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Factors That Predict Academic Reputation Don't Always Predict Desire to Attend

Michael J. Conard
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ABSTRACT. The study assessed indicators of educational quality and selectivity as predictors of Academic Reputation (AR) and desire to attend a college. Surveys were mailed to 1,004 high school seniors randomly selected from a large database, yielding 198 respondents. Educational quality indicators were regressed on AR. Curriculum rigor and social/cultural activities were significantly predictive of AR. Class size and individualized attention from faculty were not. Curriculum rigor and individualized faculty attention were predictive of desire to attend. Class size and social/cultural activities were not.

Selectivity variables (min. high school GPA, class rank, SAT scores) were regressed on AR and all were significantly predictive. However, none predicted desire to attend.

The results challenge notions about relationships between AR and educational quality and selectivity indicators and their usefulness in enhancing desire to attend. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> 2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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KEYWORDS. Academic reputation, educational quality, educational selectivity, college selection process, higher education

INTRODUCTION

Demographic changes and the subsequent challenges that effected higher education from the mid-1980s through the mid-1990s have precipitated an increased interest in the application of marketing principles in the planning and implementation of marketing strategies aimed at increasing enrollments and attracting high caliber students. While the declining enrollment trends reversed in the latter part of the 1990s ("College enrollment surge," 2001; Harney, 1999), colleges continue to implement such marketing strategies.

Earlier studies (Bowers & Pugh, 1973; Cook & Zallocco, 1983; Discenza, Ferguson, & Wisner, 1985; Johnson, Stewart & Eberly, 1991; Murphy, 1981; Vaughn, Pitlik & Hansotia, 1978) found that academic reputation (AR) was one of the most important factors in college choice. Recent studies indicate that this remains true (Grunig, 1997; Wajeeh & Micceri, 1997). High school seniors, guidance counselors, newly matriculated college freshmen, and their parents consistently cite AR as paramount in choosing a college to attend. This is true whether the student is attending a large midwestern university (Johnson, Stewart & Eberly, 1991), a midsize college in the northeast (Maguire & Lay, 1981), or a junior college in the south (McLeod, 1997). Therefore, from a marketing perspective, it is important for institutions of higher education to be able to measure, develop, and manage AR.

Studies have established the importance of various factors, including AR, in the college choice process (Grunig, 1997; Quigley et al., 1999; Wajeeh & Micceri, 1997). However, what prospective students consider when making judgments about an institution's AR has only been recently understood. Conard and Conard (2000) analyzed the components of AR and found ability to get a good job after graduation was the most important factor in a college's AR. Second in importance was teaching expertise of the faculty. Number of majors offered, technolog-

ical facilities, tuition cost, difficulty of courses and academic quality of students enrolled were each of moderate importance. It was also found that having a large percentage of graduates in successful careers, up-to-date technological facilities, challenging courses, and distinguished faculty were very likely to be associated with very good AR.

In part, the development of effective marketing strategies depends on understanding the perceptions of prospective students regarding important college choice criteria, such as AR.

Educational Quality

Quality of the educational experience is part of what observers consider when judging AR. Indicators of educational quality that have appeared in the literature include average class size, availability of social/cultural activities, rigor of curriculum, and individualized attention from faculty (Carnegie Foundation 1986; Cook & Zallocco, 1983; Discenza, Ferguson, & Wisner, 1985; Litten, 1979; Maguire & Lay, 1981). Relatively small class size, numerous social and cultural activities, a rigorous academic curriculum, and much individual attention from faculty have been suggested to be indicators of higher quality of education. Theoretically, these indicators ought to be positively predictive of AR.

Selectivity

The selectivity of an institution is also widely viewed as important to AR (Cook & Zallocco, 1983; Maguire & Lay, 1981). Many of the most prestigious or elite colleges have relatively low acceptance rates, and are widely perceived to accept only the best and brightest students. Admissions standards used by the majority of colleges and routinely reported in college guides include minimum high school GPA, class rank, and minimum SAT scores. Theoretically, one would expect them to be positively predictive of AR.

