INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions seek to attract and wield low-socioeconomic enrollment in an effort to create a diverse culture and serve societal welfare. Throughout the past half century, American postsecondary schools endeavored to achieve targeted minority goals through governmental affirmative action directives or those of their individual boards of trustees (Springer 2003). Higher education institutions seek to analyze and understand the variant attributes directing and determining high school seniors’ college decisions (Roszkowksi and Spreat 2010). The research has focused on sociological and economic lenses to understand the drivers of the students’ selection and college choices (Adams 2009). Various paradigms and filters provided frameworks to interpret and understand the students’ behavior and actions against the backdrop of financial decisions and other assistance (Lillis and Tian 2008). Significant research has examined several college choice models and their applicability as related to the sociological and financial concerns and constraints (Dixon and Martin 1991). The inclusion of research examining the private sector of higher education institutions with the backdrop of college choice models and minority enrollment was relevant to the research intent of this dissertation. The findings of the literature directed a Venn diagram tri-intersection (Figure 1) of the determinants of college choice models with minority enrollment factors and private college enrollment attributes.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the predictors of African-American enrollment at a private college. After a thorough literature review of college choice models, a set of quantitatively measured determinants were gleaned and identified for the statistical research and treatment. The set of predictors included high school grade point average, college entrance exam score(s), socio-economic status, and communications from admissions, financial aid, and student home proximity to college campus. The research examined the determinants influence on the outcome of enrollment. Three significant positive predictors for African-American enrollment at a private college were realized for the total sample. These included merit aid, socio-economic status, and GPA.
The review of literature identified the published college choice model theories and their frameworks. The Hossler and Gallagher college choice model, as the referred standard, included the three stages of predisposition, search and choice (1987). Through subsequent studies utilizing the variations of the Hossler and Gallagher model, the determinants of college choice were derived. The theories highlighted the college choice determinants of enrollment that included socio-economic status, student’s ability and achievement, parental and peer influence, along with organizational factors of high school involvement. The literature review overviewed the minority college choice attributes for enrollment. The minority determinants included parental education, financial aid information and award, the level of academic information dissemination, proximity to home, and influences of teachers and counselors. The literature review noted that the variations of the Hossler and Gallagher model, minority enrollment, and private college choice were synthesized in the research. The selected variables or predictors were those identified for quantitative treatment rather than qualitative research.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study sought to understand the predictors for African-American enrollment utilizing the identified college choice determinants gleaned from a review of the literature. The study investigated the college choice models’ determinants against an institutional recruitment database to discriminate variable differences across the African-American enrollment. Once the significant predictors of enrollment were analyzed and identified, the study evaluated the current admission policies and procedures and recommended potential opportunities to modify or adjust future recruitment cycles and data-collection venues.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The primary benefit of the study was to identify the predictors for African-American enrollment and communication of the results with a private, religious college admissions office. One of the constant recruitment goals for higher education institution admission offices included a growing, diverse campus population (Clark 2001). In that context, the results of the study’s quantitative research could be utilized to evaluate the deployment of current admission policies used to recruit African-American students. The outcome of the research could potentially benefit other private educational institutions that seek to maximize their African-American enrollment. Further study at the institution and others would investigate the adjustment of policies and their subsequent impact on matriculating minority freshmen enrollment. A successful benefit from the research results would be the realization of the growth in African-American enrollment.

DESIGN

The design of the research was observational in identifying the variables that influence or predict African-American college enrollment at a private higher education institution. The research examined a set of college choice independent variables and their effect on the dependent variable of African-American enrollment. The funnel below was a visual representation of the research treatment and prediction of African-American college enrollment at a private college institution.

