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College Characteristics Influencing Choice of Missouri Valley College

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COLLEGE CHARACTERISTICS INFLUENCING
CHOICE OF
MISSOURI VALLEY COLLEGE

A Project/Thesis presented to the
Faculty of
Lindenwood College

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science
in Human Service Agency Management

By
Bryan B. Berlin
January 1997



Thesis
B 456c
1997

This thesis, written by

Bryan B. Berlin

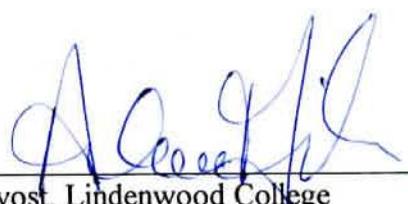
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MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Human Service Agency Management

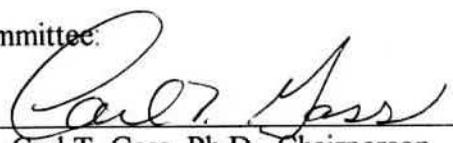


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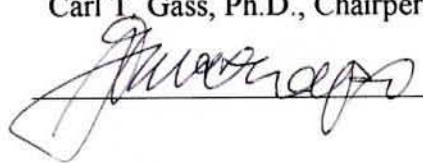
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Thesis Committee:



Carl T. Gass, Ph.D., Chairperson



3/4/97

Date

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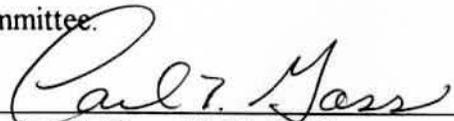


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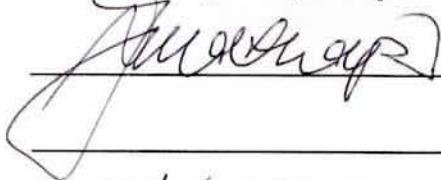
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Date

Thesis Committee.



Carl F. Gass, Ph.D., Chairperson



3/4/97

Date

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CHAPTER ONE

Purpose of the Project

On September 17, 1889, following the opening address, Missouri Valley College opened its doors to its first students. The event marked the culmination of several earlier attempts of higher education by the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Marshall, Missouri had been selected as the location of the college over Sedalia and Odessa because of perceived advantages and the express desire of the community for the college (Parsons, 1940, p21).

Today Missouri Valley College is still related to the Presbyterian Church (now referred to as the Presbyterian Church USA). And it is still committed to preparing young people to take their place as contributing members of society (Missouri Valley College, brochure, 1996). The college has been fully accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools since 1916. In addition Missouri Valley College is approved by the Missouri State Board of Education, the Board of Christian Education and the Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

The attraction that has been common since 1889 for students at Missouri Valley College has been opportunity. From its current students pursuing degrees in cutting-edge fields such as mass communications and human service agency management, Missouri Valley College has consistently strived to provide the career preparation necessary for new fields.

The purpose of this project was to determine which college characteristics were most influential to students in deciding to pursue an education at Missouri Valley College.

It seemed important to this researcher to investigate the influential factors that have caused incoming students to select this as the environment in which to prepare themselves for their roles as contributing members of society.

To accomplish this, a survey was prepared and administered to the incoming freshman class of fall term 1996-97 to provide insight into their decisions to enroll at Missouri Valley College. The study results were tabulated and analyzed to provide statistical analysis of the new students.

Questions in the survey were patterned after the format of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program Freshman Survey which Missouri Valley College has been compiling for a number of years. Following a similar format facilitated the compilation and analysis of the results and provide reference to previous research. It also allowed comparison with previous years data and similar private, co-educational liberal arts colleges in the same geographic area.

Information from nearby liberal arts colleges provided insight as to whether the results obtained at Missouri Valley College by students may be based on reasons other than the desire to learn or the quality of the education. Based on the information that the survey provided, Missouri Valley College may gain a better idea of the focus of its students and may be able to adjust curriculum to best satisfy its objectives. This information should also lend insight into student perceptions leading to enrollment, which could aid in recruiting procedures.

Statement of the Problem

Missouri Valley College offers the opportunity to receive an affordable liberal arts education focused on four-dimensional growth-mentally, socially, physically, and spiritually. Students benefit from the close personal relationships that are fostered as students gain a broad range of knowledge and understanding about the arts, humanities and sciences. Through the learning and social activities that are experienced on the campus students are encouraged to grow and develop their capacities for work, success and leadership (Missouri Valley College Handbook, 1995-96).

Dramatic changes have occurred in the job market. There is an ever-increasing demand for jobs as well as specialized training for specific jobs prior to employment. As a result, motivating factors other than the desire for further knowledge may be the driving force that is responsible for bringing many students to the campus. It is important to understand the reasons noted as very important in selecting Missouri Valley College if the institution is to achieve a successful retention rate and provide the opportunity for self-discovery and personal fulfillment for the students.

Therefore, the following hypotheses were formulated, which if found tenable, might be worthy of further investigation:

- I. Most students will select Missouri Valley College because of financial aid packages made available to them.
- II. Most students will select Missouri Valley College because of participation in intercollegiate athletic programs.

III. Most students who select Missouri Valley College will come from the geographic region that is within a 500 mile radius of the college location, Marshall, Missouri.

IV. Most students will select Missouri Valley College because the college provides opportunity not found elsewhere for them.

The purpose of the study was to provide student information in their choice of college, which in this case will be Missouri Valley College. The hypotheses were based on the idea that students choose Missouri Valley College for reasons other than the quality of the education or strength of academic programs. Results of the survey were expected to reveal the most significant factors noted by students in the selection of Missouri Valley College.

By identifying the reasons students have selected Missouri Valley College the institution will be better able to set about its task at hand. In many ways the college may be able to apply the concepts of Total Quality Management and its two main objectives- to provide customer satisfaction and quality service.

Understanding the perceptions of the students as customers with very definite needs and desires will allow the college to better address its mission and purpose and measure its success in achieving it.

Historical Perspective

When Missouri Valley College opened its doors to students in 1889, the initial enrollment was 153 students. Of these, 140 were part of a pre-college preparatory academy which was part of the college until 1926, providing teaching experience for college students, but also preparing some students for college.

Enrollment slowly rose to over 300 students and stayed there until World War II. After the war, returning servicemen helped boost enrollment to between 500-600. Attendance slowly dropped but by the mid-1950s a gradual rise in students began that would eventually top out over 900 in 1970-71 as college appeared more attractive than the Vietnam War. The student numbers began to decline again, this time falling to about 364 in 1978-79. From this point forward to the present the picture is remarkable indeed. Enrollment topped the illusive 1000 student figure in the 1988-1989 school year and has continued to climb to a near-optimal capacity of 1200 students (Missouri Valley College, Admissions Office, 1996).

The dramatic increase is a result of a new direction toward recruiting involving both students and faculty which was started in 1993. The Sales Program is an entrepreneurial approach whereby teachers sell students on the value of an education in much the same way that the manager of an enterprise must sell the concept prior to selling the product. In the program, students make calls on new student contacts and faculty members make follow-up calls on behalf of their respective fields.

Recruiting is played close to the vest, in the areas that have produced the significant student numbers most readily. In some interesting situations, former students who have chosen teaching as a profession have guided new students to Missouri Valley College and opened up areas that had not been recruited previously.

Missouri Valley College is a member of the Heart of America Athletic Conference along with William Jewell College, Culver Stockton College, Baker University, Mid-America Nazarene College, Graceland College, Benedictine College, Central Methodist College, Evangel College, and Lindenwood College. The conference competes intercollegiately in the Division II of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (Missouri Valley College, Development Office, 1996).

Throughout its long and rolling history Missouri Valley College has achieved tremendous success in its athletic programs for a school of its size. Student athletes compete in sports including football, basketball, track and field, cross-country, softball, volleyball, baseball, wrestling, rodeo and soccer. With both men's and women's teams in several sports, athletic recruiting plays a very important role in the student population. Many students select Missouri Valley College because of the athletic participation. It is also significant to note that the student-athletes have maintained grade point averages as high if not higher than non-athlete students, which may be an indication of the dedication and discipline involved in athletics (Missouri Valley College, Registrar, 1995).

The school colors are royal purple and old gold. The purple symbolizes royalty and the gold stands for incorruptible value, having been chosen by the first president of the college, Dr. W.H. Black. Orange came to be substituted during World War II when gold fabric was difficult to obtain and purple and orange are the accepted colors today.

The athletic teams of Missouri Valley College have been known as the "Vikings" since 1922. Professor William I. Ferguson upon hearing of a great football victory against Drury College of Springfield, Missouri, was inspired to write a poem entitled "Vikings", wherein the student athletes were likened to Viking warriors.

Professor Ferguson devoted his entire life to Missouri Valley College and young adults. Retiring at the age of 96, his last official duties included handwritten letters to all incoming freshmen and speeches to alumni groups on behalf of the college. The following is his description of the pervasive spirit at Missouri Valley College:

Spirit of Valley- The Big "V"

Spirit is difficult to define; it suggests a prevailing influence, an attitude, a mood. V-stands for Valley with its spirit of lasting friendships, of purposeful living, of enjoyment of meaningful life. V-stands for Vigor, that muscular asset of young men and women of bouncing back after a knockdown or a poor paper on a test. V-stands for Valor, a quality of being unafraid, the quality of meeting tough situations and mastering them. A possible purpose of Valley might be bringing the joy of doing tasks well; might be the producing of fellowship and the blessings of this fellowship. It could bring some knowledge of God and the gladness of this knowledge.

In the most recent years of enrollment in the 1000 student range, the student athletes make up a large part of the student body. It is entirely possible that as many as 40% are attending Missouri Valley College to participate in a particular sport (Missouri Valley College, Admissions Office, 1996).

While scholarships are readily available to all students, there are no athletic full-ride scholarships offered in any sport. Not all students who arrive because of sports continue to participate, but many stay and complete their course-work for a degree nonetheless.

At this level of competition, obviously there are athletes who might not be able to compete in a larger institution in a major conference. By no means does this lessen the performance or achievement of student-athletes at Missouri Valley College, in fact it serves to support the earlier statement that Missouri Valley College offers a chance for opportunists that may be high-risk. That it has been successful can be witnessed by the many championship banners and trophies that adorn the athletic fieldhouse and a glance at the Athletic Hall of Fame. For an institution of this size it is a remarkable tradition that is ongoing.

Admissions, Recruitment and Retention

The Admissions Office oversees the recruiting program at Missouri Valley College. Through the efforts of the recruiting staff, the entire process is coordinated to maintain an efficient recruiting process. Contacts are made by students, faculty and staff as well as talking to prospective students when they visit the campus. College and careers nights within the region also are utilized effectively.

When students show interest in the college, they are sent an information packet which includes an introductory letter, an application, a transcript release

form, a Preliminary Financial Statement, a Handbook and athletic information as applicable.

Once the application and final transcripts have been received, the file is evaluated. The criteria for the evaluation include:

1. 18 ACT/840 SAT
2. Rank in the top half of their class
3. 2.0 High School Grade Point Average

Students may be accepted on probation if they do not meet the criteria but can provide two letters of recommendation and the Academic Admissions Officer deems that they have the potential to succeed in a college setting.

In situations where the students do not score well on the College Placement Review, the college places the students in general studies classes or refresher courses to improve their skills and increase the likelihood of their success.

Analysis of the first-time freshmen for the last four years reveal average ACT scores of:

Fall 1992- 18.1
 Fall 1993- 18.5
 Fall 1994- 18.4
 Fall 1995- 18.5

Students in the top half of their respective class for the same years:

		Percentage
Fall 1992- 133	Enrollment- 1153	11.5%
Fall 1993- 219	Enrollment- 1102	19.9%
Fall 1994- 202	Enrollment- 1206	16.7%
Fall 1995- 252	Enrollment- 1212	20.8%

(Missouri Valley College, Admissions Office, 1996)

Missouri Valley College admissions policies and procedures seek to implement a commitment to the Mission Statement with a commitment to openness and opportunity that produces a diverse student population. This commitment has been consistent throughout the history of the institution, as evidenced by the role the Academy played in the early years of the school's history. The Academy provided from one to three years of college preparatory work for students who were not yet adequately prepared for the college experience.

At the same time Missouri Valley College seeks to attract the full spectrum of good to excellent students who will benefit from the close personal attention of the academic and social atmosphere of the small campus size.

