

University College Student Recruitment Survey



Patrick McGuire, Ph.D., Director, Urban Affairs Center

Christine Fox, Ph.D., &
Faculty Research Associate
Urban Affairs Center

Mihoko Ogawa, M.A.
Graduate Research Associate,
Urban Affairs Center

6/1/02

Executive Summary

Major findings of this study include:

- Two-thirds of respondents only sought information about colleges during the final three months before attending, considered only a couple of local public colleges, and wanted a four-year institution.
- Social networks and direct campus experiences were more important influences on college selection than direct advertising, especially for women.
- While many respondents had completed at least one course at a community college, few had completed degrees and were reflecting a “2+2” pattern of BA attainment.
- Respondents chose to attend UC specifically because of the programs housed there.
- The four UC “majors”—Business Technology, Individualized Study, Adult Liberal Study, and Undeclared/Don’t know—are serving several distinct pools of students.
- Respondents chose to attend UT and UC based on quality concerns, economic factors, and flexible curriculum and course scheduling.
- Regardless of major, respondents’ reflect a “consumer” approach to education.
- Students are happier with their UC experiences than with their UT experiences generally.
- Curricular flexibility is a crucial antidote to dissatisfaction related to course availability.
- Three-quarters of respondents had previously been enrolled in other UT Colleges. Many of these students would have left UT if not for the availability of more flexible classes and curriculum of University College majors.

Findings

Who Answered the Survey?

This report is based upon responses from an “on-line” survey of University College (UC) Students. Announcements of the survey were sent to all UC students in spring 2002 via their UT e-mail account—which most but not all of them would have been using actively. They were invited to participate in the survey and awards of several of gift certificates (to be drawn randomly from among the respondents) were used as an inducement to participate. We had 112 respondents to the survey.

This study cannot be described as statistically representative of University College students in general. This panel of respondents is very disproportionately Caucasian, while also including more females and respondents under 25 years of age than the general UC population.¹ Individuals who were neither Caucasian or African-American population (including Hispanic, Asian, Native American, Mixed, and Other) are significantly under-represented.² The distribution of respondents by student major is generally representative of University College.³

Table #1 Comparing Respondents to University College Population (rounded)⁴

Attributes	UT Students in General *	U.C. population in General**	Respondent Panel
Race-Caucasian	75%	43%	73%
Race-African-American	12%	27%	16%
Race-Other (Hispanic, Asian, Native American, Mixed, Other)	13%	37%	8.1%
Gender- Male	48%	38%	28%
Gender- Female	52%	62%	72%
Under 25	88%	30%	42%
Age- 25-30	10%	18%	17%
Age- 31-40	6%	21%	15%
Age- 41-50	4%	20%	21%
Age- 51+	1%	11%	5%

*--Data from UT Institutional Research John Nutter 5/29/02 * --Data from Cathy Zimmer, UC College Relations 5/24/02

¹ As shown in Table #1, the sample is markedly older than the remainder of the UT student body.

² The respondents' race is roughly reflective of UT students generally, but the critical issue is the extent to which the respondent sample is “representative” of the UC population.

³ Adult Liberal study is 17%, Individualized Study is 32%, undecided students are 21%, and the various business technology degrees are about 15% of the respondent population. While the later are popular and have large classes, it is a two-year degree and thus their percentage of the total student body of UC is smaller than one might expect.

⁴ Data for the U.C. population aggregates people from 25-29, and uses 10-year categories starting with 30-39. Since the size of the categories is essentially the same, comparisons are useful despite the initial age varying by one year.

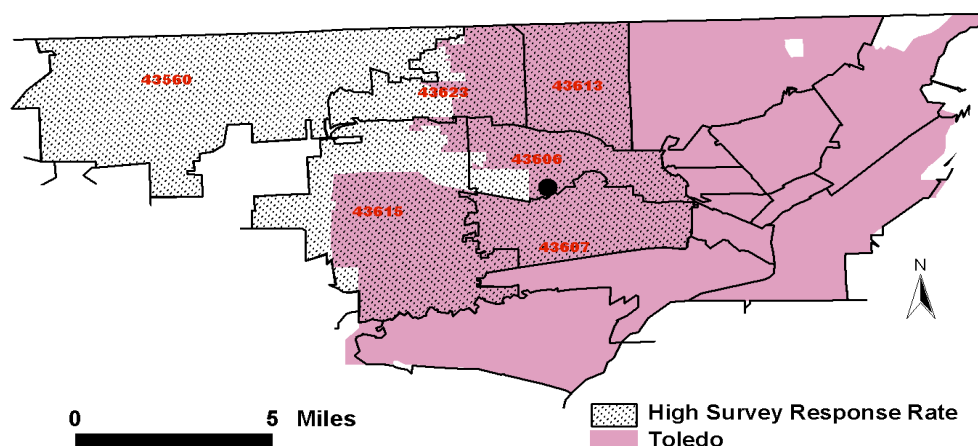
Over half (55%) of the respondents are single, almost a third (30%) are married, and 14% are divorced. Roughly 1/3 (32%) live with their spouse, 20% live alone, and 15% to 17% with their children, their parents, and/or housemates. This is roughly what one would expect given the “non-traditional” student orientation of several UC programs and thus a slightly older age cohort than the remainder of the University student population.