PARTICIPANTS

The participants (sample) for the study were drawn from a private college institution’s recruitment database. The sample represented 40,000 prospect students for the entering fall 2009, 2010, and 2011 freshmen classes. From the total sample, the following population subsets were derived based on the enrollment status: 712 applied, 293 accepted, 110 enrolled, and only 41 identified athletes. The collected data utilized existing admission and recruitment policies and procedures for the previous three years. Thus, with the predominance of the literature review prior to 2009, the extracted data were consistent and reflective of the literature review timeline. The students were categorized as prospects, applicants, admit, and deposit within the construct of the database. The study examined the students from prospects through the recruitment cycle to deposited classification in testing the independent variables against the final dependent variable of enrollment. The sample was constrained by utilizing only one institution rather than representative sample of private colleges’ admission data.

INSTRUMENT

The data for the research was collected and extracted from Recruitment PLUS™ database for the private college institution. Recruitment PLUS is provided through College Board for an annual fee. Recruitment PLUS enables “schools and thousands of administrators [to] easily coordinate recruitment, admissions, and enrollment activities…. Recruitment PLUS is [provided] from the College Board, the recognized leader in admissions software and services” (http://recruitmentplus.collegeboard.org). The
private institution utilized the Recruitment PLUS database for the pre-determined years of data.

PROCEEDURE AND DATA ANALYSIS

The statistical procedure employed to analyze the research questions was a logistic regression analysis. The study involved several independent variables and the dependent variable on the dichotomous dependent variable of enrollment. The dependent variable of African-American enrollment was dichotomous in nature that the student enrolled or did not.

A set of variables was gleaned from the review of literature that examined the college choice models, minority college enrollment, and private college enrollment. The variables selected from the review of literature were identified as data sets for quantitative analysis rather than qualitative research. The below independent variables (predictors) were designated as the college choice determinants. The research examined the following independent variables and their relationship to the dependent variable (outcome) of African-American enrollment:

1. Socioeconomic status (SES)
2. Parental higher education level
3. College entrance exam scores
4. Financial aid
5. High school grade point average
6. Number of admission communications
7. Student’s home proximity to campus

RESULTS

The results of the research identified significant college choice model predictors for African-American enrollment at a private university. The significant predictors included merit aid, private SES neighborhood clusters, American College Testing (ACT), and grade point average (GPA). Several of the original identified predictors were not included in the statistical models due to their unavailability in Recruitment PLUS. These included level of parental education and number of admissions communications. The predictors that were included in the logistic regression models were the same as those recognized through the pivotal and subsequent research of Hossler and Gallagher (1987) college choice models. Hossler and Gallagher identified the three phases of college choice as predisposition, search, and choice (1987).

In the study, research, Hossler, Braxton, and Cooper (1989), recognized SES, student ability (ACT and GPA), resident, and financial aid as determinants of college choice. The outcome of this study’s research validated those predictors for the universe of an African-American population at a private college institution. Hossler, Braxton, and Cooper (1989) three phases of college choice research was based on empirical studies and literature. In contrast, this study’s research was a quantitative discrete study that validated the literature from Hossler, Braxton, and Cooper (1989), Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999), Lil- lis and Tian (2008), and Kim, DeJardins, and McCaill (2009). The latter two studies emphasized the need for financial aid based on the study participants expectations and responses during the final stage of college choice. The majority of the previous research was qualitative based on interviews including the Hossler, Schmidt, and Vesper (1999) longitudinal study. Thus, the individual results of this study discussed below were unique given the single demographic (African-American ethnicity within a private college institution) of the data set that had not been previously evaluated.

Merit aid (coefficient = 0.22, p = .000) was a significant predictor of African-American enrollment at a private college institution in the total data set of records. This finding is supported by the research literature that did investigate African-American college choice determinants including Sevier (1993) and George (2011). The latter study was a qualitative study seeking to understand the financial cost issue. In contrast, this study quantitatively determined that aid is a positive predictor for African-American college enrollment at a private college. Merit aid (financial aid) realized in the data set was constrained due lack of information regarding the final financial aid package consisting of university grants and discount tuition.