Student quality is related to the quality and effectiveness of the recruiting program. Missouri Valley College is concerned about each individual student and is of a size that personal attention can be effective and also aid in the academic as well as social growth of the student.

Retention figures for the past four years for students attending at the end of the semester and eligible to return the following semester:

Total eligible to return:	Returned:	Percentage
1992- 1059	936	88.4%
1993- 1038	910	87.7%
1994- 1100	955	86.8%
1995- 1120	980	87.5%

(Missouri Valley College, Admissions Office, 1996)

The title of this project/thesis is "College Characteristics Influencing Choice of Missouri Valley College." The study focused on the Fall 1996 freshman class of Missouri Valley College, a private coeducational, liberal arts college located in Marshall, Missouri.

Throughout its history, the college has demonstrated a vital capacity to develop interpersonal relationships on campus that continue to enhance the quality of life after graduation. The college has closely related itself with the entrepreneurial spirit in its own endeavors as well as the type of students that are attracted to its programs. Perhaps the best examples of this can be evidenced by the success in enrolling the highest number of Horatio Alger Honor students of any college or university in the country (Missouri Valley College, Admissions Office, 1996). This society recognizes achievement by high school students who have risen above disadvantages.

Missouri Valley College is also the home of the American Humanics Program, founded in 1948. Its purpose: "Dedicated to the education and development of leaders of the youth of America", is appropriate because the college has earned a reputation for the quality of its Humanics Program and the caliber of students who desire to become leaders in the youth/human service agency field.

This project was conceived in the fall of 1995 while the researcher was serving as a graduate assistant in the Development Office of Missouri Valley College. The student survey was prepared and administered to the incoming freshmen upon their arrival on campus in August 1996. The subsequent results

were tabulated and analyzed in order to evaluate the hypotheses. Project completion was scheduled for December 1996.

Participants

The research sample for this project was the freshman class of school year 1996-97, first-time full-time students. Estimating from the most recent years enrollments the class size was predicted to be in the 300-350 students range.

Historically, the mission of Missouri Valley College has been to provide students a liberal arts education that is career oriented. While this may appear to be a standard objective of similar sized institutions of this type, there are in fact several distinctions that set Missouri Valley College apart from other independent liberal arts colleges.

A significant number of the student body fall in the high risk category for any of several reasons. About 45% of the freshman class are the first members of their immediate family to attend college. Over one-third of the new students come from single parent families. Over one third come from families with less than \$25,000 annual income and almost 25% are minority students (Gass, p.1). As a result, approximately 95% of the students receive at least some sort of financial aid (Missouri Valley College, Admissions Office, 1996).

Missouri Valley College was recognized in the October, 1995 issue of Money magazine as one of the best schools in the country at finding and distributing scholarships and grant money to students (See Appendix).

Students at Missouri Valley College represent 40 states and at least 10 foreign countries. By far the highest percentage is from the immediate area as 58% of the student population is from the state of Missouri alone. Oklahoma, Kansas, and Texas also have significantly high numbers and their geographic proximity is worth noting. Successful recruiting in these target areas has led to follow-up students, as students help attract future students.

Permission for the project was granted by the President of Missouri Valley College, Dr. J. Kenneth Bryant, the eleventh president in the history of the College.

Objectives

The following objectives were broadly achieved.

Objective 1 - By December, 1995 the student will complete and have approved the project/thesis title and description and purpose of the project.

Objective 2 - By April, 1996 the student will complete chapter one of the project/thesis and submit for approval.

Objective 3 - By July, 1996 the student will complete course work necessary for degree.

Objective 4 - By August, 1996 the student will complete chapter two of the project/thesis and submit for approval.

Objective 5 - By August, 1996 the student will have survey forms completed and prepared to distribute and administer to incoming students during registration for Fall term 1996-97.

Objective 6 - By September 30, 1996 the student will have the results of the survey compiled and ready to analyze for chapter three of the project/thesis.

Objective 7 - By October, 1996 the student will complete chapter three of the project/thesis and submit for approval.

Objective 8 - By December, 1996 the student will complete chapter four of the project/thesis and submit for approval.

Limitations of Project/Thesis Findings

Several limitations affected the completion of this study. Some of the identified limitations included:

- 1.) Using previous attendance records as an indicator, there will be a higher percentage of men than women in the sample group.
- 2.) Results will be accurate only to the degree that students are honest and understanding of their own motivations for enrolling at Missouri Valley College.
- 3.) That people do not always fill out questionnaire forms accurately and correctly will have to be taken into consideration.
- 4.) Sample group size may be reduced by failure of some students to complete and turn in the survey form.
- 5.) Inability to compare previous years data and data from other liberal arts colleges in the same geographic area will somewhat limit the findings of the survey.
- 6.) Results obtained will be for one year and only based on the random enrollment for the year and the survey group for Fall 1996-97 school year.
- 7.) Variables among individual students may be based on attitudes, background, and demographics.
- 8.) Individual differences may arise due to perceptions of the world that differ among students, and students may value what they perceive differentially.

Definition of Terms

Missouri Valley College is a small, liberal arts college related to the Presbyterian Church (USA). Located in Marshall, Missouri, it was founded in 1889. The enrollment has slowly grown over the years and currently is about 1200 students. The campus size has also grown from the original 40 acre tract to near 135 acres today.

College most often refers to an institution with a four-year program leading to a Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Arts degree.

The term university differs from college in that there are not only four-year undergraduate programs, but graduate and professional schools as well. There are exceptions to this rule, but generally that is the main distinction.

Liberal arts colleges, from the Latin "liber" meaning "free," emphasize general education course work. Study in the arts and sciences encourages further pursuit of knowledge and a dedication to striving for truth and justice in the service of humanity.

Community colleges are generally two-year schools, although some have expanded to four-year programs.

Accrediting Agencies attempt to evaluate and certify learning institutions to maintain a certain credibility. Perhaps best known is the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. The Missouri State Board of Education and the Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church would also serve as approval bodies.

Part of the initial application process involves filling out forms for scholarship determination. These may include:

FAFSA- Free Application For Federal Student Aid

FAF- Financial Aid Form

FFS- Family Financial Statement

Need-based grant- a scholarship (not necessarily full) given to students because they would otherwise be unable to afford college. Student need is determined on the basis of FAF or FFS.

Merit-based grant- a scholarship (not necessarily full) because of some special talent or attribute. Artists, athletes, community leaders, or scholars are typical recipients.

Work-study- a government-funded financial aid program that provides assistance to financial aid recipients in return for work within the school's framework.

The college selection process is composed of two phases: college search and college choice. The search phase generally ends when the prospective student submits applications to a set of colleges- referred to as the application set. After the colleges have made their admissions decisions, the "choice" phase begins. This is the process whereby a single college is determined from the application set that make offers to the student.

Criteria for admissions to Missouri Valley College is partly based on student scores on standardized tests that include:

SAT- Scholastic Aptitude Test

ACT- American College Testing Assessment

Many Students who enroll at Missouri Valley College participate in intercollegiate athletics. Missouri Valley College is a member of the Heart of America Conference which is governed by the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics. All students are eligible for scholarship assistance, but there are no scholarships athletically that pay for all of the students expenses, commonly referred to as the free-ride.

The symbolic name of the athletic teams of Missouri Valley College is the "Vikings", named after the Viking warriors by a former professor after a victorious contest.

Student athletes are eligible to participate in eight semesters of sports activity out of ten semesters from the time that they enroll, referred to as eligibility.

A student may voluntarily declare ineligibility as a freshman in order to save semesters for later, and become what is referred to as a redshirt freshman.

Semesters of eligibility refer to the semesters that a student has left, from the original eight allotted. Walk-on athletes do not enroll based on athletic commitment, but are free to try out for the team with the permission of the coaching staff.

Transfer students are eligible to participate at the next semester if they are transferring from another school within the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics. There is also a one-time waiver for students who transfer from a school

within the National College Athletic Association which allows them to become eligible at the next semester.

An agreement within the Heart of America Conference provides that transfer students within the conference shall be ineligible for two semesters to prevent entire rosters from jumping from one school to another.

There are many detailed and complex rules and regulations that govern the athletic programs of colleges and universities at all levels. The attempt is to level the playing field and provide for sportsmanlike participation as a part of the educational experience.

Timeline

Dec '95 Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec '96

Objective 1 _____

Objective 2 _____

Objective 3 _____

Objective 4 _____

Objective 5 _____

Objective 6 _____

Objective 7 _____

Objective 8 _____

The above is the actual timeline for work on this research project.

Budget

The researcher had minimal actual costs associated with the project/thesis. There were the normal paper expenses as well as publishing costs. Also, there were expenditures in the research involving computer time or travel for library access at the state university facility. Otherwise, the research was performed and the survey prepared as a graduate assistant in the Development Office of Missouri Valley College.

Summary of Project/ Thesis

The purpose of this project/thesis was to determine the reasons why students have selected Missouri Valley College for their education.

It seemed that reasons other than the quality of the education or the specific academic programs motivate students in their selection processes. It is important to understand the most influential factors that determine the enrollment of Missouri Valley College. This information is valuable for retention and recruitment of future students.

While students might not designate the desire to learn as the reason that they select Missouri Valley College, it is possible that they are receptive to and receive an education of value to themselves anyway.

It is clear that there are several obvious patterns in the history of Missouri Valley College enrollment. 1.) Students make excellent use of available scholarships and grants as part of their financial aid packages. 2.) There is a strong tradition of athletics and students participate in various sports as part of

their educational and social experience. 3.) It is region specific, as well over half of the student body is from the state of Missouri. 4.) Missouri Valley College provides an opportunity to students that some institutions would not consider due to factors they consider high-risk.

The researcher has been interested in the approach that students take toward their studies at Missouri Valley College and sought to try and determine what motivates them to select this college as their learning institution of choice.

It seemed to be important that students understand their own motivations and have a clear concept of what Missouri Valley College can provide for them. Conversely, it is critical for the college to understand what causes students to enroll if they are to best serve their needs.

A survey was prepared and administered to the freshman class of Fall 1996-97 to determine the reasons noted as very important to students in deciding to choose Missouri Valley College. The survey was evaluated and the findings analyzed.

Conclusions are presented in chapter four. Results show whether or not the information supports the hypotheses.

CHAPTER TWO

The Literature Review

Missouri Valley College is a small, private, liberal arts college located in Marshall, Missouri. Since its founding in 1889, the college has been providing students with the opportunity to receive an affordable education. Results of freshman surveys which have been administered since 1991 indicate that students who select Missouri Valley College may be giving higher preference to some factors in the college choice process.

The title of this project/thesis is "College Characteristics Influencing Choice of Missouri Valley College." (Based on the hypotheses that Missouri Valley College is selected by students on the basis of financial aid packages, athletic programs, location of the college, or opportunity not found elsewhere as opposed to more common factors such as academic reputation or specific academic programs offered.) Freshman class members of the 1996-97 school year were surveyed; the results revealed the reasons noted as very important to students in deciding to further their education at Missouri Valley College. The college selection process is extremely critical to the future of the institution, but even more important to the success of students. If an institution is really serious about freshman success, it must know the characteristics and background of its target students and use these data in planning for its success. In determining the reasons noted as very important in selecting Missouri Valley College, the administration will have a better idea of who the students are as well as why they are enrolled. If the institution is attracting high-risk students, then the programs

and services must reflect this and take certain liabilities into account. Similarly if the students are enrolling to participate in intercollegiate athletic programs, special attention may be required to provide the full benefit of the educational experience that is the mission of higher education.

Market Research Foundation as it applies to institutions of higher education covers the elements that affect attracting students and graduating them. Identifying and locating target markets, defining the image of the college's consumers, the demand for specific programs, and the effect of competition on both the institution and the student are all part of the institution's self-analysis and ultimately reveal the consumer satisfaction and effectiveness of the institution.

In attempting to establish a market position, an institution must seek answers to questions such as:

Why are current students attending this institution?

Why do students continue at this institution?

Why do some admitted students not enroll?

Why do students withdraw from this institution?

And the questions that will be addressed in this survey:

Why have students selected this institution?

What are prospective students looking for?

What are the characteristics of Missouri Valley College which influence them in their decision (Grabowski, 1981, p13)?

