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Why Do You Come to LU?

Sara Hawkins and Amanda Schmidt

The purpose of this study was to examine the reasons that people attend and continue to attend Lindenwood University. We examined 129 surveys completed by current Lindenwood University students. The survey asked a variety of questions, including demographic data, resident/commuter status, and what the student likes/dislikes about Lindenwood. There were two hypotheses for this study. Our first hypothesis was that commuter students would attend class more often than resident students. Our second hypothesis was that scholarships/funding was the top reason that students chose to come to Lindenwood. While our second hypothesis did yield statistical significance, our first one did not. Implications of these findings are discussed.

With the job market currently being so competitive, more and more people are realizing that a college degree is necessary to land the job of their dreams. There are many reasons that people choose to pursue a degree, but why do they choose the schools they do? Specifically, why choose Lindenwood University? We were very curious to see why students choose to come here and why they continue to return. We were also interested in finding out if there were a difference between class attendance and student status (resident or commuter). Our first hypothesis is that commuter students will miss fewer classes than resident students because the reasons for attending college differ. Since commuter students often have less funding, they have to pay more of their own tuition than resident students do. For this reason, the motivation is higher for commuter students to attend their classes.

Rogers (2006) discusses a study done to improve enrollment at a university in Ohio. This study could be very relevant to colleges and universities around the country. Seeing what worked for one school can inspire administrators about changes that need to be made at their school, particularly Lindenwood University. The results of our study could prompt administrators to examine the current problems here and change them to raise students' levels of satisfaction.

Graham and Kummer (2006) point out that rising costs of traditional, four-year universities has caused many students to opt for a less expensive community college or technical school. In their article, Graham and Kummer found that the percentage of students planning to attend community college had risen significantly in many areas. For example, in South Jersey, the number of students planning to attend community college rose 8 percentage points. At Edison/Fareira school in Philadelphia, the number of students planning to attend a community college rose from 32 percent in 2001 to 70 percent in 2002. Community college is more acceptable and has less stigma attached than in the past. These schools used to be considered "junior colleges" and somehow less adequate than traditional universities. However, the low price of these institutions makes them very tempting for students who cannot afford an expensive education.

Rowan-Kenyon (2007) discusses the importance of one's socioeconomic status. Often, not having the money is an excellent reason no to attend colleges. However, often students from low socioeconomic backgrounds tend to receive large grants and scholarships due to their inability to pay. This can impact the financial aid that other students receive, which can impact the choice to attend college.

International students also have a large impact on our schools. Roach (2007) talks at length about the importance of international students and the possibility of ensuring that all receive a proper education. Since Lindenwood hosts so many international students, this would affect them. One reason that Lindenwood has so many international students is that they are willing to pay for the student's entire tuition in most cases.

This article supports our second hypothesis. Our hypothesis is that the top reason that students attend Lindenwood is the funding or scholarships that they receive. For many students, Lindenwood grants huge scholarships and it makes it easier on students who would not be able to afford another, more expensive area school, such as St. Louis University. A person who receives a full scholarship to a school will often choose that school simply because they can't afford other schools. We hypothesize that this is the case for many Lindenwood students, especially students who reside on campus. For commuter students, we believe that the top reason for attending Lindenwood is the location of the university. Many people grew up in St. Charles, and Lindenwood is a very short commute for many people in the St. Louis area. With the price of gas soaring to unheard of amounts, a short commute is very important for many people.

However, as much as scholarships help, they do not fix the financial problems that many students have while in college. Schworm (2007) states that free tuition is not the only solution to this problem. This statement was made in response to a Massachusetts proposal to provide free education for all students attending a community college. This is a novel concept, but could it really work? Even if this proposal were passed, Schworm points out that there are other things to consider.

There are other financial factors aside from tuition that many college students struggle with everyday, especially commuter students. Students must not only raise the money for tuition, they also must pay for books, food, and rent. For students struggling on a low budget, this can be very difficult. Although the idea of free tuition for all students is appealing, it will not fix these other problems that need to be addressed. The price of textbooks needs to be lowered, and apartment buildings can offer student discounts for full-time students. These small adjustments can make a huge difference in the life of the student who is struggling to pay the bills and attend school.