The pattern of respondent location is about as one would expect for the University in general and is more concentrated near UT than University College students in general (See Table #2). About 11% of the students reside in each of the two adjacent zip code areas surrounding the Bancroft and Scott Park campuses, 10% more in the next zip immediately north of these two, and 15% additional live in the two areas adjacent to the west in West Toledo and Sylvania. Thus, almost half of the respondent’s live in the 5 contiguous zip codes around, north, and west of the campuses (See Figure #1, shaded area). The rest are dispersed throughout the City, County, and Northwest Ohio.

Table 2 Zip Area Concentrations of Respondents and UC students--Spring 2002

Zip Code Area	University College 2002	Survey Respondents
43606	7%	11%
43607	8%	11%
43613	8%	10%
43615	9%	8%
43560	7%	6%

Figure 1



Respondents were equally distributed among sophomores, juniors, and seniors (24%-29% of the sample), with freshman being only 15% of respondents. Half (52%) of respondents are full time, one-third (32%) are part-time, and 13% are intermittent attendees. Overwhelmingly, their previous educational experiences were in other UT colleges (72%)!⁵ For about 6 in 10 respondents (59%) their highest degree completed had been a high school degree. A Quarter (26%) had completed Associate, 9% Bachelors, and 5% Masters degrees. Interestingly, only 15% had their Associates degrees and only 3% had their Bachelors' degrees from their "previous college." This suggests that few respondents were part of a "2 + 2" program from a community college, and that most who had degrees had completed them as part of THIS round of college attendance.

Respondent's occupation was originally an open-ended response and leaving the choice of descriptors to the respondent resulted in most of the answers appearing to be unique. Using thematic coding similar to in vivo qualitative techniques, and minimizing potential problems of inter-coder reliability by having a single person⁶ engage in recoding, several areas concentration emerged from the occupational data. Almost 30% have no job other than being a student; 70%

⁵ 5% had attended Owens CC and 6% had last attended an area high school. The remainder had come from various institutions across the US from community colleges to the Universities of Chicago and Michigan.

⁶ That student, Mihoko Ogawa has an MA in Sociology and is working on a Ph.D. in Research and Social Foundations Dept. in the College of Education. She has had classes in social and qualitative methods. In addition to completing and presenting her own scholarly papers, she has previously worked on another UAC study with Dr.'s Hamer and Opp in which she collected and coded data under direct faculty observation.

do—a response reflective of the general student population at UT.⁷ About 10% of all respondents are “assistants” to some professional or manager. Just over 5% are managers of various kinds and 5% are secretaries. Waitresses, clerks, accountants, and coordinators of various kinds each involved over 2.7% of respondents. The remaining 40% of respondents were distributed across 33 occupational categories that ranged across so many occupational categories that they could not be aggregated effectively. In effect, there is no identifiable commonality among respondents relative to off-campus work patterns.

The ratio of full-time to part-time university attendance seemed to decline (from roughly 3:2 to 1:1) as students entered their junior and senior years. This may be an artifact of a compositional change in the respondent pool, as many Business Technology (BT) students do not advance past the sophomore year. Noting that 60% of Business Technology students are full time, compared to 20% of Adult Liberal Studies and half of Individualized Program majors, supports this contention. However, it is also important to note that 80% of respondents who are undecided and/or don’t know are full time, and many of these may transfer out of the College when they do select a major.

In sum, while the respondent pool varies from the full population of UC students by being disproportionately female, white, and young, we can identify when these sample attributes may be influencing response rates, and note that influence. Thus, when responses reported in this study vary from expectations and/or previous studies of a similar theme conducted on comparable groups (other UT students and/or Toledo households), and/or we identify group-based distinctions within the sample, we believe that our findings are significant.

When and Why Did Respondents Chose to Attend College?