While academic success may be only one facet of a successful college education, it is nevertheless one of the more measurable and objective criteria present on all

college campuses. Its importance is critical to the student remaining in school as well as the student with post-graduate plans and admissions to graduate and professional school (Hood, 1968, p7).

College Selection Process

The college selection process is composed of two general phases: college search and college choice. The college search phase is the decision made by students what to do after high school. For some this process begins early in life and follows a fairly predictable schedule. There are five important general factors that help determine people's choices after high school:

- 1) Academic aptitude- some alternatives are not available to students below a certain aptitude level.
- 2) Family income- the large expenditure necessary for a college education is critical in the selection process.
- 3) Cost and aid- costs take the form of tuition, room and board, and distance to an alternative. Aid enhances the desirability of an alternative.
- 4) Quality of high school- educational achievement and proportion of peers that continue to college enhance the likelihood that a student will decide to go to college.
- 5) Labor market conditions- would be the expected annual income if an individual were to enter the work force (Manski & Wise, 1983, p30).

This complex set of forces and decisions determines the outcome of a student's future. The decision procedures have not changed greatly over the years.

Basically, a student with a given scholarship aid, ability, socioeconomic background and college and labor market opportunities selects the activities that seem to best suit his personal interests.

For the purpose of this study, the college search phase had obviously followed a decision to attend college and Missouri Valley College had been chosen as the single college to attend. For some, this may be only one of several colleges that admitted the student. For others it may represent the only choice, having made important college selection decisions within the college search phase.

In studying choice, it is important to note that some factors important at the beginning of the college choice phase may turn out to be irrelevant in the final selection process. This may be explained by the fact that all colleges in a student's selection set are at least minimally acceptable on some criteria and that other factors may influence the final decision. Such a finding results from the major screening influence that the search and application formation set decision processes exert on the college choice (Chapman & Jackson, 1987, p12).

Marketing Individual Differences in College Choice Behavior

The possibility that individual differences exist in college choice processes explains the wide range of alternatives and approaches taken by students.

Individual differences may arise in two ways in college choice behavior: different kinds of students may perceive the world differently or students may value what they perceive differentially. Here, "different kinds" of students would be described

by demographic, attitudinal and other background differences (Chapman & Jackson, 1987, p12).

In addition there is the possibility of what has been defined as "Context effects". By way of explanation, there would be different choice processes in choosing between only high-priced institutions and a set that included both high-priced institutions and local public institutions.

In college choice, it is assumed that a student chooses the most preferred alternative from the available options. In particular, if a student (implicitly) assigns a numerical value to each potential factor, then the fact that a student has chosen a particular factor implies that its utility exceeds that of all others that the student could have chosen (Manski & Wise, 1983, p36). As an example, a student may consider only two options after high school graduation- going to college or getting a job. If the desire to have income immediately is more important, then work would be chosen over college.

Students in the college choice process form perceptions of colleges based on actual, objectively verifiable attributes/characteristics of a college and on the information they possess about the college. This stage has been identified as perception judgment formation by Chapman and Jackson (1983). College attributes, both academic and non-academic are considered here. Included, but not limited to factors such as: quality of academic programs, extracurricular activities, campus location, diversity of student body, athletic programs, distance to the institution and parental education background are potential considerations.

As the student processes this information, preference is used to designate the overall worth of the individual alternatives from the point of view of the student. Preference depends on perceptions. Some studies separate financial considerations from preference and include it in the final choice phase. The perceptual views of a student are responsible for his or her preference. Students form values about colleges based on how they perceive the colleges. That is, judgments about the world are viewed as depending on how the world is seen (perceived) (Chapman & Jackson, 1987, p16). College- specific effects may play a significant role in the preference judgment formation stage.

The college choice stage involves student preferences, financial considerations, and post-admissions contacts. Financial considerations may be the most significant factor in a student's college selection considerations. Monetary considerations include the gross costs of attending an institution (tuition, room and board, and other expenses) and financial aid offered (scholarship, loans, workstudy). Family income level is an important individual-difference aspect. While some previous research indicates that students make a final choice without information on the financial aid they would get, there is a distinct difference at Missouri Valley College. Financial aid packages are indicated as one of the influences on decisions to enroll. (Cooperative Institutional Research Program surveys, 1991-1995).

In a similar study, Kotler (1976) describes the three types of logic that a student uses in reaching a decision on the college of first choice. 1) "Dominance Model, " where a student chooses a college that overshadows all the other schools

on all standards 2) Conjunctive Model, “ where a student chooses a college that meets the minimum level for each standard: 3) “Expectancy-Value Model, “ where the student chooses the college that has the weighted score. The last model is compensatory in nature inasmuch as there is a balancing of strong elements against deficient ones on the standard (Grabowski, 1981, p 15).

Determinants of College Choice

The three components of college choice mentioned earlier perception formation, preference judgment formation, and final college choice- involve processes by which students determine relative importance among considerations. These relative importances describe how a number of variables are related to perceptions, preferences, and choices. There are two formats for establishing such relative importances- self-reported weighting procedures and statistically derived weighting procedures.

The survey in this project was an instrument by which students would “self-estimate” how important various factors were to them in decision-making, evaluation, or judgment context.

A major advantage of these self-reported weights is that they are individual-specific. Such self-reported weights are gathered at the level of each individual respondent, acknowledging the possibility of individual differences. A second major advantage associated with such weighting procedures is ease of measurement and analysis. Percentages of most important or frequently chosen factors will summarize the findings.

Some noted drawbacks from self-reported weights exist and should be noted. Respondents may not know their own relative importance weights or be able to easily articulate them in a survey format. And the results are limited somewhat by the fact that they may be conducted after the college choice has been made and the students recall may limit the accuracy of the results. And the sampling will only include the students who have chosen Missouri Valley College, students who rejected the college are not considered in the population for comparison purposes. More precise and sophisticated statistical modeling is required to address questions about academic policy or specific changes in scholarship award amounts (Chapman & Jackson, 1987, p 20).

The most famous study in the college choice domain is undoubtedly the Manski and Wise (1983) effort using data from the National Longitudinal Study of 1972. The scope of their study and the advanced statistical modeling tools brought in studying college-going and college choice are particularly notable. Manski and Wise's model was a single one of the form- choice = $f(\text{college attributes, money, other factors})$ (Chapman & Jackson, 1987, p 18). This project is interested in the same questions of interest as they apply to Missouri Valley College.

College Characteristics Which Influence Student Choice

Important characteristics have been identified that strongly influence student decisions in college choice. A Boston College study found seven factors related to choice of college:

- 1) Costs: tuition, board, and financial aid.
- 2) Parents preference: parental education levels.
- 3) Academic reputation of the school, faculty, or programs.
- 4) Setting: size of school, rural or urban location.
- 5) Location: distance from home.
- 6) Athletic facilities: and programs that enhance athletics.
- 7) Social activities: atmosphere of the campus (Grabowski, 1981, p15-16).

Also, (Leuthold, p 3), in a 1995 study at Missouri University, included college efforts to communicate with students as an important characteristic.

It can be very helpful for an institution such as Missouri Valley College to understand how students select a school and what factors are most important in the decision. The process is complex and varies widely among individuals. In some instances it is a well-thought out analysis of personal goals matched to an institution with programs to enhance that person's plans. But in other cases, it is a haphazard decision that may be based on a recommendation of a friend, or vague notions about colleges that have not been documented.

There are academic as well as non-academic characteristics that play an important role in decisions students make to enroll in a college. Non-academic factors include geographic location, type and size of high school, economic status

of family, education background of parents, financial aid, and institution's competition. Academic factors include standardized test scores, high school records, and choice of major and courses (Grabowski, 1981, p 15).

Considering Institution Size

Size is a matter of personal preference. A child who has enjoyed close personal relationships with his teachers and his peers would probably prefer a small school where instructors tend to make themselves available to students (Soldwell, 1966, p 27). A self-directed student on the other hand, might benefit more in a large institution. The College Guide For Parents has identified some pros and cons related to school size:

Small Schools - Negatives

- 1) There are fewer instructors to choose from.
- 2) There is less privacy, and fewer new faces.
- 3) There are fewer activities to choose from.
- 4) Fewer courses are available in academic fields.
- 5) There is a large emphasis on fitting in with the crowd.

Small Schools - Positives

- 1) Closer relationships develop with faculty members.
- 2) There is a sense of belonging.
- 3) Activities are easier to participate in.
- 4) Less competition for specific courses.

5) Admissions process is likely to be more personal (Shields, 1986, p 46)

Missouri Valley College falls in the small college category (1000-3999 students) with enrollments above 1000 for the past several years. From the list of pros and cons, it is clear that the matching of student to institution is critical. The feature that is beneficial to one student may be a drawback to another student. And although obtaining information from students regarding their plans and goals is important, it is not always true that "the customer always knows what he wants" (Grabowski, 1981, p 14). The programs of an institution must remain consistent with its missions, not at the whim of students' interests.

The location of Missouri Valley College is rural, small-town middle America. Here again, what may be the ideal setting for some students may be culture shock for students accustomed to urban lifestyles. The college takes the position that the setting is a positive asset, as well as the campus size, and portrays them as such in recruiting and admissions literature.

College efforts to communicate with prospective students takes a personal approach as well, with the use of students and graduate students in recruiting calls. This strategic use of peers lends a more credible nature to information to new prospects.

Considering Admissions Selectivity

One factor that is considered in college choice is admissions selectivity of the schools being considered. Some schools have high standards that few students can meet, lending an exclusive element to their offers of acceptance. Others accept

any high school graduate, regardless of grades, test scores, or class standing. Just by having a high school diploma a student can be admitted to many junior colleges and some four-year colleges. And depending on grade average, there are many choices, with high school transcripts playing a major role in admission offers.

Nearly 70% of college students are accepted to their first college of choice (U.S. News, 1990, p 44). Generally, colleges and universities have one of five types of admissions policies:

Open (all high school graduates are accepted until the entering class is filled to capacity)

SAT scores: 750-900. ACT composite: 14-19

Liberal (some accepted applicants are from the lower half of their high school class)

SAT scores: 800 - 950. ACT composite: 16-21.

Traditional (all accepted freshmen are in the top 25%)

SAT score: 850-1000. ACT composite: 18-22.

Selective (the majority of applicants are in the top 25%)

SAT scores: 950-1100. ACT composite: 20-25.

Highly Selective (the majority of applicants are in the top 10%)

SAT scores: 1100-1300. ACT composite: 26-29 (Shields, 1986, p 41-42)

Missouri Valley College falls in the Liberal category of admissions selectivity. Established criteria from the Admissions Office for evaluation include:

1. 18 ACT score / 840 SAT composite.

2. Rank in the top half of their class.
3. 2.0 High School Grade Point Average.

The Cooperative Institutional Research Program

The Fall of 1991 marked the first time since 1978 that Missouri Valley College has participated in the Cooperative Institutional Research Program conducted by Alexander W. Astin, The Higher Education Research Institute, and the University of California at Los Angeles. Patterns of college choice and characteristics of entering students are indicated by data gathered from surveys of entering freshmen. Comparative data are provided for (1) Four-year, Protestant, low selectivity colleges, and (2) Four-year Protestant colleges. The college is still assessing how best to use the data gathered from first-time, full-time students. Although some caution must be used in analyzing the material in the surveys, some important findings and fairly consistent patterns may help to explain the characteristics of Missouri Valley College that are influential in college choice. Of particular interest will be some of the characteristics of the students and their families that are revealed in the results.

Elements of Higher Education

Higher education has two basic components: public and independent. Public institutions receive part of their operating revenue in the form of tax support from the state governments. Private institutions on the other hand are

tuition driven, and rely on support from alumni, grants, and planned giving bequests.

It is the nation's independent institutions that have been particularly devoted to the liberal arts and the humanities. And Missouri has been fortunate to have many such institutions within the state, providing a wide variety of programs.

The virtues of public institutions are many, but the most significant are broad access and low price. This is not without a cost however, as state funds have been stretched to the limit and constituents have forced state governments to be more fiscally responsible. This has caused the public institutions to increase tuition to offset the shortfalls and somewhat closed the gap in price between public and private institutions.

More than 3,000 colleges and universities operate in the United States, according to the American Council on Education. Size varies from very small to large, multi-campus universities. The variety is impressive, and they are competing for a declining number of high school graduates (Rowh, 1995, p 57). At the same time, more and more older, non-traditional students are returning to school to improve their skills or change careers and prepare themselves for information and service industries (Aslanian, 1991, p 59).

