availability, Job Opportunities during Study, Job Prospects after Study, Language, Location, Quality, References, Reputation, Safety
Predisposition Stage of Institution	Pull	Application Process, Cost, Environment, Facilities, Friends/Family, Future HE Opportunities, Information Availability, Job Opportunities during Study, Job Prospects after Study, Language, Location, Quality, References, Reputation, Safety
Search Stage of Institution	Push	Application Process, Cost, Environment, Facilities, Friends/Family, Future HE Opportunities, Information Availability, Job Opportunities during Study, Job Prospects after Study, Language, Location, Quality, References, Reputation, Safety
Search Stage of Institution	Pull	Application Process, Cost, Environment, Facilities, Friends/Family, Future HE Opportunities, Information Availability, Job Opportunities during Study, Job Prospects after Study, Language, Location, Quality, References, Reputation, Safety
Choice Stage of Institution	Push	Application Process, Cost, Environment, Facilities, Friends/Family, Future HE Opportunities, Information Availability, Job Opportunities during Study, Job Prospects after Study, Language, Location, Quality, References, Reputation, Safety
Choice Stage of Institution	Pull	Application Process, Cost, Environment, Facilities, Friends/Family, Future HE Opportunities, Information Availability, Job Opportunities during Study, Job Prospects after Study, Language, Location, Quality, References, Reputation, Safety

APPENDIX C

List of College Choice Factors Reported in Literature

Table 3

List of College Choice Factors and Reporting Authors

Factor	Authors
Ability to Commute	McCarthy et al. (2012)
Accreditation	Daily et al. (2010); Pyvis and Chapman (2007); Wilkins (2013)
Admission	Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003); Brooks and Waters (2009); Findlay et al. (2011); Maringe and Carter (2007); Mazzarol and Soutar (2002); Tan (2015)
Agent Information	Pimpa (2003)
Assistantships Offered	Lee (2008)
Benefits of Degree	Tan (2015)
Cost	Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003); Bodycott (2009); Cantwell et al. (2008); Chen (2008); Daily et al. (2010); Lee (2008); Maringe and Carter (2007); Mazzarol and Soutar (2002); Padlee et al. (2010); Pyvis and Chapman (2007); Tan (2015); Wilkins (2013); Wilkins and Huisman (2011)
Country of Origin	Wilkins (2013)
Course Availability	Findlay et al. (2011); Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)
Course Content	Findlay et al. (2011); Mazzarol and Soutar (2002); Pyvis and Chapman (2007)
Cross-cultural Understanding	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)
Cultural Values	Chung et al. (2009)
Culture	Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003)
Customer Focus	Padlee et al. (2010)
Diversity	Cantwell et al. (2008); Tan (2015); Wilkins et al. (2012)
Environment	Chen (2008); Findlay et al. (2011); Hemsley-Brown (2013); Maringe and Carter (2007); Mazzarol and Soutar (2002); Park (2009); Wilkins and Huisman (2011); Wilkins et al. (2012)
Facilities	Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003); Bodycott (2009); Padlee et al. (2010); Park (2009)
Familiarity	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002); Wilkins et al. (2012)
Family/Friends	Bodycott (2009); Chen (2008); Kemp et al. (1998); Mazzarol and Soutar (2002); Tan (2015); Wilkins et al. (2012)
Financial Aid Availability	Daily et al. (2010)
Financial Aid Availability	Lee (2008); Tan (2015)
Government Administration	Kemp et al. (1998)

Table 3

List of College Choice Factors and Reporting Authors (continued)

Factor	Authors
HE Opportunities	Cantwell et al. (2008); Maringe and Carter (2007); McMahon (1992)
High School	Chen (2008)
Home Economy	Maringe and Carter (2007); McMahon (1992)
Influence of Recruiters	Tan (2015)
Information Availability	Daily et al. (2010); Kemp et al. (1998); Lee (2008); Mazzarol and Soutar (2002); Pimpa (2003); Wilkins (2013)
Institutional Support Services	Brooks and Waters (2009)
Interest	Pyvis and Chapman (2007)
International	Pyvis and Chapman (2007)
International Experiences	Bodycott (2009)
Internet	Lee (2008)
Job Opportunities	Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003); Hemsley-Brown (2013); Maringe and Carter (2007); Park (2009); Wilkins et al. (2012)
Job Prospects	Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003); Bodycott (2009); Cantwell et al. (2008); Daily et al. (2010); Findlay et al. (2011); Hemsley-Brown (2013); McCarthy et al. (2012); Pyvis and Chapman (2007); Tan (2015); Wilkins and Huisman (2011); Wilkins et al. (2012)
Knowledge Development	Hemsley-Brown (2013)
Language	Bodycott (2009); Park (2009); Tan (2015); Wilkins and Huisman (2011); Wilkins et al. (2012)
Learning History	Pyvis and Chapman (2007)
Location	Bodycott (2009); Chen (2008); Hemsley-Brown (2013); Kemp et al. (1998); Mazzarol and Soutar (2002); McCarthy et al. (2012); Padlee et al. (2010); Pyvis and Chapman (2007); Wilkins and Huisman (2011); Wilkins et al. (2012)
Media	Tan (2015)
Migration	Bodycott (2009); Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)
Number of International Students	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)
Peer Competition	Pimpa (2003)
Personal Satisfaction	Chen (2008)
Political Environment	Maringe and Carter (2007)
Prestige	Maringe and Carter (2007)
Program Options	Bodycott (2009); Tan (2015)
Quality	Chen (2008); Maringe and Carter (2007); Mazzarol and Soutar (2002); McCarthy et al. (2012); Padlee et al. (2010); Park (2009); Tan (2015); Wilkins and Huisman (2011)