The aid denoted in the data set was limited but assumed to be an indicator of a more robust aid offer. The next significant predictor of African-American enrollment at a private college was socioeconomic status (SES) based on the defined neighborhood cluster of “59” and “74”, defined by the College Board (2011) defines the neighborhood clusters in their annual cluster description guide. SES was recognized in the Hossler, Braxton, and Cooper (1989) college choice model theories and subsequent studies including Smith’s (2009) qualitative study. The two neighborhood clusters represented low-income households with students who aspired to attend college as indicated by their interest in AP (Advanced Placement) and honors courses. The identification of these two statistically significant SES groups as predictors for African-American enrollment at the private college institution will be discussed in the recommendations section.

Subsequently, a high ACT (coefficient = -0.001, p = .000) was a negative predictor for the enrollment outcome. The negative determinant indicated that the higher the ACT score the less likely the student would enroll at the private college institution. The below recommendations will state that the private institution should not direct admission efforts to students with high ACTs. ACT and the below GPA were recognized collectively in the literature review as evidence of achievement and cited as a determinant of college choice by Hossler, Braxton, and Cooper (1989). However, Hossler, Braxton, and Cooper’s research was not constrained to the one demographic of an African-American sample at a private college institution. This study’s findings narrowed the focus of previous college choice model research with the addition of a specific ethnicity within a prescribed domain.

In contrast with the high ACT predictor, the model output cited GPA (coefficient = 0.001, p = .05) as a positive predictor of enrollment. With this outcome, the institution should focus recruitment efforts on students with respectable GPAs along with the next significant determinant.

The significant determinant, not documented in the review of literature as a predictor of African-American enrollment, was athlete status. This variable was not a predictor or independent factor as a part of the research design. However, based on the attributes of the records in the sample population and the logistic regression modeling, the athlete status evolved as a predictor by default. The athlete or non-athlete status drove the construct of achievement and cited as a determinant of college choice by Hossler, Braxton, and Cooper (1989). As a result, the model output indicated that the higher the GPA the more likely the student would enroll at the private college institution.

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A predictor included in each of the research questions that did not prove a significant positive or negative factor was the student’s resident in proximity to the private college institution. The review of literature recognized that the location of the selected institution relative to the student’s home was a predictor of enrollment (Spies 2001 and Siever 1993). However, including the predictor of student’s home residence in the logistic regression model did not prove significant. The variable was assigned to each student record based on their residence in the state of the private institution or not. Thus, for the studied private college, the indicator of a student’s residence was not significant.


In conclusion, the study focused on measurable quantitative predictors within a private college institution. Consequently, research contributed to the body of knowledge. The results of the determinants of African-American enrollment at a private college institution. Three of the predictors, merit aid, SES, and GPA, were positively significant. The other two predictors, non-athlete status and high ACT, were negative indicators. The outcomes of the study provided contributions to body of knowledge for the college choice model theories researched over the past two decades. The previous research focused in the literature, did not contain the intersection of the study’s construct that is depicted in this study. That is, the confluence of the enrollment predictors as defined by the college choice theories, minority recruitment, and private college recruitment were not discovered in the review of literature. The intersection of the three segments was realized through this study’s research and documented outcomes. The following are broad-based conclusions incorporating the study’s outcomes along with consistent themes throughout the review of literature:

1. Amended admission recruitment practices as discussed in previous section.
2. Provide focused and informative literature and communication with targeted African American student throughout recruitment cycle (Dehne 2005) especially for the small private institutions. Dehne reported, “most private colleges leave the beneﬁts of these [attributes] characteristics for the students to infer” (Dehne 2005, p. 9).

He concluded that small, private colleges need to vividly proclaim and explain their beneﬁts for the inquiring high school college-seeking applicant. Thus, admissions ofﬁces need to overtly explain and communicate the beneﬁts of education at a small, private institution. Adams (2009) also, reported that communications were critical in the three phases and most explicitly in the ﬁnal phase after admission to ensure student commitment.

3. Utilize predictor factors for recruited athletes as identiﬁed in this study and other research (Johnson, Jubenville, and Goss 2009). The institutions incorporate the determinants including merit aid, targeted markets (neighborhood clusters of “99” and “74”), and GPA in focused recruitment efforts.