The two systems of higher education are complementary. Neither alone is able to meet the needs or expectations of society. But, together they form an educational enterprise which is rightly the envy of the world. Of course, it has its blemishes, but by and large, it is a marvelous enterprise. Our dual system has maintained a rich diversity that provides both for broad access and academic

excellence. It has enabled us as a nation to move closer than ever before, and far closer than any other nation on Earth, to providing appropriate higher education for every citizen who seeks it and is capable of benefiting from it (Rhodes, 1983, I-9).

It is more important than ever before that both sectors of higher education work together to maintain both access and choice to all students. Equal opportunity must be encouraged and nurtured. And the institutional diversity and distinctiveness must be maintained to meet the different needs of all people. It is important that a college stand for something more substantial than a requisite amount of hours spent sitting in a class (Rhodes, 1983, I-11).

The tuition gap that exists between public and private institutions is particularly of note as we analyze the factors that have caused students to select Missouri Valley College. Evidence from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program surveys indicates that students enrolled because of the financial assistance offered more than the social or academic reputation of the school. A much higher than average number of students receive a Pell Grant, Workstudy, or Stafford Loan than at similar colleges (Cooperative Institutional Research Program surveys 1991-1995).

Recent Trends of College Choice at Missouri Valley College

One particular aspect stands out in the history of Missouri Valley College- the mission has been to provide an educational opportunity for a student body which includes a significant number of students that society would classify as high-

risk. This has been true from the very outset as indicated by the need and availability of the Academy for pre-college preparation and support for students not quite ready for the disciplines of college routines.

The diversity of the student body is evidenced by the mix of different ethnic and economic backgrounds and range of age of students. Freshman survey results from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program since 1991 reveal that over 40% of the freshman are the first members of their immediate family to attend college. Over one-third of the freshmen come from single parent families, over one-third come from families with less than \$25,000 annual income, and approximately 18% are minority students (Gass, 1996, p 1).

The willingness of Missouri Valley College to offer opportunity to students who may not be the most academically challenged or financially well suited may explain why the financial considerations rank higher than academic programs in college choice involving the college. As literature from the college Admissions Department states-

We Offer You The Opportunity...

- *To afford a private liberal arts education
- *To challenge your potential- intellectual, social, physical, spiritual
- *To benefit from individual counsel for career planning
- *To succeed and be a leader

In 1993, Missouri Valley College initiated a new approach to recruiting that involves all students and the faculty as well. The entrepreneurial Sales Program believes that teachers must sell their students on the value of an education as entrepreneurs must sell their concepts prior to selling their products. The Sales

Program has had a tremendous impact on new student recruitment. Over the past three years, the students have made over 15,000 new student contacts, which has been followed up by 4,000 calls by faculty on behalf of their respective fields (Gass, 1996, p 1).

While the financial aid benefits of this approach are obvious, there is an intrinsic value that accompanies these personal approaches to students who are not highly sought after by many academic institutions. In effect, Missouri Valley College is saying, "We Believe In You", and are willing to help you further your education. This is clearly printed on folders that contain information about enrollment at the college.

Financial Aid

Financial aid is available to all qualified students at Missouri Valley College and approximately 95% of the students receive financial aid in one form or another. Financial aid may be met through a combination of state, federal, and institutional aid. Institutional aid is offered in several areas.

To be eligible for financial aid, a student must first be admitted to the college. All students receiving federal or state-based program support must file the Application for Federal Student Aid. After filing this, students will receive a Student Aid Report which outlines the extent of financial aid available. From this and family tax records verifying annual income, the college can determine the financial aid package for each individual.

Student Aid

Student Aid at Missouri Valley College averaged \$5,202 for the 1995-1996 academic year, which covered about 36% of the average total tuition of \$14,550. For the 1996-1997 academic year, in an article titled "Cut College Costs in Half-Or More", college costs are up another 6.5%, to an average of \$10,333 at private schools and \$2,780 at public schools, according to Money magazine (1995).

The General Accounting Office said in a report requested by 23 members of Congress that college tuition jumped on average 234% between the 1980-1981 and 1994-1995 school years. That compared with an 82% increase in median household income over the same period and a 74% increase in the Labor Department's Consumers Price Index. Two factors were at work, the report said: rising expenditures by schools and an increasing reliance on tuition to pay for them as support from state governments declined (Kansas City Star, 1996).

To cut college cost a little more, Money magazine also suggested that students can, depending on the college, trim as much as 40% off the cost of a four-year degree by taking college courses while in high school, scoring well on advanced placement exams or spending a year or two in a well regarded community college (Insert, Democrat News, 1996).

A program providing college credit for area high school students has been initiated and is proving to be very successful for the college as well as students in the general vicinity of Missouri Valley College who are able to take advantage of the program.

Student aid may come from several sources-

Federal Pell Grants- the Pell Program provides an outright federal grant to students whose family contributions cannot equal total college expenses. The Pell Grant is made available to students who demonstrate a proven need through the Application for Federal Student Aid.

Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (SEOG)- Supplemental grants are offered to exceptionally needy students who receive a Pell Grant. The grant is designed to assist students with financial need that cannot be met through other means.

Missouri Student Grants- This state grant program is provided to students who can prove financial need.

Subsidized Stafford Loans- The Federal government guarantees loans from \$2,625 to \$5,500 for eligible students per year. These loans are made by private lending institutions and interest is subsidized by the federal government. There are also Unsubsidized Stafford Loans, which are not need-based, and the student pays the interest while in school.

Federal Parent Loans To Undergraduate Students (FPLUS)- Parents may borrow for dependent undergraduates in the amount of cost of education, less financial aid.

Federal Perkins Loans- These are federally funded loans based on demonstration of financial need. They are low interest loans, which students are not required to pay back until after graduation or withdrawal.

“Work and Learn”- Full-time students are able to defray a portion of the costs of their education by participating in work-study programs. Compensation is generally credited against the student’s account.

Scholarships- A variety of scholarships are awarded to students who have excelled in fields of study, community activities, or athletic competition, but continuing in the activity is not necessarily required to maintain the scholarship.

Veteran Benefits- Veterans can receive assistance with educational expenses through the G.I. Bill (1995-1996 Missouri Valley College Catalog).

Just how serious Missouri Valley College is to provide financial aid may be found in some of the admission material. An insert in the Marshall Democrat News, July 1996, reads as follows:

“For 107 years Missouri Valley College has provided opportunities for students who would not otherwise have access to higher education. Missouri Valley believes that all individuals should realize their full potential and that education is the key to a successful future.

More importantly, the college will assist the students in every step of the admission process. Once a student is accepted, the financial aid office will work diligently to make Missouri Valley affordable. The college will not turn students away because of financial limitations.

Missouri Valley has been nationally recognized for its ‘deep pockets’ and its aggressive program of institutional scholarship.” (Missouri Valley College Admissions Department, 1996).

Results from the Cooperative Institutional Research Programs Freshman surveys support the role of financial considerations in college choice among students who select Missouri Valley College. For 1995, from a respondent base of 337, 70% said that financial aid offered was important in selecting Missouri Valley College. The average for similar, private, Protestant colleges was 53% (Cooperative Institutional Research Program surveys, 1991-95). At least for some students, Missouri Valley College may have help answering the financial aid question.

Matching Academics with Athletics

The college selection process for the student-athlete should attempt to accomplish two objectives: (1) choose the school that best meets his personal and academic needs and (2) connect his athletic skills to the top choices.

Five factors have been identified (DiSalvo and DiGeronimo, 1993, p27-38) that should be considered in the college search for a student-athlete.

- 1) Academic Suitability- Academics should be the first consideration in choosing a college. Objectivity is required to match individual academic strengths and weaknesses with a specific institution. Possible fields of study are important considerations, especially if the student is undecided on a major. There should be some area of special interest and classes related to that field of study.
- 2) Cost- The 1990's are difficult times that have witnessed soaring costs and more competition for financial aid awards. This factor may limit which schools are considered for enrollment.

3) Location- The distance consideration is an important one for student-athletes. Greater distances make it difficult for family to see the student-athlete perform, as well as increasing the costs of travel to and from home. Otherwise the location factor is much the same as for the non-athlete student.

4) Size- The size of the institution can have a dramatic effect on the learning environment. Small colleges tend to give students more personalized attention, although limited social activities are a trade-off. Large universities provide a more diverse student body and an increase in social activities, but personal attention is usually sacrificed.

5) Athletic Programs- After the academic considerations and preferences in costs, location and size have been addressed, the student-athlete should have a clearer picture of where he will be able to live and excel as a student regardless of athletic standing. This should be the time to add athletic considerations to the college selection process. Specific sports and level of competition depend on the specific individual.

The student-athlete hoping to compete at the intercollegiate level of sports is usually motivated by one or more of the following reasons:

- 1- To enhance college admission opportunities
- 2- To gain an athletic scholarship.
- 3- To compete in a particular sport.
- 4- To make it in the professional level. (Disalvo & DiGeronimo, 1993, p36)

Results from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program Freshman Surveys indicate that a significantly higher number of students were recruited by

the athletic department at Missouri Valley College than the average for similar colleges. From a respondent base of 336 first-time students in Fall 1995, 58% were recruited by the athletic department. The average for similar private, Protestant colleges was 14% (Cooperative Institutional Research Program surveys, 1991-95).

Missouri Valley College has a long and lofty tradition of outstanding athletic teams and producing excellent coaches. Historically, the programs have developed strong character and enhanced the academic programs. While scholarships may be awarded for athletic participation, they are need-based and continuing in the sport is not required to maintain the scholarship. There are no scholarships awarded that provide full tuition based on athletics, such as there are at larger institutions, commonly called "free rides".

For many years the athletic program involved the traditional sports of football, basketball, baseball and track and field. During the 1970's women's competitive athletic programs were initiated, including the sports of volleyball, basketball, and soccer. And recently the sports of wrestling and rodeo have been added. To attest to the success of college athletics, the 1995 wrestling team placed first in the Division II national competition of the National Intercollegiate Athletic Association and the 1995 rodeo team sent three members to the National College Rodeo Finals in Missoula, Montana. One member of the 1995 football team was signed by the New York Giants professional football team (Missouri Valley College Development Office, 1996).

Majors and Degrees

Missouri Valley College awards Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees with majors in accounting, actuarial science, alcohol and drug studies, art, biology, business administration (agri-business, finance, management and marketing), computer science, criminal justice, economics, elementary education, English, history, human service agency management, mass communications (journalism, radio and TV), mathematics, philosophy/religion, physical education, political science, psychology, recreation administration, sociology, and speech communications and theater. In addition, the college offers Bachelor of Science degree programs leading to teacher certification in secondary education (English, math, social studies and speech-theater), special education and early childhood education.

The Associate of Arts degree is offered in small business administration. Preprofessional courses are available in dentistry, engineering, law, medicine, pharmacy, theology and veterinary medicine.

Academic majors are divided among six divisions, the largest being business and education. Once again a point can be made to the original founding of the college by the Presbyterian Church. The mission was to train leaders and teachers for the church, not that far removed from preparing educators for all levels of education today. Teachers and coaches from Missouri Valley College are fulfilling similar missions today all over the country.

Likewise, business majors receive training for a broad range of situations in the business world. From owning a business to accounting, from agriculture to economics, the grouping of these majors emphasize their close relationship, and encourages double majors or additional concentrations within a chosen area.

Missouri Valley College is the birthplace of American Humanics. Humanics is the study of human relations, as applied to successful group leadership. The foremost interest of this foundation is in youth leadership. Its entire program is directed toward producing trained, capable, and inspired leadership for America's youth programs. Today there are over 25 million youth served by twelve major national youth agencies. More than 4 million adult volunteers work to make these programs a success. Over 30,000 full-time staff members oversee operations and have careers that have a difference- a career with a purpose in the human services agency management field.

Faculty

Missouri Valley College has been fortunate to have a dedicated faculty. Faculty members also serve as advisors to students in their major fields as well as working closely with them to achieve success in their academic programs. The small campus size and enrollment allow close interpersonal communications. Approximately 60% of the faculty members have earned a doctorate or the highest degree in their field.

There has been some indication of lack of support from the administration and little input from faculty in decision-making which have effected some turnover

in faculty members. Much is demanded of faculty- in addition to teaching and advisor roles, many are expected to recruit new students as well.