Conrad and Eagan (1989) suggested that there was a movement in American higher education to improve institutional prestige by playing

“The Prestige Game,” the goals of which were to maintain or enhance institutional status, reputation, and prestige. Conrad and Eagan suggested that schools tighten (increase) admission standards (i.e., SAT/ACT scores, high school grade point averages) to embellish their prestige in the minds of prospective students, as “the perception of selectivity has always been a hallmark of prestigious institutions” (p. 8). Although the terms reputation and prestige are used separately, it might be inferred that they are related and vary together. Moreover, they note that USA Today’s annual ranking of colleges and universities is partly based on student selectivity which serves to reinforce the association between selectivity and prestige.

The present study examined the following hypotheses.

- H1: Perceptions of AR will be higher for colleges with higher educational quality indicators (i.e., mean class size, social/cultural activities, rigor of curriculum, and amount of individualized faculty attention).
- H2: Perceptions of educational quality variables will be positively related to perceptions of AR and of desire to attend.
- H3: Perceptions of AR will be higher for colleges with higher selectivity (i.e., minimum required SAT scores, minimum high school class rank, minimum high school GPA).
- H4: Perceptions of selectivity will be positively related to perceptions of AR and of desire to attend.

METHOD

Sample and Procedure

Questionnaires were mailed to 1,004 college-bound high school seniors residing in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Florida, and the

New England states. High school seniors as opposed to college freshmen, as used in other studies (e.g., Bowers & Pugh, 1973; Vaughn, Pitlik, & Hansotia, 1978) were chosen to preclude any potential bias associated with participants already attending a college. Respondents were contacted in November of their senior year, before most would know their own admissions status, thereby reducing or eliminating that potential influence on their perception of AR.

The sample was randomly selected from a database of 74,292 that was obtained from the National Research Center for College and University Admissions (NRCCUA). Several measures were taken to increase the response rate, including an advance notification postcard, a personalized cover letter highlighting the importance of participation, a stamped, addressed return envelope, and a reminder postcard. The inclusion of an incentive (e.g., money) has been associated with higher participant response rates; however, none was offered in this study due to budgetary constraints.

A total of 198 useable questionnaires were returned, equaling a 19.7 percent response rate. Although this is a relatively low response rate, a typical rate of return for mail surveys is approximately 30 percent (Shaughnessy and Zechmeister, 1994). Importantly, the 198 respondents were representative of both the sample and the database in terms of gender and state of residence. However, the mean reported SAT score of respondents was 1,036, compared to the national mean score of 910 for that year (The College Board, 1995).

Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study was designed to be as brief as possible to enhance readability and response rate. Question sequence was designed according to the funnel technique in that general questions preceded specific questions to ensure independence of responses (Zikmund, 1994).

Development of questionnaire items addressing aspects of AR have been described elsewhere (Conard & Conard, 2000). To assess correlates of AR, respondents were asked to name a college or university

with which they were familiar and to indicate their perception of its AR on a ten-point scale where 1 = lowest 10% of colleges/universities and 10 = top 10% of colleges/universities. Respondents then answered several questions, each on a 7-point scale, regarding their perceptions of this particular college regarding average class size (from “20 or fewer” to “500 or over”); social/cultural activities (from 0 = none at all to 6 = very many); rigor of curriculum (from 0 = not at all rigorous to 6 = extremely rigorous); and individualized attention from faculty (from 0 = not at all individualized to 6 = extremely individualized). These four criteria had been identified as indicators of educational quality in much of the literature (e.g., Carnegie Foundation, 1986; Maguire & Lay, 1981).

Next, respondents were asked to indicate their desire to attend that particular college on a 7-point scale where 0 = no desire at all and 6 = very strong desire. Respondents were also asked to indicate if they had applied, intended to apply, or did not intend to apply to the particular college named.

Subsequent items assessed respondents' perception of admission standards as related to AR. In an effort to obtain a range of AR ratings, respondents were asked to name a college/university with which they were familiar that had an AR that was either better than or worse than the school previously named, and to indicate their perception of its AR on the same ten-point scale. Respondents then answered several questions regarding their perceptions of this particular school regarding the minimum accepted total SAT score (200-1,600); high school class rank percentile; and minimum high school GPA (1.0-4.0). These three criteria are important admission standards that are used by the vast majority of colleges and universities. While universities undoubtedly use qualitative admissions criteria (such as athletic participation, student government activities, community service activities and the like), the present investigation considered only quantifiable admissions criteria. It was believed that high school seniors were likely to be familiar with, and to have some impression of these criteria, since they are widely reported in college guides. Respondents were also asked to indicate their desire to attend that college.