We decided to study the questions we had by administering a survey to Lindenwood student. We recruited people through the use of flier and the Human Subject Pool (HSP). We also administered the survey to random classes on campus. The survey focused on two topics: why did you come to Lindenwood, and how is your class attendance? We also collected demographic data including age, sex, status (commuter or resident) and how long they had been attending Lindenwood. We were interested in finding out if our hypothesis could be supported or not.

Method

Participants

One hundred and fifty-four participants took part in our study, and all of our participants were current Lindenwood students. Students that were recruited through the Human Subject Pool were given extra credit, and the non-HSP students were given small bags of candy as compensation. We had to discard data from 31 participants because they did not state whether they were commuters or residents. 23 freshmen, 23 sophomores, 43 juniors, and 33 seniors took part in this study. We had 43 males and 80 females. The age

of the participants ranged from 18 to 34 years, with a mean of 21.11. 83 participants were from the United States and 16 were international students. The top area of origin of the participants was Missouri, with 43 participants reporting origination there. The GPA of our participants ranged from 2.00 to 4.00, with a mean of 3.69. The top two majors reported by participants was biology with 17 participants and psychology with 28 participants. We had 36 commuter students, 87 resident students, 92 full-time students, 4 part-time students, and 75 undergraduate students. The number of semesters the participants attended LU ranged from 0-11, with a mean of 3.38 and a mode of 1. The number of hours worked by our participants ranged from 0-60, with a mean of 16.16 and a mode of 0. The number of credits the participants are currently taking ranged from 6-20, with a mean of 15.01 and a mode of 15.

Materials

For this study, we used a variety of materials. We used all the necessary HSP paperwork, including a list of participants, experiment description, participant receipts, and sign-up sheets. We also used informed consent letters, instructions (see Appendix A), feedback letters, copies of the survey (see Appendix B), pens, pencils, desks, chairs, and bags of candy for non-HSP participants. We used a variety of classrooms. All but one of the classrooms was in Young Hall; the other was in Roemer Hall. All of the classrooms had enough desks for all of the participants, adequate lighting, and a large table on which we organized our materials.

Procedure

For this study, we collected data in two different settings, meaning that we had two different procedures. For the first procedure, we collected data from participants

using the HSP (human subject pool). We first posted a description of our experiment and a sign-up sheet on the HSP board. We used a classroom in Young Hall that had about 30 desks with chairs, a table with two chairs, and adequate lighting. As the participants came in, we had them sign their name on the list of participants and take two copies of the informed consent letter, a copy of the instructions, the survey, and a participant receipt. Once they had completed the survey, we looked over their receipt to be sure it was correctly filled out. We took the survey and one copy of their signed informed consent letter and gave them a feedback letter. Once they had the feedback letter and their receipt, they were thanked for their time and told that they were free to leave.

For the second procedure, we went to different classes and, with the instructor's permission, administered our survey to these classes. All participants were told that this was completely optional and that their participation would in no way affect their grade for the class. All the classrooms used in this procedure had adequate lighting, enough desks and chairs for all participants, and a table for us to organize our things on. Since these participants were not recruited through the HSP, we did not use any HSP paperwork in this procedure. We handed out the surveys, instructions, and two copies of the informed consent form to all participants. The participants were given as much time needed to complete their surveys. As they handed in their surveys and one copy of their informed consent form, they were given a feedback letter and a small bag of candy as compensation for their time. Once all the participants had finished and received their feedback letter and candy, we thanked the class and instructor for their time and exited the class.

Results

The results of the experiment did not turn out the way we had hoped. Our first hypothesis was that resident students would miss a higher amount of classes than commuter students. The results that we found concluded that there was no significant difference between the amounts of classes missed in the two groups. We conducted an independent t-test to determine this. The results of our independent t-test were $t(119) = .685, p > .05$ ns. We were unable to reject the null hypothesis.