Conclusions

Selecting the right college or university is one of the most important decisions to be made with respect to getting a college degree. There are literally thousands of institutions of higher learning from which to choose- from large universities to small junior colleges.

Selecting the right institution is critical because success depends on how well the student is matched to the particular college or university.

The college choice process is a complex one because there are so many variables involved. The students themselves come from all types of social, cultural and economic backgrounds. They differ widely in ability, motivation, attitudes toward college, and their individual goals vary widely as well.

With such great variety in both colleges and students, some colleges must be better suited than others for individual students. The college selection process requires a person to ask some important questions of themselves in relation to their own capabilities and limitations.

After a student has made the decision to attend college the college choice process begins. Again, questions must be asked in regard to academic reputation, specific programs of study, faculty, facilities, costs and the character and climate of the region and surroundings of different colleges being considered.

Information regarding colleges and programs of study are found in many books and directories, and are readily available through libraries and guidance counselors. After some possible choices are identified, it would seem to be important to visit in person those institutions before making a decision.

Although the choice of a college is an important one, in many cases the choice is poorly made. Frequently it is made without considering all available alternatives or else is made on the basis of incorrect or incomplete information.

Evidence supports the fact that college choice should reflect a field of study of interest, strength of specific programs, reputation, opportunity for independent study, and social life. In addition, college choice should be related to an individual's goals and career plans.

Surveys conducted since 1991 at Missouri Valley College indicate that factors other than academics and fields of study are major determinants influencing choice of the college. Financial aid packages offered, athletic programs, opportunity not found elsewhere, and location have been identified as being most important to students in selecting the college. Suggestive patterns begin to emerge that Missouri Valley College is selected on the basis of factors other than academics or educational program quality.

The purpose of this study was to survey the freshman class for school year 1996-1997 to determine reasons noted as very important in selecting Missouri Valley College. Previous surveys have been conducted since 1991 by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program pioneered by Alexander W. Austin at the University of California-Los Angeles.



Other approaches to studying college choice have been developed by Manski and Wise (1983), which are based on self-reported factors from individual respondents, in this case college freshmen.

Some limitations must be acknowledged, and by surveying only the freshmen who enroll, an important group remains outside the reach of the survey—most notably the accepted applicants who did not enroll. The information that may be gathered from this group may be equally important in determining reasons that caused some students not to enroll.

Although the problem of matching students with colleges is a complex one, most people agree that students will be better off in institutions where they are most likely to succeed. It is in the best interest of the institution to understand the motivations and factors that have caused students to enroll if they are to best serve their needs.

That there is a place for an institution like Missouri Valley College, willing to offer opportunity to all, is a lofty claim worthy of respect. If the institution is in fact serious about the individuals and their success may require critical and special attention to support such a claim.

CHAPTER THREE

Introduction

The purpose of this project/thesis was to determine which college characteristics are the most influential to students who select Missouri Valley College. The project involved designing a survey, the instrument by which the freshman class for fall 1996-97 would be evaluated. After the survey was administered, the results were tabulated for statistical analysis.

This chapter includes an overview of the project. It begins with a restatement of the hypotheses and a description of the location where the project took place. Results of the survey are included in several tables in this section. This is followed by an analysis of the data that was obtained. Then there is a discussion of the results relating to the hypotheses.

Project Review

Based on an analysis of recent trends in enrollment at Missouri Valley College, it appeared to be important to determine the college characteristics that were the most influential in the choice of the college by students.

Research would indicate the decisions regarding choice of college are based on educational considerations related to the pursuits and goals of each individual. Survey results compiled since 1991 at Missouri Valley College indicate that there are other factors that are responsible for students selecting the college (Cooperative Institutional Research Program surveys, 1991-95). This previously

published material and personal interest of the author led to the idea to research this topic. As a result, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- I. Most students select Missouri Valley College because of financial aid packages made available to them.
- II. Most students select Missouri Valley College because of participation in intercollegiate athletic programs.
- III. Most students who select Missouri Valley College will come from a geographic region that is within a 500 mile radius of the college location, Marshall, Missouri.
- IV. Most students will select Missouri Valley College because the college provides an opportunity not found elsewhere for them.

Project Setting

The project took place in Marshall, Missouri, a small, agricultural town located in the north-central part of the state. Missouri Valley College was founded in Marshall in 1889. It is a private, liberal arts college, related to the Presbyterian Church. The location was originally selected because of transportation and economic advantages. Today, the economic base is made up of agriculture, food processing, retail trade and health care.

Project Implementation

The project involved development, administration, and evaluation of a survey to the freshman class for the school year 1996-97 to determine the factors influencing their decisions to enroll at Missouri Valley College.

The survey format sought to determine the age, sex, and ethnic origins of the respondents to better understand the demographic background of the group. Respondents were also asked to indicate which considerations were important to them in selecting Missouri Valley College. From the list of potential factors that might be relevant to the selection process, the respondents were asked to indicate which ones were important considerations to them. This self-reported information explicitly acknowledged the possibility of individual differences.

Permission to conduct the survey was granted by the college President, Dr. J. Kenneth Bryant. The survey was administered by Christine Bradley, Director of the Campus Life Office, in freshman orientation classes during registration procedures, in September, 1996.

Sample Description

After the survey had been administered there were 421 valid respondents. A detailed listing of demographic characteristics is presented in Tables 3.10 and 3.11, Tables of Participants.

Male students outnumbered female students almost two to one, as 68.6% were male and 31.4% were female. Respondents were asked to specify their age on the survey. Most were in the age brackets that would be appropriate for

traditional college entrance. There were no significant numbers that indicate large numbers of older students, or non-traditional freshman.

Concept

Missouri Valley College is a small, private, liberal arts college located in Marshall, Missouri. Founded in 1889, the college has a long tradition of providing students with the opportunity to receive an education. The problems Missouri Valley College faces today are not isolated or unique. Colleges and universities today are competing for a declining number of traditional students and face rising costs at the same time. Private institutions are not alone in these struggles for survival. Public institutions have lost tax support from state governments and been forced to seek funding elsewhere.

There must surely be some characteristics or reasons that attract students to each college or university. The researcher has had a personal interest in this particular college since earning an undergraduate degree there in 1979. Since that time the college has faced its share of problems, both internal and the ongoing challenge of recruitment.

It is important to understand the reasons or characteristics of the college that are important to prospective students if the institution is to achieve a successful retention rate and provide an education of value to those who choose to go there.

Previously published results from surveys conducted by Alexander W. Astin and The Higher Education Research Institute at Los Angeles revealed some

interesting trends among freshman enrolling at Missouri Valley College (Cooperative Institutional Research Program surveys, 1991-95). The fall of 1991 marked the first time since 1978 that Missouri Valley College participated in the Cooperative Institutional Research Program.

Based on personal interest and the data from these surveys, a study of the freshman class for fall 1996-97 was proposed to try and determine what college characteristics influenced students who selected Missouri Valley College. In order to accomplish this a survey would have to be prepared, administered and tabulated.

Because a study of this nature involved surveying incoming students, it was necessary to receive permission to conduct the study. Permission was granted by the President of the college, Dr. J. Kenneth Bryant. The survey did not require names or identification of individuals.

After receiving permission, a suitable questionnaire was developed. Since the study sample was rather unique, a simple format was designed that would give a general idea about the demographics of the group. This required participants to self-evaluate important considerations from a list of factors relevant to the college selection process.

These considerations were then arranged in clusters of relevant similarities. Five clusters were organized as follows-

1. Financial aid packages.
2. Participate in athletic programs.
3. Opportunity not found elsewhere.

4. Academics.
5. Other options.

These response clusters and the percentage of total responses are shown in Table 3.12, Table 3.13, and graphically in Table 3.15.

Analysis of Results

Appropriate statistical analysis was performed on the data for the total sample of males and females. Because most of the data was converted to nominal data, indicating frequencies, the Chi-square was used to test the results for hypotheses I, II, and IV. The Chi-square is used when data is nominal and independent. In all instances the .05 level of significance was used. (Note: Interpretation of chi-square- the chi-square tells us whether the frequency observed differs greatly from that expected.)

The data collected for hypothesis III was raw data appropriate for graphic representation and interpretation.

Four major hypotheses were developed for this study.

Hypothesis I, which stated: most students will select Missouri Valley College because of financial aid packages made available to them.

The cluster for this hypothesis consisted of the following considerations (1) was offered financial aid and (2) low tuition. Of the responses, 24.8% indicated that these were important considerations for selection of Missouri Valley College.

Table 3.1 Calculation of X^2
(Using data from Table 3.12)

Chi-square-	$fe = \frac{(284+98)}{2} = 191$			
	Financial aid packages		Opportunity not found elsewhere	
fo	284		98	
fe	191		191	
fo-fe	93		-93	
$(fo-fe)^2$	8649		8649	
$\frac{(fo-fe)^2}{fe}$	45.28	+	45.28	= 90.56

The df is based on the categories or columns.

$$df = k-1=2-1=1$$

The obtained chi-square is 90.56.

The X^2 critical value for df1 is 3.86.

Because 90.56 is greater than 3.84, the null hypothesis is rejected.

There is a significant difference.

Hypothesis I was supported.

Table 3.2 Calculation of X^2
(Using data from Table 3.12)

	$fe = \frac{(284+120)}{2} = 202$			
	Financial aid packages		Academics	
fo	284		120	
fe	202		202	
fo-fe	82		-82	
$(fo-fe)^2$	6724		6724	
$\frac{(fo-fe)^2}{fe}$	33.29	+	33.29	= 66.58

The obtained value for chi-square is 66.58.

The X^2 critical value for df1 is 3.84.

Because 66.58 is greater than 3.84, the null hypothesis is rejected.

There is a significant difference.

Hypothesis I was supported.

Table 3.3 Calculation of X^2
(Using data from Table 3.12)

$fe = \frac{(284+436)}{2} = 360$			
	Financial aid packages	Participate in intercollegiate athletic programs	
fo	284	436	
fe	360	360	
fo-fe	-76	76	
$(fo-fe)^2$	5776	5776	
$\frac{(fo-fe)^2}{fe}$	16.04	16.04	= 32.08

The obtained value for chi-square is 32.08.

The X^2 critical value for df1 is 3.84.

Because 32.08 is greater than 3.84, the null hypothesis is rejected.

There is a significant difference.

Hypothesis I was supported.

Table 3.4 Calculation of X^2
(Using data from Table 3.12)

$fe = \frac{(284+205)}{2} = 244.5$			
	Financial aid packages	Other options	
fo	284	205	
fe	244.5	244.5	
fo-fe	39.5	-39.5	
$(fo-fe)^2$	1560.25	1560.25	
$\frac{(fo-fe)^2}{fe}$	6.38	6.38	= 12.76

The obtained value for chi-square is 12.76.

The X^2 critical value for df1 is 3.84.

Because 12.76 is greater 3.84, the null hypothesis is rejected.

There is a significant difference.

Hypothesis I was supported.

Hypothesis II, which stated: most students will select Missouri Valley

College because of participation in intercollegiate athletic programs.

The cluster of considerations for Hypothesis II consisted of 1) recruited by athletic department 2) relatives wanted me to go 3) friend suggested attending 4) advice of high school counselor and 5) recruited by college admissions. The cluster shared the similarity of direct recruitment or encouragement from an outside source to select the college. Of the responses, 38% indicated that these were important considerations in selecting Missouri Valley College.

Table 3.5 Calculations of X^2
(Using data from Table 3.12)

Chi-square-	$fe = \frac{(436+98)}{2} = 267$	
	Participation in intercollegiate athletic programs	Opportunity not found elsewhere
fo	436	98
fe	267	267
fo-fe	169	-169
$(fo-fe)^2$	28561	28561
$\frac{(fo-fe)^2}{fe}$	106.97	+ 106.97 = 213.94

The obtained value for chi-square is 213.94.

The X^2 critical value for df1 is 3.84.

Because 213.94 is greater than 3.84, the null hypothesis is rejected.

There is a significant difference.

Hypothesis II was supported.

Table 3.6 Calculation of X^2
(Using data from Table 3.12)

$f_e = \frac{(436+120)}{2} = 278$		
	Participation in intercollegiate athletic programs	Academics
f_o	436	120
f_e	278	278
$f_o - f_e$	158	-158
$(f_o - f_e)^2$	24964	24964
$\frac{(f_o - f_e)^2}{f_e}$	89.8	+ 89.8 = 179.60

The obtained value for chi-square is 179.60.