To ascertain when and why respondents chose to attend college, their decision to go to UT, and their satisfaction with that decision, we will consider the responses of the entire respondent population, and where significant by their current UC disciplinary major. We will examine in greater detail four categories of majors; Adult Liberal Studies (ALS), Individualized Program (IDVP), Business Technology (BT), and Don’t Know (and Undecided) (DK).⁸

Almost 90% of current students began to seek information about college in the 6 months before entering college—this is relatively late compared to national trends for “traditional” full time students. More importantly, ***almost 2/3 of respondents (62.5%) did not begin to seek information about college until the final 3 months before attending!*** The pattern of when one began to consider attending college was unaffected by one’s previous college experience as the pattern was reproduced in a roughly proportional manner among people who had completed high school, an A.A., or B.A. degrees. There are, however, important disciplinary variations hidden in this general trend. Two-thirds of BT students decided what college they would attend less than a month before initially attending class. Two-thirds of DK decided in the final 3 months (half of them in the last). Three-fourths of ALS students decided 3-6 months before class (but almost not

⁷ Half of all UT students have part-time and a quarter of them have full-time employments, a net employment rate of 75% compared to the 70% in this study. UT Institutional Research Power Point 5/21/02.

⁸ A fifth major, Administrative Programs—a BA level curriculum—, had only 2 respondents and the sample is too small to use for cross tab purposes and to render any meaningful findings.

in the final month). And 90% of IDVP students decided during the last 6 months, equally divided between the final, final 3, and final 6 months.

Respondents actively considered only a couple of the nearby colleges. In a form allowing for more than one entry, 85% considered UT, 43% considered BG, 27% considered Owens CC, and 25% considered Lourdes College. On one hand, this suggests that the respondents may have been from outside the area and only applied to one college in NW Ohio, but the distribution of home zip codes is inconsistent with that pattern. It is more probable that respondents are local residents and highly embedded in the community, work many hours, are unwilling to commute, and therefore have focused on only local colleges.⁹ The fact that none of the other 13 regional colleges in our selection list (mostly 30 minutes or more from downtown Toledo) were considered by more than 10% of the students supports the later explanation.¹⁰

In violation of local trend and the cost-maximizing logic of the so-called “academic marketplace,” the UT/UC respondents were generally not interested in attending a community and/or technical college (except for Owens). Except for Lourdes, respondents limited their focus to public universities exhibiting almost no interest in Findlay, Tiffin, Heidelberg, Defiance, or Northern Ohio Universities. Respondents were also not interested in attending a 4-year public college that was on the edge of the Toledo metro region, including OSU Lima and Eastern Michigan University.¹¹ Instead, ***respondents generally intended to enter a local 4-year public university and strongly favored UT from the start.***

There is an interesting connection between Owens and Lourdes. Several current UT students had considered Lourdes had obtained an A.A. degree, and almost half of all students with A.A. degrees were from Owens. This differed from applicants “direct from high school” or people with BA’s.¹² While the decision to attend UT is beneficial to the institution, the consideration of Lourdes by UT students may be verifying the surprisingly high esteem in which that institution is held locally¹³ in combination with the limited economic wherewithal of people who became UT students. Two logical explanations leap forth. Students may have been reflecting their preference for smaller classes (without regard to quality), or, that having paid the minimum for their first two years, they sought to counter any stigma with a higher priced B.A. degree.

Respondents are not strongly influenced by direct advertising. They did not lack contact with the media and advertising sources. In fact, 2/3 of respondents (67%) report regularly reading The Toledo Blade.¹⁴ Yet very few respondents (6%) noted that The Blade had provided information that influenced their decision-making. Blade readership was disproportionately common among those under age 25 and (unlike other age cohorts) they did not read other local papers. The

⁹ J. Funk found the same tendency in the general population of Toledo --56% of respondents applied to only one college/university--3/02 survey. pg. 22.

¹⁰ This is also consistent with the responses of the general population in Funk 3/02. Pgs. 20-33.

¹¹ There is a tuition reciprocity agreement between Lucas County and EMU, and so cost is not driving this pattern.

¹² Almost 40% of junior level respondents considered Lourdes vs. 30% of sophomores & seniors, and 0% of freshmen!

¹³ This varies from the general public response in Funk 3/02, pg. 21-24 in which Lourdes scores almost equal to UT. It is much stronger than the other private schools in this sample, but

¹⁴ Despite a form that allowed for more than one entry, the only other newspaper outlets eliciting double-digit responses as sources of information were The Toledo Journal (13%) and The (Toledo) City Paper (10%). The Collegian, Catholic Chronicle, and Toledo Parent were cited by 5-7% of respondents.

disproportionately youth of our respondent sample may result in our underreporting the readership and/or influence of other local newspapers, and overstating the importance and diversity of “other” non-local regional and special interest periodicals, since “under 25’s” responses varied from other age groups on each of these topics.