RESULTS

Various statistical analyses, including analysis of variance, correlations, and multiple regression, were performed in order to assess the relationships between quality and selectivity variables, and AR and desire to attend. The results for the analyses of quality variables are presented first, followed by the results for selectivity variables.

Educational Quality

Perceived AR of the respondent-identified college or university was categorized into three groups. The Low AR group contained 14.9% of responses and consisted of colleges rated in the lowest 50%. The Moderate AR group contained 25.2% of responses, and consisted of colleges rated in the 60%-70% range. The High AR group contained 59.8% of responses, and consisted of colleges rated in the 80%-100% range. The mean AR of the reported colleges was 7.6, with a standard deviation of 1.99, on a ten-point scale, indicating a good to very good AR.

One-way analyses of variance procedures were used to assess differences in quality variables by AR groups. Scheffé post-hoc tests were employed for each ANOVA to identify which groups were significantly different from one another.

Table 1 shows the results of the ANOVAs, with AR as the independent variable, and the quality variables and desire to attend as the dependent variables. The results revealed no significant differences between groups regarding class size. However, significant differences were found among groups regarding social/cultural activities, curriculum, individualized faculty attention and desire to attend.

An examination of the Scheffe results shown in Table 1 reveals that both the Moderate and High AR groups had significantly higher perceived levels of social/cultural activities than the Low AR group. All three AR groups were significantly different with respect to perceived rigor of the curriculum. The High AR colleges were perceived to have the most rigorous curricula, followed by the Moderate and Low AR colleges, respectively.

TABLE 1. Group Means, One-Way ANOVA and Scheffe Results of Perceptions of Colleges' Quality Variables by Judged Academic Reputation Percentile Category

	Low AR 10th-50th percentile	Moderate AR 60th-70th percentile	High AR 80th-100th percentile	F
Perception of Colleges':				
Average Class Size	2.610	2.820	2.690	0.179
Social/Cultural Activities	3.931 _a	4.625 _b	5.026 _b	12.210***
Rigor of Curriculum	3.207 _a	3.958 _b	4.819 _c	33.962***
Level of Individualized Faculty Attention	3.214 _a	3.833 _{ab}	4.157 _b	6.611**
Desire to Attend	3.690 _a	5.020 _b	5.070 _b	10.442***

Note. Row means that do not share subscripts differ at $p < .05$ in the Scheffe test. Class size was measured on a 1-7 scale where 1 = 20 or fewer, and 7 = 500 or more. Social/cultural activities, rigor of curriculum, level of faculty attention and desire to attend were measured on a 0-6 scale, where higher numbers mean more or better.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Significant differences were found between the means for the Low AR and High AR colleges regarding the level of individualized faculty attention and desire to attend. The High AR colleges were perceived to offer more individualized faculty attention than the Low AR colleges. Further, desire to attend was significantly higher for the Moderate and High AR colleges than for the Low AR colleges.

The results of the sub-group comparisons show that perceptions of quality variables are significantly different among schools grouped according to AR. The pattern of differences indicates that schools with higher AR are perceived to have more social/cultural activities, more rigorous curricula, and more individualized faculty attention than schools with low AR. However, there were no significant differences in perceived class size among the AR groups. Also, respondents indicated stronger desire to attend colleges with higher AR.

The analysis of variance results show differences among groups when schools are categorized according to level of AR. Correlations among the variables using the continuous scale of measurement were also examined. Respondents had rated AR on a ten-point scale, where 1 = lowest 10% of colleges, and 10 = top 10% of colleges. Table 2 presents the correlation matrix for AR, the four quality variables, and desire to attend. AR was significantly positively correlated with amount of social/cultural activities, rigor of curriculum, level of individualized attention from faculty, and desire to attend. AR was not significantly correlated with class size. However, as expected, class size was negatively correlated with level of individualized attention from faculty, yet it was not correlated with the other variables. Number of social/cultural activities, level of individualized attention from faculty and desire to attend were positively correlated with rigor of curriculum. There was a small but significant correlation between number of social/cultural activities and desire to attend, and a moderate, significant correlation be-