The X^2 critical value for $df=1$ is 3.84.

Because 179.60 is greater than 3.84, the null hypothesis is rejected.

There is a significant difference.

Hypothesis II was supported.

Table 3.7 Calculations of X^2
(Using data from Table 3.12)

$f_e = \frac{(436+205)}{2} = 320.5$		
	Participation in intercollegiate athletic programs	Other options
f_o	436	205
f_e	320.5	320.5
$f_o - f_e$	115.5	-115.5
$(f_o - f_e)^2$	13340.25	13340.25
$\frac{(f_o - f_e)^2}{f_e}$	41.62	+ 41.62 = 83.24

The obtained value for chi-square is 83.24.

The X^2 critical value for $df=1$ is 3.84.

Because 83.24 is greater than 3.84, the null hypothesis is rejected.

There is a significant difference.

Hypothesis II was supported.

Table 3.8 Calculation of X^2
(Using data from Table 3.12)

$fe = \frac{(436+284)}{2} = 360$		
	Participation in intercollegiate athletic programs	Financial aid packages
fo	436	284
fe	360	360
fo-fe	76	-76
$(fo-fe)^2$	5776	5776
$\frac{(fo-fe)^2}{fe}$	16.04	+ 16.04 = 32.08

The obtained value for chi-square is 32.08.

The X^2 critical value for df1 is 3.84.

Because 32.08 is greater than 3.84, the null hypothesis is rejected.

There is a significant difference.

Hypothesis II was supported.

Hypothesis III, which stated: most students who select Missouri Valley College will come from a geographic region that is within a 500 mile radius of Marshall, Missouri, home of the college.

Students were asked to indicate the distance from their hometowns to Marshall, Missouri. Table 3.9, Distance from hometown, indicates that 70.8% of the respondent base live within 500 miles of Marshall. The remaining 29.2% live over 500 miles away or come from foreign countries.

Table 3.9 Distance from hometown
(Using data from Table 3.16)

Distance from home in miles	all students	% of total	
5 or less	34	8.1	
6-25	23	5.5	
26-50	17	4.0	
51-100	68	16.1	
101-500	156	37.1	70.8%
over 500	118	28.0	29.2%
Foreign country	5	1.2	
Total	421	100.0	

As can be seen from the table, over 70.8% of the total sample of students reside within 500 miles of the college. Hypothesis III was supported.

Hypothesis IV, which stated: most students will select Missouri Valley College because the college provides opportunity not found elsewhere for them.

The cluster for this hypothesis consisted of these considerations- 1) wanted to live near home 2) no other option for local college and 3) not accepted anywhere else. Only 8.6% of the responses indicated these were important considerations for selecting Missouri Valley College.

Table 3.10 Calculations of X^2
(Using data from Table 3.12)

Chi-square-	$fe = \frac{(98+120)}{2} = 109$	
	Opportunity not found elsewhere	Academics
fo	98	120
fe	109	109
fo-fe	-11	11
$(fo-fe)^2$	121	121
$\frac{(fo-fe)^2}{fe}$	1.11	+ 1.11 = 2.22

The obtained value for chi-square is 2.22.
The X^2 critical value for df1 is 3.84.
Because 2.22 is less than 3.84, the null hypothesis is accepted.
There is not a significant difference.
Hypothesis IV was not supported.

Discussion of Results

I. Most students will select Missouri Valley College because of financial aid packages made available to them.

This hypothesis was confirmed.

Missouri Valley College has been able to reach record enrollment levels in recent years, after surpassing the 1000 student number in the 1988-89 school year. This is surprising at a time when small, private liberal arts colleges are struggling for survival. That there may be some explanation for this recent trend formed the basis for this study.

Being a private institution, Missouri Valley College is tuition-driven, and at the same time tuition tends to be higher than state-supported institutions. What the Admissions Department has attempted to do to set the college apart is to assist students in finding and distributing scholarships and grant money as much as possible. It has been successful to the point that Money magazine recognized it as one of the best schools in the country in 1995 for its scholarship programs.

Two factors of the college selection process are directly related to financial aid- family income level and the cost and aid of college. Because of the large expenditure necessary, family income level is an important individual difference aspect. Cost and aid includes tuition, room and board, and distance to an alternate

college. Aid, in the case of Missouri Valley College, may enhance the desirability of the college to some students.

The willingness of the college to offer financial aid to students who may not be the most academically challenged or financially well suited may explain why financial considerations rank higher than academic factors.

Scholarship aid is necessary because of the particular demographics of the students that Missouri Valley is attracting. Research from surveys conducted by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, and the University of California in Los Angeles have helped provide a better understanding of the backgrounds of the students who enroll (Cooperative Institutional Research Program surveys, 1991-95). A significant number of the student body would fall in the high risk category for one reason or another. Data derived from freshman surveys indicate a high percentage of students are the first generation of their immediate families to attend college. As many as one-third may come from single parent families and families with less than \$25,000 annual income (Gass, 1996, p1). As a result of these factors, approximately 95% of the student body receive at least some kind of financial aid.

Financial aid packages are calculated individually and take in many considerations. Again, the Cooperative Institutional Research Program surveys show a much higher than average number of students receive a Pell Grant, work-study, or Stafford loans than at similar colleges (Cooperative Institutional Research Program surveys, 1991-95). Some of the scholarship package is

considered grant, some is written off as work-study, and some is in the form of loans, payable after graduation.

Respondents were asked if they knew the value of their financial aid packages prior to enrolling. Of the respondents, 78.6% indicated that they knew the value of their financial aid packages. Some previous research would indicate that many students make college choices without this information; it apparently is a strong consideration at Missouri Valley College.

The college attempts to help students in every step of the admissions process, and works to help them qualify for the maximum loan amounts possible. Monetary considerations may be the most significant factor in a student's college selection process if Missouri Valley College is included in the selection set.

II. Most students will select Missouri Valley College because of participation in intercollegiate athletic programs.

This hypothesis was confirmed.

Missouri Valley College has a long and rich history of successful athletic teams as well as coaches who made significant influences on many student-athletes. Today, both men and women compete in sports including football, basketball, track and field, cross-country, softball, volleyball, baseball, wrestling, rodeo and soccer. Many students select Missouri Valley College because of athletic participation.

There is an important distinction between athletic programs at small schools such as this, and large universities with revenue-producing programs.

Missouri Valley College does not offer a scholarship that is based strictly on athletic skills as is found at larger schools. There may be some merit-based grants because of special talent or attributes, but most of the scholarship package is need-based and not contingent on participation in athletics.

Many of the students who select Missouri Valley College might not have the opportunity to participate at a larger school with a highly competitive program. And many who come to Missouri Valley College for athletic intentions wind up dropping the sports, but continue studies toward completion of a degree.

Students were asked to indicate on the survey if they intended to participate on an athletic team, and if so, which one. Of the respondents, 87% of the male and 43% of the female freshman specified athletic teams that they intended to participate on; a total of 73.6 %. Because of the variety of teams and the broad opportunity to participate, the coaching staffs have in effect become the admissions team for the school. (Missouri Valley College Admissions, 1996). This percentage is significantly higher than normal for a school of this size.

Student-athletes who select Missouri Valley College thus are motivated by one or more of the previously cited reasons-

- 1- To enhance college admissions opportunities
- 2- To gain an athletic scholarship
- 3- To compete in a particular sport
- 4- To make it in the professional level

It is widely accepted that small colleges such as Missouri Valley College do not produce large numbers of professional-level athletes. As was previously noted,

scholarships are not granted strictly on the basis of athletics. Therefore students must be either 1) trying to enhance college admission opportunities, or 2) hoping to compete in a particular sport. Either of these are legitimate motivations, but should only be a part of the college selection process.

III. Most students who select Missouri Valley College will come from a geographic region that is within a 500 mile radius of the college location, Marshall, Missouri.

This hypothesis was confirmed.

Missouri Valley College has focused its recruiting efforts in the geographic area surrounding Missouri for several reasons. It allows for a smaller admissions staff, based on campus; recruiting expenses can be kept manageable, and there appears to be a consistent attraction to students for the educational experience that Missouri Valley College offers.

By having the admissions staff on campus it is possible to market the college through-out the Mid-west, which is largely agricultural. Over half of the student body traditionally is from within the state. The 500 mile radius includes the tier of states that border Missouri and account for over 70% of the students. The rest of the student body represents low concentrations in the rest of the United States. There are several key areas that have yielded significant numbers of students because of student satisfaction and follow-up enrollments (Missouri Valley College Admissions Office, 1996).

Since 1993, a new direction in recruiting was initiated. Through the Sales Program many initial contacts are made by telephone by work-study students and admissions staff personnel. 'College and careers nights' are utilized effectively, mostly in the rural Missouri areas and St. Louis and Kansas City metropolitan areas. Missouri Valley College seeks to attract students who will benefit from the small campus size (Missouri Valley College Admissions Office, 1996).

An additional question was asked on the survey to determine how many of the students visited the campus before enrollment. Of the respondents, 73.9% indicated that they had come to the campus prior to enrolling. The logistics of this are much easier when the distance from home is not that great.

Location may also be important because of the high incidence of student-athletes. Greater distances make it difficult for family member to see the student-athlete perform, as well as the increased expense of travel to and from home. Otherwise, the location factor is the same for the non-athlete student.

IV. Most students will select Missouri Valley College because the college provides an opportunity not found elsewhere for them.

This hypothesis was not confirmed.

The respondents did not indicate that they were not accepted anywhere else significantly. Likewise, the desire to live near home or attend the only local choice for a college were not highly significant results.

Opportunity is defined in the dictionary as a "favorable chance". If one considers the significance of financial aid and participation in athletics in the

students at Missouri Valley College, it is possible that they may in fact be taking advantage of these favorable chances. And they may not look at their situations as having only one option. Apparently Missouri Valley College best suits the interests of those students who enroll.

Students who are in the college choice process form perceptions based on actual characteristics of a college and on the information they possess about the college. College attributes, both academic and non-academic are considered. Financial aid offers and athletic participation may be important enough to students that Missouri Valley College gains a preference in some students viewpoints.

There is another possibility to consider. The respondents were asked to self-evaluate the factors that were important to them. There is a risk that respondents may not know the relative importance of the factors or be able to articulate them. And it is possible that the survey was not able to allow students to indicate why they chose Missouri Valley College.

Table 3.11
Table of Participants
Raw Data Form

Participants-	Male-289	Female-132
Total respondents- 421		
Age-		
Under 19	186	92
19-21	89	25
22-23	10	5
24-25	2	1
26-30	2	5
31 and over	0	4
Ethnic Origin-		
White, non-Hispanic	212	107
Black, non-Hispanic	48	10
Am. Indian/Alaskan	10	4
Hispanic	5	2
Asian/ Pacific Island	1	3
Non-Resident Alien	1	0
Other	7	3
Will not say	5	3
Distance from hometown-		
5 miles or less	11	23
6-25 miles	12	11
26-50 miles	12	5
51-100 miles	52	16
101-500 miles	109	47
over 500 miles	90	28
Foreign country	3	2
Participation on athletic team	253	57
Football	101	0
Wrestling	36	0
Baseball	31	0
Cross-country	10	5
Basketball	56	19
Soccer	29	8
Rodeo	7	4
Track	41	16
Volleyball	0	17
Softball	0	13

This table provides demographical information about the sample group. It is in the raw data form.

Table 3.12
Table of Participants in Percentage Form

	Number of Respondents	Total Male	Female	first-time Total	full-time (%)
Students in sample	421	68.6		31.4	100.0
Age on September 1, 1996	421				
Under 19		64.4		69.7	66.0
19-21		30.7		19.0	27.0
22-23		3.5		3.8	3.6
24-25		.7		.7	.7
26-30		.7		3.8	1.7
31 and over		0.0		3.0	1.0
Ethnic Origin	421				
White, non-Hispanic		73.4		81.0	75.8
Black, non-Hispanic		16.6		7.6	13.8
Am. Indian/Alaskan		3.5		3.0	3.3
Hispanic		1.7		1.5	1.7
Asian/ Pacific Island		.3		2.3	.9
Non-Resident Alien		.3		0.0	0.2
Other		2.5		2.3	2.4
Will not say		1.7		2.3	1.9
Distance from hometown	421				
5 miles or less		3.8		17.4	8.1
6-25 miles		4.2		8.3	5.5
26-50 miles		4.2		3.8	4.0
51-100 miles		18.0		12.1	16.2
101-500 miles		37.7		35.6	37.0
over 500 miles		31.1		21.2	28.0
Foreign country		1.0		1.5	1.2
Athletic team	421	87.5		43.0	73.6
Football		39.9			
Wrestling		14.2			
Baseball		12.3			
Cross-country		4.0		9.0	
Basketball		22.1		33.3	
Soccer		11.5		14.0	
Rodeo		2.8		7.0	
Track and field		16.2		28.0	
Volleyball				30.0	
Softball				23.0	

This table provides demographical information about the sample group. Percentages are calculated separately for males and females and then as a total percentage with n=421, the number of respondents for the survey.