There is other important market segmentation among respondents that may be distorted by the attributes of our respondent sample. The strongly Caucasian composition of the sample may result in our understanding the importance of ethnic-based papers and readership patterns. Cross tab analysis shows us that almost 40% of among African American respondents regularly read The Toledo Journal. Yet almost 60% of African Americans read The Blade regularly. The number of Hispanic respondents was so low that no meaningful measure of interest in Latino-focused newspapers can be created.¹⁵

What is important is that regardless of age, race, or disciplinary major, respondents do not view The Blade as an influential source of information. In any case, **radio was twice (13%) and TV three times (18%) more frequently cited as influencing a respondent’s decision-making than The Blade.**¹⁶ TV ads were a major influence on ALS, while “other” (friends, co-workers, parents, etc.) was major influence on the other three UC majors. Each disciplinary group had the shallow general pattern of response to radio, TV, and The Blade as influential noted above, with BT, DK, and IDVP having a less pronounced reaction to TV.

We need to note differences in the response pattern of different UC majors to what motivated them to attend UT. The recommendations of friends and visiting UT were the principal source of information about college applications for ALS and DK majors. Catalogs, books, previous experiences, and visiting the campus influenced the IDVP majors, and perhaps significantly, 40% percent of the IDVP students had previously attended UT colleges. Yet before we make too much of this, almost 60% of the DK students came from other UT colleges too and so UT experience does not mitigate or minimize the influence of social or experiential factors. Only a couple BT and ALS students came from other UT colleges.

Similar to The Blade readership response, 75% of all respondents visited the UT website and 46% visited the University College website in anticipation of attendance. However, **only 11% said that websites were a significant source of information influencing their decision to attend.** The basic response rate regarding both viewing and influence may be a function of the sample being disproportionately young. However, given the predominance of computers in the workplace and the high levels of employment among UT students and the respondents, the low ratio of influence relative to web site exposure is a useful indicator, even if we cannot ascertain with any certainty the statistical accuracy of this finding relative to UC students generally.

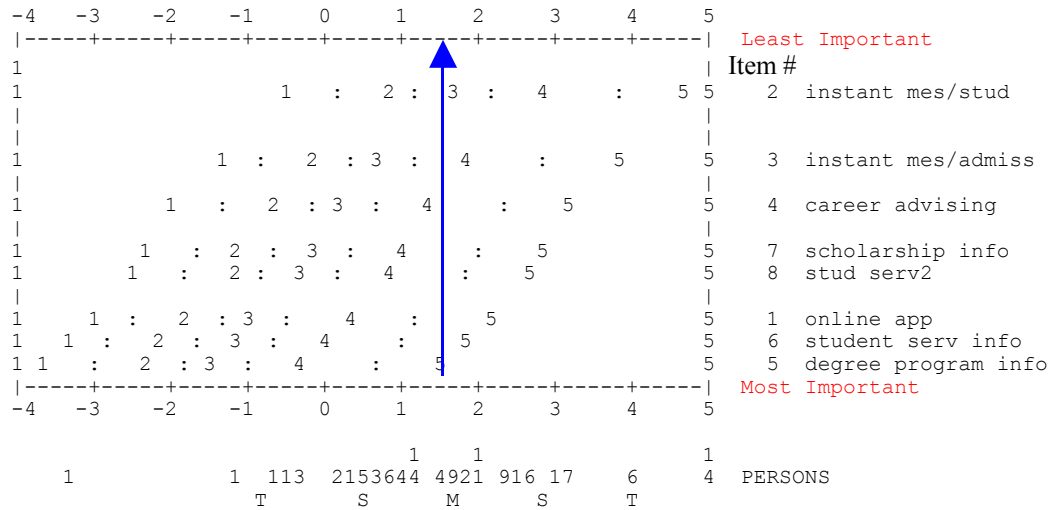
Figure #3 shows what features respondents thought were important in a college website. Having the traditional information that universities have provided to entering students—career advising, application forms, degree program, scholarship and student service information and links on the website--were described by 80%-96% of respondents as somewhat or very important. Application of more state of the art technologies such instant messaging with admissions, current

¹⁵ Two Hispanics read Hispanic-focused newspapers--one each El Tiempo and La Prensa--as well as a few Caucasians reading one or the other or both (the question had a multiple selection option).