TABLE 2. Correlation Matrix of AR, Quality Variables, and Desire to Attend

	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(1) AR	-0.015	0.363***	0.599***	0.322***	0.323***
(2) Average class size	--	0.139	-0.043	-0.352***	-0.028
(3) Social/cultural activities		--	0.272***	0.041	0.148*
(4) Rigor of curriculum			--	0.381***	0.316***
(5) Individualized faculty attention				--	0.336***
(6) Desire to attend					--

Note. Class size was measured on a 1-7 scale where 1 = 20 or fewer, and 7 = 500 or more. Social/cultural activities, rigor of curriculum, level of faculty attention and desire to attend were measured on a 0-6 scale, where higher numbers mean more or better.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

tween level of individualized faculty attention and desire to attend. Overall, an examination of the correlation matrix reveals acceptable levels of multicollinearity, which indicates that multiple regression procedures are appropriate.

To test Hypothesis 2, AR was regressed on the perceived quality variables using stepwise multiple regression analysis. As shown in Table 3, rigor of curriculum was the first variable to enter the equation, at $p < .05$, followed by social/cultural activities. The results suggest that rigor of curriculum explains approximately 38% of the variance in ratings of AR and is the strongest predictor, followed by social/cultural activities which contributed an additional 3% of explained variance. Neither class size nor individualized faculty attention were significantly predictive of AR. Although, individualized faculty attention varied with and is moderately correlated with AR (as shown in Tables 1 and 2, respectively), the regression results showed that it did not predict AR after controlling for curriculum rigor and social/cultural activities.

Desire to attend was also regressed on the four quality variables. The results, which are shown in Table 4, indicate that rigor of curriculum was also the strongest predictor of desire to attend, followed by individ-

TABLE 3. Multiple Regression Results: Quality Variables as Predictors of AR

Variable	R	R ²	ΔR^2	b	β	t
Rigor of Curriculum	.614	.377		.960	.556	9.275***
Social/Cultural Activities	.639	.409	.031**	.321	.186	3.112**
Constant				1.823		

The optimal equation is:

$$AR = .96(\text{curriculum}) + .321(\text{social/cultural activities}) + 1.823$$

Note. Rigor of curriculum and social/cultural activities were measured on a 0-6 scale, where higher numbers mean more or better.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

TABLE 4. Multiple Regression Results: Quality Variables as Predictors of Desire to Attend

Variable	R	R ²	ΔR ²	b	β	t
Rigor of Curriculum	.344	.118		.339	.250	3.436***
Individualized Faculty Attention	.412	.170	.052***	.297	.246	3.383***
Constant						2.223

The optimal equation is:

$$\text{Desire to Attend} = .339(\text{curriculum}) + .297(\text{individualized faculty attention}) + 2.223$$

Note. Rigor of curriculum and individualized faculty attention were measured on a 0-6 scale, where higher numbers mean more or better.

*p < .05 . **p < .01. ***p < .001

ualized faculty attention. However, the relationship was not as strong as with AR. Neither class size nor social/cultural activities were significantly predictive.

A separate group of items was designed to determine the extent to which perceptions of selectivity predict perceptions of AR. In an effort to obtain ratings of colleges with a range of AR, respondents were asked to name a college/university with which they were familiar, and that had an AR that was either better than or worse than the school previously named. Respondents also indicated their perception of its AR, on the same ten-point scale as before, as well as their perceptions of the school's admission standards regarding minimum total SAT score, high school class rank and high school GPA. Desire to attend was also assessed.

The mean AR for the respondent identified college was 7.4, with a standard deviation of 2.1 on a ten-point scale, indicating a good to very good AR. Perceived AR was categorized into three groups. The Low AR group contained 22.6% of responses and consisted of colleges rated in the lowest 50%. The Moderate AR group contained 24.1% of re-

sponses, and consisted of schools rated in the 60%-70% range. The High AR group contained 53.5% of responses, and consisted of schools rated in the 80%-100% range. The distribution of responses among groups indicates that a broader range of AR was generated, as was intended.

The results of one-way analyses of variance procedures and Scheffé post-hoc tests are presented in Table 5. The results revealed significant differences between groups regarding SAT score, high school class rank (percentile), high school GPA, and the desire to attend.

The Scheffé results indicate that High AR colleges were perceived to have significantly higher minimum SAT scores and class rank percentile than Moderate or Low AR colleges. Neither minimum SAT scores nor class rank percentiles differed significantly between the Moderate and Low AR categories.