Table 3.13
Important Considerations For Selection
of Missouri Valley College- Raw Data Form

Participate in athletic programs	Male	Female	Total			
Recruited by athletic department	186	51	237			
Relatives wanted me to go	54	29	83			
Friend suggested attending	46	29	75			
Advice of high school counselor	12	8	20			
Recruited by college admissions	12	9	21			
	310	126	436	436		
Financial aid package						
Was offered financial aid	146	95	241			
Low Tuition	26	17	43			
	172	112	284	284		
Other options						
Size of college	95	57	152			
MVC has good reputation for social activity	31	11	42			
Religious affiliation	8	3	11			
	134	71	205	205		
Academics						
MVC has good academic reputation	42	24	66			
Graduates get good jobs	18	12	30			
Specific programs offered	14	10	24			
	74	46	120	120		
Opportunity not found elsewhere						
Wanted to live near home	36	37	73			
No other option for local college	11	8	19			
Not accepted anywhere else	5	1	6			
	52	46	98	98		
				1143		
421 Respondents	Yes		No			
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Did you know the value of your financial aid package prior to enrolling?	236	95	331	53	37	90
Did you visit the campus of Missouri Valley College before deciding to enroll?	213	98	311	76	34	110
Was the population of Marshall a positive influence in choosing Missouri Valley College?	128	73	201	161	59	220

This table provides information about the considerations which the respondents indicated as important in selecting Missouri Valley College. There were 1143 responses indicated by the 421 survey respondents.

Table 3.14
Survey Responses- Percentage Form

Participate in athletic programs	%	Male	Female	%	% of Total	
Recruited by athletic department		186	51			
Relatives wanted me to go		54	29			
Friend suggested attending		46	29			
Advice of high school counselor		12	8			
Recruited by college admissions		12	9			
	27.1	310	126	11.0	38.1%	
Financial aid package						
Was offered financial aid		146	95			
Low Tuition		26	17			
	15.0	172	112	9.8	24.8%	
Other options						
Size of college		95	57			
MVC has good reputation for social activity		31	11			
Religious affiliation		8	3			
	11.7	134	71	6.2	18.0%	
Academics						
MVC has good academic reputation		42	24			
Graduates get good jobs		18	12			
Specific programs offered		14	10			
	6.5	74	46	4.0	10.5%	
Opportunity not found elsewhere						
Wanted to live near home		36	37			
No other option for local college		11	8			
Not accepted anywhere else		5	1			
	4.6	52	46	4.0	8.6%	
100.0%						
421 Respondents						
	Yes			No		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Did you know the value of your financial aid package prior to enrolling?	81.7	72.0	78.6	18.3	28.0	21.4
Did you visit the campus of Missouri Valley College before deciding to enroll?	73.7	74.0	73.9	26.3	26.0	26.1
Was the population of Marshall a positive influence in choosing Missouri Valley College?	44.3	55.0	47.7	55.7	45.0	52.3

This table provides information about the considerations which the respondents indicated as important in selecting Missouri Valley College. There were 1143 responses indicated by the 421 survey respondents.

Response Clusters
 Table 3.15
 Percentage of Total Responses

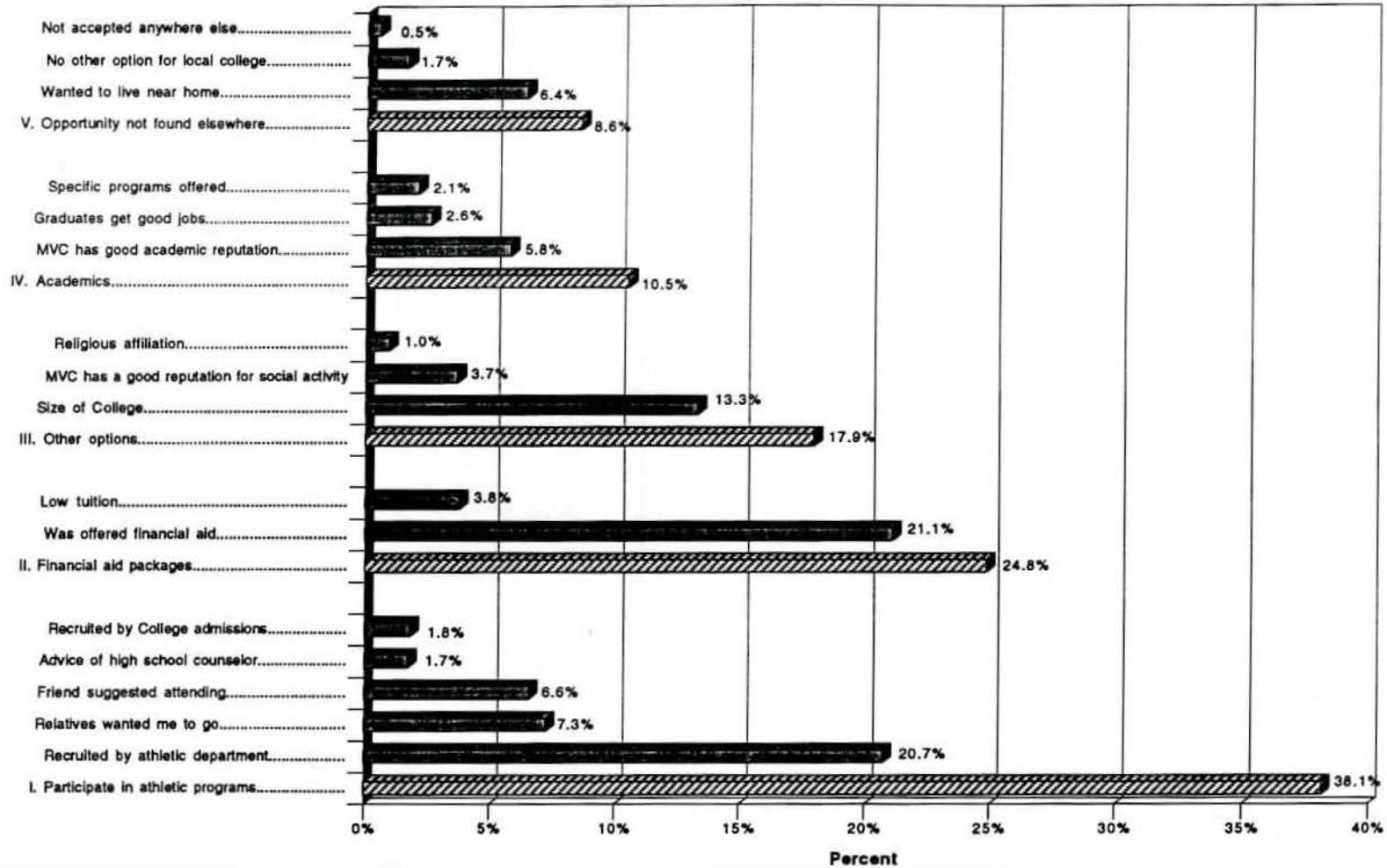


Table 3.16
Distance From Hometown

Survey Responses- 421 Grand Total

Distance from <u>home in miles</u>	% of total	Male	Female	% of total	all students	% of total	
5 or less	2.6	11	23	5.5	34	8.1	
6-25	2.8	12	11	2.6	23	5.5	
26-50	2.8	12	5	1.2	17	4.0	
51-100	12.3	52	16	3.8	68	16.1	
101-500	25.9	109	47	11.2	156	37.1	70.8%
over 500	21.4	90	28	6.7	118	28.0	29.25%
Foreign country	.7	3	2	.5	5	1.2	
Sub-totals	68.5	289	132	31.5	421	100.0	

This table represents the distance from Missouri Valley College to the students hometowns.

Chapter IV

Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

The purpose of this project/thesis was to determine which college characteristics were the most influential to students who select Missouri Valley College. The project involved designing a survey, the instrument by which the freshman class for fall 1996-97 would be evaluated. The survey was administered by the Director of Campus Life, Christine Bradley, during freshman orientation classes in registration proceedings, September, 1996. After the survey had been administered, the results were tabulated for statistical analysis.

Conclusions

I. Most students will select Missouri Valley College because of financial aid packages made available to them.

A significant percentage of survey respondents indicated that 1) they were offered financial aid or 2) they considered the tuition to be low were important considerations to them in selecting Missouri Valley College. That financial considerations are important is to be expected and rightfully so. Statistics show that most students are accepted by their first or second choice school, though, so first and foremost the academic quality and fit with a particular school should be the most important considerations when selecting a college.

The fine line between admission and financial aid is becoming even finer as schools compete for students in today's market. At a time when the cost of college tuition and fees is rising at a rate greater than the rate of inflation, this

would seem at first glance encouraging news. College selection should not be limited by cost considerations, but neither should cost be the main characteristic of a college that causes a student to enroll.

Ideally, the best choice of a college for a student is the one that is most suited to his or her plans and needs and that allows him or her to excel. Thus, the broad diversity of choice that students are faced with in college selection. In a perfect world, the selection of a college would be for all of the right reasons, and money would not be one of them. But in reality money is a very significant factor.

Because there are so many possible sources of financial assistance available, there are many steps that can be taken to make college affordable. And while the cost of an education is a real concern, the investment in higher education is an investment for a lifetime. The wise and well researched selection can return far more than the initial investment.

Financial aid is based on the concepts of access and choice. What this means is that all students, regardless of ethnic origin, gender, or financial status can choose to pursue a college education with the knowledge that financial aid is available to those who qualify- based on need.

Financial aid programs have not been able to keep pace with increasing costs. As a result colleges such as Missouri Valley College have been making up the differences out of their own pockets. In attempting to help students who demonstrate financial need, these colleges have raised tuition, and at the same time channeled significant amounts of these increases back in the form of student financial aid packages. In theory this is a noble and generous gesture. In practice

it is a poor business approach because it forces the college to defer maintenance, postpone new projects, and sometimes reduce or eliminate existing programs, faculty, staff and services.

II. Most students will select Missouri Valley College because of participation in intercollegiate athletic programs.

Student response to survey questions revealed that the highest response for important considerations in college selection was recruitment by the athletic department. The percentage of freshmen who indicated intentions to participate in athletic programs was almost 74%. These factors indicate that the athletic department has replaced the admissions department in the critical role of student recruitment.

Missouri Valley College offers student-athletes the chance to continue to participate in sports and receive a college degree. Most of the financial aid that is offered to student-athletes is need-based, not contingent upon participation in sports.

College athletics at the small college level is relatively free of the problems that can develop at the large university level. Most of the well-publicized abuses are restricted to large university football and basketball programs. At the small college level such as Missouri Valley College, most students who compete in athletics have a higher graduation rate than non-athletes and often have higher grade point averages, as has been documented at Missouri Valley College.

Some of the student-athletes have career plans that include coaching and teaching. For these students the intercollegiate athletic experience may enhance

the educational experience and provide invaluable experience for future situations in their careers. It is also commendable that athletics require an extra measure of discipline with the added time demanded for training and participation.

The point remains that the selection process should still be concerned with the same objective for the student-athlete as for the non-athlete student- that being selecting the institution that best meets the individual's academic and personal needs.

The role of location may be significant because of the higher than average number of athletes. School selection close to home makes it possible for family and friends to see the student-athlete perform. Likewise, the expense of travel back and forth is considerably less.

III. Most students who select Missouri Valley College will come from a geographic region that is within a 500 mile radius of the college location, Marshall, Missouri.

