

STUDENTS' EVALUATIVE CRITERIA: DOES GENDER MAKE A DIFFERENCE WHEN SELECTING A COLLEGE?

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ABSTRACT

Evaluation of student gender differences based on the perceived financial, social, psychological, physical, and functional risks associated with college selection. Nineteen criteria associated with these risks were evaluated for significant gender differences and for their level of importance by gender in the selection process. Significant gender differences were found with financial aid, security, academics, friendly atmosphere and religious atmosphere. Although not ranked in the same order of importance, similar top ten search criteria were found for both with the exception of security and religious atmosphere for females and location and quality of professors for males. The most important criterion for females was academics; for males tuition.

INTRODUCTION

For college officials to recognize the student as a “customer” may not go far enough. Behind a great deal of consumer research and marketing strategy is the assumption that men and women differ in aspects of their consumer behavior. This assumption has led academics to study a wide range of consumer phenomena to document sex- or gender-related differences while it has led practitioners to target women and men in very different ways. Thus, while understanding the extent to students’ criteria selection agree and disagree is important, it is also important to understand when/if gender plays a determining role. Therefore, this paper analyzes gender differences between students and their college selection criteria utilizing perceived risk (i.e., functional, physical, financial risk, social, psychological, [time was excluded due to nature of variable]) as an underpinning for making their decisions.

DISCUSSION

There were five significant differences reported between female and male students with females reporting higher level means regarding academics, friendly atmosphere, financial aid, security/safety, religious atmosphere. Also noted, the mean level of importance for female students was higher than males on 17 of 19 criteria. This may possibly be due to females tending to encode more information than do males and they tend to elaborate on this information more extensively. The mean level of importance for male students ranked only athletics and the prospects for a marriage partner higher. While intuitively, this finding for the athletic criterion is sensible, it is somewhat anti-typical for the marriage prospects criterion. Also noted, four of the top five selection criteria for male and female students are the same: academics, tuition, scholarships and friendly atmosphere. The two which are different; for males the last of the top five is degrees offered, for females it is financial aid. Noting differences in the top ten selection criteria might also prove useful. Since there does seem to be differences among genders, academic officials should find this information useful when preparing promotional material or visiting with students. While school recruitment publications, from brochures to letters, have to be designed for a mass audience some gender specific targeted media/messages may increase the probability of directly addressing the needs/concerns of male and female students. Thus, the data presented in this report should be useful for educating all involved in the recruitment process as well as alumni and others.