Table 3

List of College Choice Factors and Reporting Authors (continued)

Factor	Authors
Racial Discrimination	Kemp et al. (1998)
Recognition of Qualifications	Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003); Maringe and Carter (2007); Mazzarol and Soutar (2002); McCarthy et al. (2012)
Recruiting Materials	Tan (2015)
References	Chen (2008); Mazzarol and Soutar (2002); Padlee et al. (2010); Pyvis and Chapman (2007); Tan (2015); Wilkins (2013); Wilkins and Huisman (2011)
Reputation	Cantwell et al. (2008); Chen (2008); Daily et al. (2010); Findlay et al. (2011); Hemsley-Brown (2013); Kemp et al. (1998); Lee (2008); Mazzarol and Soutar (2002); McCarthy et al. (2012); Park (2009); Pyvis and Chapman (2007); Wilkins (2013)
Research	Cantwell et al. (2008)
Risks	Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)
Safety	Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003); Daily et al. (2010); Kemp et al. (1998); Park (2009); Wilkins et al. (2012)
Scheduling Options	McCarthy et al. (2012)
Scholarships	Bodycott (2009); Tan (2015)
Skills Development	Hemsley-Brown (2013)
Social Life	Tan (2015); Wilkins et al. (2012)
Socialization	Padlee et al. 2010)
Special Educational Programs	Lee (2008)
Subject Interest	McCarthy et al. (2012)
Subject Variety	Tan (2015)
Support Services	Bodycott (2009); Brooks and Waters (2009); Tan (2015)
Trade	McMahon (1992)
Unique Adventure	Findlay et al. (2011)
University Enrolment	Kemp et al. (1998)
Value	Wilkins and Huisman (2011)
Visa Process	Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003); Chen (2008); Maringe and Carter (2007)

Note. Bolded factors were mentioned by the respondents in the interviews.