The attraction of Missouri Valley College seems to be regional as over half of the student body is from the state of Missouri alone. Perhaps this would have been a more precise question to have determined which state the students were from. That information could be obtained from student enrollment information. This distance of 500 miles includes all of the state of Missouri and roughly the first tier of states that border Missouri on all sides. Driving distance to almost all locations would be within one days travel.

There have been several cases of recruiting successes in the neighboring states of Kansas and Oklahoma which have resulted in additional students

enrolling. This can be attributed to peer influence and the satisfaction rate of the initial students.

The regional influence can best be seen in the 1996 Alumni Directory of Missouri Valley College. While there are alumni in most all of the states and several foreign countries, by far the largest concentration is in the state of Missouri. And in the county where Missouri Valley College is located, Saline County, there are over 550 alumni out of a population of about 23,500 residents.

The benefits to the college of being able to focus recruiting efforts close to home are substantial. If the type of student who can best benefit from the educational experience of Missouri Valley College can be found in sufficient numbers close to home, recruiting expenses can be kept to a minimum and the benefit of alumni in the state may help provide prospective student referrals.

As a small liberal arts college, programs are smaller in size and tend to be somewhat general in studies. It is difficult for a small school to develop a specific program that can serve as an attraction for large numbers of students. Missouri Valley College does have the distinction of being the birthplace of American Humanics, providing career-oriented education for preparation of youth group leadership. It was the first program of its type in the country, founded in 1948 by H. Roe Bartle, who was serving as president of the college at the time.

One advantage that large universities have over small colleges is the capacity to offer broader educational fields and more specialized fields of study. Limitations of size and budget preclude small colleges from such large program offerings.

IV. Most students will select Missouri Valley College because the college provides an opportunity not found elsewhere for them.

Demographic analysis of the student body of Missouri Valley College would indicate that the student body has several tendencies that are somewhat consistent for the past several years. This information has become available because of participation in the programs conducted by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, and the University of California in Los Angeles.

A significant number of students would be considered high-risk for one reason or another. Data from freshman surveys show that a high percentage of students are the first generation of their immediate family to attend college. As many as one-third may come from single parent families and families with less than \$25,000 annual income. Because of these factors, approximately 95% of the student body receive at least some kind of financial aid (Gass, 1996, p1).

Missouri Valley College also is very liberal in its admissions policies. Entrance requirements are relatively easy and access is rarely denied. While students may not recognize this as a special opportunity, schools with more stringent requirements would not consider them for admission.

Results of the survey did not show high percentages of students who were not accepted anywhere else. Whether or not they applied anywhere else is not known. Likewise, the percentages for wanting to live near home or attend the only local college were not significant. From these results it would appear that there are other characteristics of the college that influenced enrollment.

Implications

This project was an attempt to identify the characteristics of Missouri Valley College that most influenced students to enroll there. The survey which was administered asked them to indicate which considerations were important in selecting the college. It is not known how many colleges were on the selection lists of the students, or if Missouri Valley College was first or last of their selection lists.

Results of previous survey data suggested that there were several non-academic factors that were most influential to students. While this project reinforced those results, there is no data from the earlier stages of the college selection process for these students to determine that the survey accurately shows the attraction to Missouri Valley College. It is possible that students were not able to self-estimate or accurately articulate the most important factors that led them to select the college. It is also possible that the survey did not allow them to indicate exactly why they enrolled.

I. First and foremost, the college selection process is unique and different for each individual involved. A college education may not be the goal for every high school graduate, but it is for many. And a college education is expensive, even with financial aid. It takes special knowledge to get the best possible financial aid package possible.

This requires the student to know what his or her needs are in the education he seeks, what their personal finance situation is, and how to tell good

advice from bad advice on paying for college. Students need to evaluate college choices with objectivity and skepticism to make the best selection. There are often inconsistencies in the process of financial aid which can result in vastly different offers from comparatively priced institutions.

The fact that Money magazine recognized Missouri Valley College for having "deep pockets" in regard to financial aid is only the first part of the picture. If the college is writing off part of tuition in the name of assistance, that strategy cannot work forever. Perhaps a more accurate assessment could be made by finding what the average debt load of graduates is upon completion of a degree at the college. The students may be saddling themselves with the burden of long payback of student loans.

II. Obviously many students aspire to participate in intercollegiate athletics as evidenced by the responses from the survey. And athletic programs can enhance the educational experience for students. The role of coaches as recruiting staff must be recognized. If in fact, 70% of the freshmen are intending to participate in athletics, the coaching staff is responsible for most of the enrollment.

The positive influence of strong, winning athletic programs is obvious. Whether or not the attraction of athletics at Missouri Valley College continues will have to be checked in the future. But intentional or not, the role of athletics in student recruitment is not an insignificant part of admissions at the college. Mediocrity in athletics could cause the attraction to become less favorable.

III. The trend of recent years reveals that the majority of students are from the state of Missouri or very nearby. At earlier times in the history of the school there

were strong recruiting campaigns in the east. Competition among colleges there made it attractive for students to attend college elsewhere.

Today the market for the educational experience that Missouri Valley College offers appears to be close to home and recruiting is focused closer to the source. The fact that the majority of alumni are in the state is also a potential benefit for new student contacts.

If there is a downside to this situation, it would stem from the type of student that Missouri Valley College attracts. The demographics of the students that are attending show that most come from lower income families and probably end up in average income professions. These factors do not help to increase the endowment fund, when most students require financial aid and will be paying back student loans after graduation.

IV. The responses for the considerations in this category were relatively insignificant. The author expected that there would be larger numbers of students who indicated that they wanted to live near home. Also, the responses to the consideration- not accepted anywhere else were surprisingly low.

In order to better determine that Missouri Valley College is selected by students because it is an opportunity not available anywhere else, a more specific line of questioning would have to be used.

It is possible that the considerations were not able to reveal the relative importance of the respondents. But it is also possible that the respondents were correct in their self-evaluations, and Missouri Valley College was not the only option that these students have for higher education.

Recommendations

The data from this project is useful and helps to give a better idea of the factors that may be influencing students to enroll at Missouri Valley College. The most noteworthy part of this study was that academic considerations were not an important factor.

The limitations inherent with self-reported information must be acknowledged. Only some directional information is provided from such a study. More precise and sophisticated statistical instruments are required to determine, for example, if a policy change is appropriate.

The survey was administered to the entire freshman class, instead of obtaining only a sampling of the group. This tends to make the numbers very large in the statistical analysis, although it does give a complete result, not just a small percentage.

The instrument must address the hypotheses to the point if the study is to be supported or not supported. There may be an instrument that is more appropriate for this type of study, which would provide data for comparative analysis.

One other limitation that should be noted is that the respondents all selected Missouri Valley College. Perhaps a more realistic conclusion could be drawn by surveying some students who applied, but did not enroll. From this group would develop some of the factors that caused students to enroll elsewhere.

APPENDIX

Please place an (X) in each box that is appropriate.

Sex

Male	
Female	

Age

Under 19	
19-21	
22-23	
24-25	
26-30	
31 & Over	

Athletic Team

Football	
Soccer	
Volleyball	
Wrestling	
Basketball	
Rodeo	
Track	
Cross Country	
Baseball	
Softball	

Ethnic Origin

Non Resident Alien	
Black, Non Hispanic	
Am. Indian/Alaskan	
Asian/Pacific Island	
Hispanic	
White, Non-Hispanic	
Other	
Will not say	

Distance From Hometown

5 Miles or less	
6 - 25 Miles	
26 - 50 Miles	
51-100 Miles	
101-500 Miles	
over 500 Miles	
Foreign country	

Indicate important considerations for your selection of Missouri Valley College

Relatives wanted me to go	
MVC has good academic reputation	
MVC has good reputation for social activities	
Was offered financial assistance	
Low tuition	
Advice of High School Counselors	
Recruited by athletic department	
Recruited by college admissions department	
Size of college	
No other option for local college	
Specific programs offered	
Not accepted anywhere else	
Graduates get good jobs	
Religious affiliation/orientation of college	
Friend suggested attending	
Wanted to live near home	

Yes

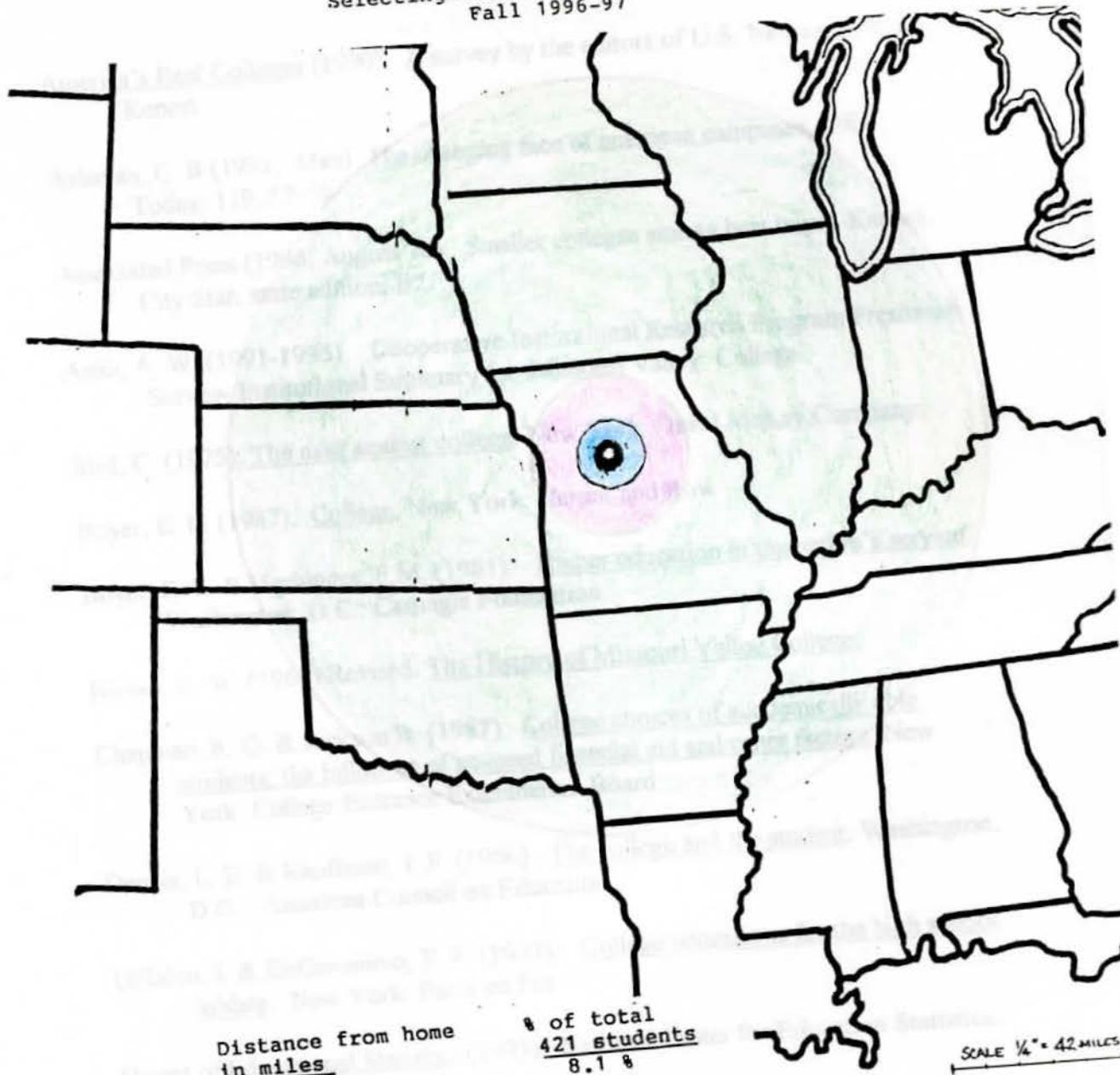
No

Did you know the value of your financial aid package prior to enrolling?

Did you visit the campus of Missouri Valley College before deciding to enroll?

Was the population of Marshall a positive influence in choosing Missouri Valley?

Figure 3.7
 Geographic Distribution of Students
 Selecting Missouri Valley College
 Fall 1996-97



Distance from home in miles	% of total 421 students
○ 5 or less	8.1 %
● 6-25	5.5 %
● 26-50	4.0 %
● 51-100	16.1 %
● 101-500	37.1 %
● over 500	28.0 %
● foreign country	1.2 %

SCALE 1/4" = 42 MILES

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