TABLE 5. Group Means, One-Way ANOVA and Scheffe Results of Perceptions of Colleges' Selectivity by Academic Reputation Category

	Low AR 10th-50th percentile	Moderate AR 60th-70th percentile	High AR 80th-100th percentile	F
<u>Perception of Colleges'</u>				
<u>Minimum:</u>				
Combined SAT Score	865.38 _{ab}	957.50 _b	1136.42 _c	33.29***
High School Class Rank (Top Percentile)	35.28 _{ab}	31.46 _b	18.07 _c	30.01***
High School GPA (from 1.0-4.0)	2.43 _a	2.72 _b	3.30 _c	59.97***
Desire to Attend	2.55 _a	3.80 _{bc}	4.03 _c	9.94***

Note. Row means that do not share subscripts differ at $p < .05$ in the Scheffe test. Minimum SAT score, class rank and High School GPA were measured on continuous scales. Respondents wrote in their answers. Desire to attend was measured on a 0–6 scale, where 0 = no desire at all, and 6 = very strong desire.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Significant differences were found between all three AR categories for minimum high school GPA. High AR colleges were perceived to require the highest minimum high school GPA for admission followed by the Moderate and Low AR colleges, respectively.

Finally, desire to attend was significantly lower for schools in the Low AR category than for schools in the Moderate or High AR categories. There were no significant differences in desire to attend between the Moderate and High AR categories.

The patterns of differences shown in Table 5 indicate that colleges with the highest perceived AR were also perceived to be more selective, with an associated stronger desire to attend, than colleges with lower perceived AR.

The analysis of variance results show differences in selectivity among groups when colleges were categorized according to level of AR. Correlations among the variables using the continuous scale of measurement were also examined. Table 6 presents the correlation matrix for AR, the three selectivity variables, and desire to attend. An examination of the correlations shows large and significant correlations between AR and minimum SAT scores, high school class rank, and minimum high

TABLE 6. Correlation Matrix of AR, Selectivity Variables, and Desire to Attend

	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) AR	0.633***	-0.491***	0.688***	0.227**
(2) Minimum SAT score	--	-0.417***	0.704***	0.092
(3) Minimum class rank		--	-0.501***	-0.055
(4) Minimum high school GPA			--	0.083
(5) Desire to attend				--

Note. Class rank was measured with a "top-down" scale, where smaller numbers (e.g., top 10%) indicate higher performance. GPA was measured on a scale where 1.0 = "D" through 4.0 = "A." The scale for desire to attend went from 0 = "no desire at all" to 6 = "very strong desire."

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001

school GPA, as well as a moderate and significant correlation between AR and desire to attend. Interestingly, while AR was moderately correlated with desire to attend, the selectivity variables were not. Overall, an examination of the correlation matrix reveals acceptable levels of multicollinearity, which indicates that multiple regression procedures are appropriate.

To test Hypothesis 4, AR and desire to attend were regressed on the perceived selectivity variables, using stepwise multiple regression. An examination of Table 7 reveals that minimum required high school GPA was the best predictor of AR and explained approximately 46% of the variance in AR ratings, followed by minimum required SAT score, which explained an additional 5% of the variance, and high school class rank (percentile), with an additional 2%.

None of the selectivity variables were significantly predictive of desire to attend. Therefore, while perceptions of selectivity are related to AR, they are not related to desire to attend.

DISCUSSION

The first hypothesis regarding AR and educational quality was supported. ANOVA results indicated that colleges with higher AR were perceived to have more rigorous curricula, more individualized faculty attention, and more social cultural activities than those with low AR. Respondents also indicated a stronger desire to attend colleges with high AR more than those with low AR. However, there were no differences in perceived class sizes among colleges with high, moderate, or low AR. While the data suggest that AR is not affected by class size, it is affected by individualized attention from faculty. Apparently, in the minds of college-bound high school seniors, AR can exist independently of class size, but not independently of individualized attention from faculty. In reality, class size is likely to be inversely related to individualized attention from faculty.