APPENDIX D

Conceptual Framework

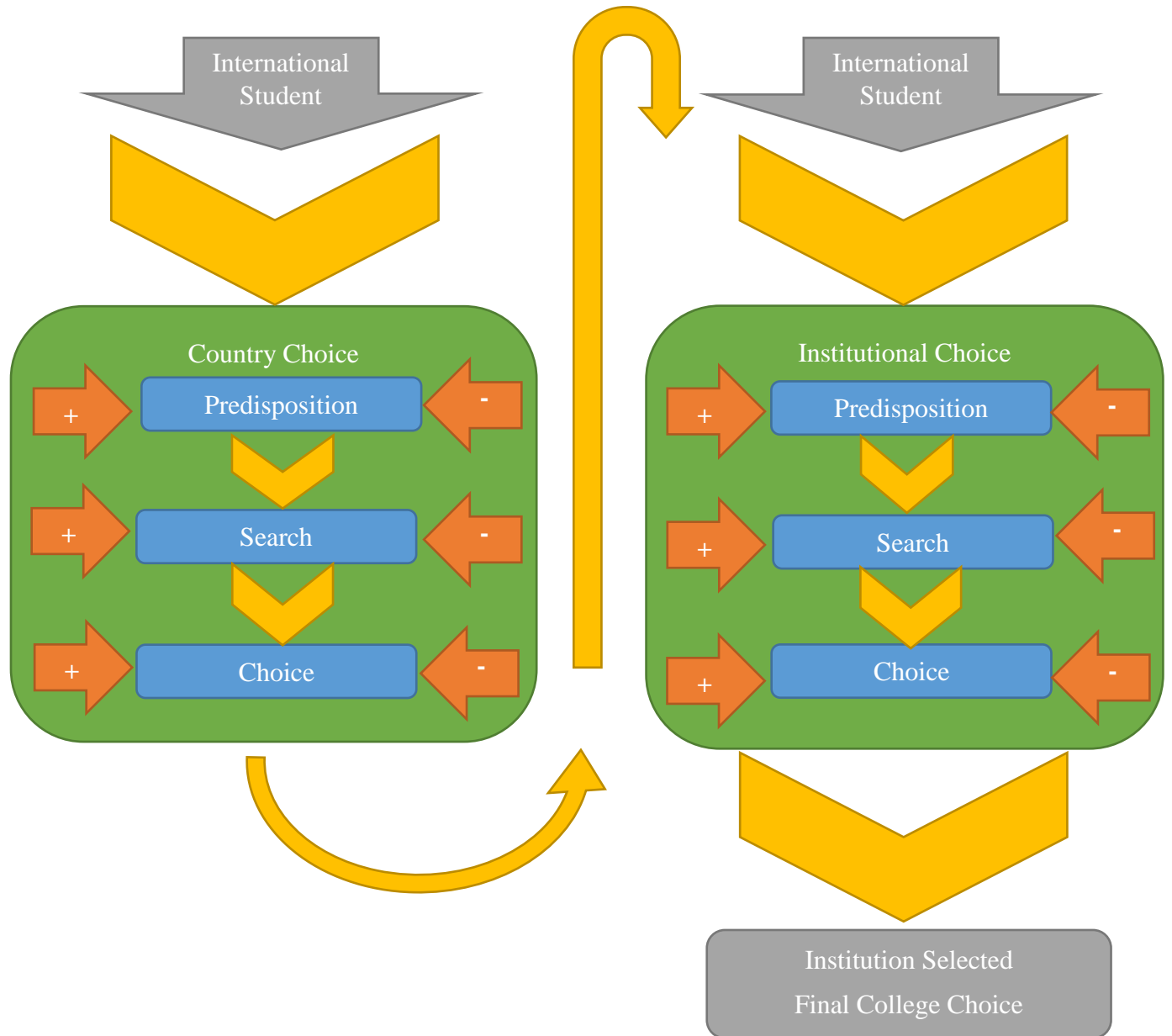


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of international student choice.

APPENDIX E

Alignment of Interview Questions with Research Questions

Table 4

Interview Questions Aligned to Research Questions

	RQ1	RQ1a	RQ1b	RQ1c
Describe why you decided to study in a foreign country.	X	X		
Which countries were potential options to study at and why these countries?	X		X	
Describe how you narrowed down your choice and selected to study in the USA.	X		X	X
Describe some of the aspects that influenced your search for potential institutions at which to study.	X	X	X	
Which institutions were potential options to study at and why these universities?	X		X	
Describe how you narrowed down your choice and selected to study at WKU.	X		X	X

APPENDIX F

Sampling Table

Table 2

Purposeful Sampling

Type of Data	Type of Sampling	Description
Interviews	Maximum Variation	Initially, students will be selected based on their relationship with the researcher in an attempt to obtain thick descriptions of the College Choice experience.
	Snowball	The initial selected students will be asked to refer the researcher to other students who might be willing to share their College Choice experience.
Documents	Theoretical	Documents are collected to establish relationships between mentioned factors and to triangulate data mentioned in the interview.
Institutional Data	Theoretical	Institutional data will serve to triangulate data and show the relationship between the institutional mission and their internationalization practices.

APPENDIX G

Interview Protocol

In this interview I am interested in hearing stories about your experiences. I am looking for a reflection on how you made the different decisions.

Q1: Describe why/how you decided to study in a foreign country.

Explain to me how the idea of studying abroad first came to mind.

How did your parents/friends react to your decision?

Which university options did you have in your own country?

How did money play a role?

Q2: Which countries were potential options to study at and why these countries?

What drew you to these countries?

Describe how you went about collecting information about these countries?

Did you have an agent/friend/teacher help you collect information?

How did family/friends play a role?

How did money play a role?

How did safety play a role?

How did proximity to home play a role?

Q3: Describe how did you narrowed down your choice and selected to study in the USA.

What drew you to the USA?

What was different about the USA compared to other countries that you liked?

How did the Visa application process play a role?

How did (conditional) admission play a role?

How did money play a role?

How did safety play a role?

How did Visa requirements play a role?

Q4: Describe what you were looking for in a potential institution?

What were the top three most important aspects?

Why were these aspects important to you?

How did you receive information about institutions?

Did family/friends advise on/recommend institutions?

How did money play a role?

How did climate play a role?

Q5: Which institutions were potential options? Why these universities?

How did money play a role?

How did location/climate/environment/weather play a role?

How did educational quality play a role?

How did you hear about these institutions?

Q6: Describe how you narrowed down your choice and selected to study at WKU.

How did you hear about WKU?

Was WKU your first choice?

What drew you to WKU?

How did ranking/reputation play a role?

How did admission requirements play a role?

How did money play a role?

How did scholarship opportunities/scholarship offers play a role?

How did climate play a role?

How did family/friends play a role?

APPENDIX H

Pre-Interview Survey

Table 6
Pre-Interview Survey

Pseudonym	Application Process	Cost	Environment	Facilities	Friends/Family	Future Study Opportunities	Information from WKU	Job Opportunities during Study	Job Prospects After Study	Language	Location of WKU	Quality of Education	References	Reputation	Safety
Suly			X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X		X	X
James				X											
Pedro		X		X			X								
Baylee		X				X				X				X	
Gia		X	X		X					X			X		X
Max											X		X		X
Shi Wang		X	X			X			X	X				X	
Brand		X	X								X	X			X
Khan	X	X	X				X				X				X
Jeremy		X	X		X	X	X		X		X	X			X
Sophia		X	X	X		X				X	X	X			X
Junior	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Paola			X	X	X							X			X
Leonard	X	X					X								
Maame Aba											X				