Our second hypothesis was that most often the reason for students attending Lindenwood University would be a scholarship that the student received from the school. For this hypothesis we conducted a chi-square analysis. Through this analysis we were able to conclude that there was a statistical significance for scholarships over other reasons for attending Lindenwood University. The results were $\chi^2 = 20.489, p < .05$. We were able to reject the null hypothesis.

The number of classes missed each semester ranged from 0-20, with a mean of 2.89 and a mode of 3. For type of class most likely missed, 68 participants reported missing GE classes, 5 reported missing classes required for their major, and 36 reported missing elective classes. The top two reasons reported for missing class were oversleeping, with a total of 5 participants, and being sick, with a total of 13 participants. Many participants reported being sick or oversleeping as part of the answer, but the top results were only oversleeping or only being sick. The top reason that participants reported coming to LU was scholarships/funding, with a total of 78 participants. 25 participants reported location as their main reason, 5 participants reported outside influences as their reasons, and 14 participants reported some other reason for attending.

To further elaborate this question, we also asked the participants to explain their answer to the question. The top two reasons listed were that they were given a good scholarship and/or that it was close to home. Since there were such a variety of answers, it was difficult to pinpoint exact numbers, but the top two reasons that participants continue to attend LU were that it is close to their homes, and that they're almost done, or about to graduate. The top two things that participants like about LU were its location and its small classes/campus size. The top responses to what the participants dislike about LU were the rules, the food, the parking, and the visitation policy. The top things that the participants would change about LU were the rules, the food, and the visitation policy.

Discussion

While conducting this experiment we came across several issues that could have had an effect on the outcome of the study. One of these issues was the question about the participants' country and area of origin. This question was not on the original survey (see appendix), but it was later added on as a result of having many international students take the original survey. Not knowing where some of the first participants lived may affect the answers that they gave. Being an international student may be a bigger motivator for those that are residents because they have more to lose if they do not do well in school. Since we do not know exactly how many of the residential students were foreign, we cannot tell for sure why there was no statistical significance found between the two groups.

Another issue that could have affected our results was that one of the questions referred back to a previous question and on some of the surveys it asked the participant to refer back to the wrong question. We tried to catch the error before the participants

answered the question, but we were not able to change all of them. This could have affected the results because we were not able to include those answers that referred to the wrong question. This may have skewed the results by not having all of the data from each participant.

If we were to conduct this experiment again we would get permission to view attendance and GPA records of the participants. Since the number of classes that each participant misses each semester and their GPA were both self-reported, there was no way to ensure accuracy of unless we looked up the official records of them. If these numbers were not correct it would greatly affect the results since that was one of the main things that we were looking for. We would also change the other before mentioned problems that we encountered during the experiment in order to improve the accuracy of the results of any future experiments like this one.

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Appendix A

Instructions

You will now be asked to complete a survey about Lindenwood University.

You will complete a survey regarding your attendance and status at Lindenwood University. Please answer all questions as honestly as possibly. Your answers and information will be kept completely confidential. Your answers and time are very valuable to us. Once you complete your survey, you will be compensated for your time.

Thank you for your time.

Appendix B

Why Do You Come to LU?

1. What is your class status?

Freshman

Sophomore

Junior

Senior

2. Age_____

3. Sex_____

4. What is your country of origin? _____

5. What area of that country are you from? (State, city, province, etc.)

6. overall GPA at LU_____

7. Major(s)_____

8. What type of student are you? (please circle all that apply)

Commuter

Resident

Full-time

Part-time

LCIE

Graduate

Undergraduate

9. How many semesters have you attended (including this semester) at Lindenwood University?_____

10. How many hours per week do you work (if you do not work, please write 0)?

11. How many credits are you currently taking?_____

12. On average, how many sessions of each class do you miss per semester?

13. Which type of class are you more likely to miss?

General ed. Required for major elective

14. What is most often your reason for missing class?

15. What made you choose to come to Lindenwood University? (circle all that apply)

Scholarship convenience/location outside influence educational reasons

Other

16. Please explain your answer to question 15. _____

17. Why do you stay at Lindenwood University?

18. Is your reason for coming here still a factor in your staying here?

19. What do you like/dislike about LU? (please give at least one of each)

20. If given the opportunity, what would you change about LU?