Using a multiple regression framework, the second hypothesis was partially supported. Rigor of curriculum and social cultural activities

TABLE 7. Multiple Regression Results: Selectivity Variables as Predictors of AR

Variable	R	R ²	ΔR^2	b	β	t
High School GPA	.68	.46		1.479	.406	4.951***
SAT score	.71	.50	.05***	.002	.250	3.089**
Class Rank	.73	.53	.02*	-.027	-.187	-2.801*
Constant	1.251					

The optimal equation is:

$$AR = 1.479(\text{GPA}) + .002(\text{SAT}) - .027(\text{Class Rank}) + 1.251$$

Note.

*p < .05. **p < .01. *** p < .001.

predicted AR, however, it was rigor of curriculum and individualized faculty attention that predicted desire to attend. The finding regarding the importance of curriculum rigor as a predictor of AR is consistent with previous results, which indicated that colleges with a very good AR are very likely to have challenging and difficult courses, and that difficulty of courses was important in determining a college's AR (Conard & Conard, 2000). The finding that social/cultural activities were not predictive of desire to attend was surprising because many studies have indicated that social/cultural activities are important in choosing and/or attending a college (Bowers & Pugh, 1973; Cook & Zallocco, 1983; Discenza, Ferguson & Wisner, 1985; Litten, 1979; Maguire & Lay, 1981). However, it is important to note that many factors could intervene between desire to attend and actually choosing that particular college, including the respondent's perception of the opportunity to attend based on SAT scores or other credentials.

Further, the connection between attitudes, such as desire to attend a particular college, and behaviors, such as actual attendance, has long been known to be tenuous (e.g., Wicker, 1969). This may partially ex-

plain the discrepancy between desire to attend and findings from previous studies regarding choice. Actual matriculation is affected by factors other than AR and desire to attend, including cost, (Carnegie Foundation, 1986; Murphy, 1981; Quigley et al. 1999) financial aid, (Maguire & Lay, 1981) and availability of specific programs (Cook & Zallocco, 1983; Johnson, Stewart & Eberly, 1991). However, it might logically be expected that desire to attend would be a necessary precursor to actual matriculation, arguably the ultimate variable in the college choice process. While the focus of the present study was on precursors to matriculation, future research could employ more complex designs, such as structural equation modeling, in order to tease apart the possibly complex relationships among AR, desire to attend, and matriculation.

The third hypothesis, regarding AR and selectivity, was supported. ANOVA results indicated that colleges with High AR were perceived to be significantly more selective than colleges with Low or Moderate AR. Colleges with Moderate or High AR were more desirable to attend than colleges with Low AR. Using a multiple regression framework for the fourth hypothesis, the results were mixed. While all of the selectivity variables predicted AR, none of the selectivity variables predicted desire to attend. It is possible that student quality (i.e., student self-selection) moderates the relationship between selectivity and desire to attend. For example, it may be that students with higher SAT scores and high school GPA may perceive their chances of being accepted by more selective schools to be better than students with lower SAT scores, which could differentially effect desire to attend.

Implications and Conclusions

Assuming an absence of reverse causation, the results indicate that colleges and universities might enhance their perceived AR in the minds of the target market (i.e., college-bound high school seniors) by incorporating the following actions into their strategic planning: (1) evaluate and consider increasing the number and diversity of social/cultural activities; (2) evaluate and consider increasing the rigor of the curricu-

lum to create or enhance an academically challenging environment; and (3) evaluate and consider increasing selectivity of admissions criteria.

However, it is important to recognize that some factors that predict AR (i.e., social/cultural activities, and selectivity) do not correlate with desire to attend. Again, assuming an absence of reverse causation, colleges might concentrate on promoting rigorous curricula that allow individualized attention from faculty in order to increase their attractiveness to prospective students. For some colleges, enhancing AR and desire to attend may be a matter of raising awareness of existing activities and programs.

In practice, these findings would indicate that “playing the prestige game” (Conrad & Eagan, 1989) by increasing selectivity and tuition, may not improve actual matriculation rates. However, AR and desire to attend are highly correlated, and therefore, any strategy that might enhance the perception of AR should be given serious consideration. Until additional studies replicate the results presented here, and until the relationships among quality, selectivity, desire to attend and actual matriculation are more fully understood, these strategies must be considered with care.

In this study, quality and selectivity indicators were evaluated separately for two different colleges, so that a structural equation model was not appropriate. Future research designs might employ such models to investigate complex relationships among AR, desire to attend, and matriculation.

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