¹⁶ Cross tab analysis shows that this trend held regardless of age.

students, etc. received only tepid interest, being positively sanctioned by 40-50% of students. Thus respondents sought basic information on line and were less interested in immediacy of response to particular queries than to ease of operation relative to their basic queries. Stated differently, it may be that they expected the website to be simple enough and thorough enough that they would not need individualized assistance to navigate it or obtain needed information.

Figure 2. Rating scale keymap for college website¹⁷



¹⁷ Figure 2 shows the items in order from most important to least important, after conversion to an equal interval scale. Items at the top of Figure 2 were rated the least important, whereas items at the bottom were rated the most important. The numbers inside the figure represent the rating scale categories of 1 to 5, and the vertical line drawn through these numbers represents the average person response. The numbers inside the figure show the rating scale categories on an interval scale. Note that the leap from ‘somewhat unimportant’ to ‘unimportant’ is large, as is the difference between ‘very important’ and ‘somewhat important’. Thus, it was psychologically more difficult to move between these categories than it was to move between the more central categories of 2, 3, and 4.

Why Did Respondents Chose to Attend UT?

Occupational needs and adaptability, and NOT life circumstances, seem to have motivated respondents to enter college in general and UT in particular. Decisions to attend and complete college were commonly reported as being part of most (74%) respondents' long-term goals.

Decisions to attend now were motivated by occupational factors, including a desire for job advancement (41%), job retention-- needing a degree to keep an existing job-- (23%), and the availability of the majors and courses at times when they could attend (34%).

While job retention and advancement might be assumed to be similar, response patterns indicate they are quite different. Job *retention* is an important motivator among respondents 25-49 years of age and respondents whose family status involves multiple and biological-linked nuclear family members—living with their parents and/or their children.¹⁸ Business technology students more often noted job retention (50%) as an important influence on their attendance decision, as opposed to about a quarter of the ALS, IDVP, and DK respondents. Job *advancement* was a motive noted by respondents regardless of their family status, and most pronounced among those over age 25. It motivated about half of the ALS, IDVP, and BT, but only ¼ of DK majors.

Course availability was a significant influence on respondent's selection of UT. It mattered for roughly half of the respondents in each department DK, BT, IDVP, and ALS!! This pattern held regardless of their family status as 24% to 41% of people in each family status group noted the importance of this factor. Other pragmatic factors encouraging college entry including cost (8%), flexibility in curriculum (6%), transportation availability (4%), and changing marital, childcare, and family status were considered important by few respondents.¹⁹

When asked to identify how important each of 20 factors were in their decision to attend UT in particular, and allowed to pick as many of the factors as were pertinent, respondent responses were overwhelming. ***Students chose UT and University College because of the majors and programs housed there.***^{20 21} Thus, the level of competition between UC and other UT colleges is relatively minimal. However, the attendance decision is predicated on the assumption that courses needed to complete majors and programs will be available. The importance of this assumption will be noted below, since the violation of this assumption is a key factor in dissatisfaction with their departmental majors, and University College.

However, when a Rating Scale Key Map is constructed—Figure # 3—and the scores of each factor are arrayed, a larger pattern emerges.²² ***Student respondents valued “quality.” Academic quality, faculty skills, prestige, and reputation were four of the top 8 responses*** in a keymap distribution. The importance of these factors held across respondents regardless of their family

¹⁸ Relative to living alone, with roommates, divorced or widowed, and/or living with a spouse or a significant other.

¹⁹ Few people were influenced by life changing circumstances; divorce (6%), deaths in a family (3%), children leaving home (2%), or children entering grade school (3%). This pattern held across age groups, regardless of motive—job retention or advancement, etc.

²⁰ The Toledoans generally cited the centrality of this attribute in the 3/02 Funk survey, including those that chose to attend Owens and Lourdes.

²¹ This pattern held regardless of the respondent's major including Don't know and Undecided!

²² More than 95% of respondents provided input on each of the 20 items, and thus there would be no significant difference between a scale based on score medians and one based on frequency of responses.

structure. They were more pertinent to students who were over 25 years old, and as such more important to the IDVP, ALS, and Undeclared students, than those in BT.

Campus specific attributes²³ are the least important for respondents regardless of age or major. Attributes involving comfort and access,²⁴ and vocational outcomes²⁵ were grouped in the middle of the “importance” distribution on the keymap. These patterns are consistent with the occupational improvement motive that respondents identified above, and the distinctions between those seeking to retain jobs, vs. those seeking job advancement. These generalizations reflect the pattern of across the board continuity among majors. An interesting exception was the IDVP students who were less interested in Faculty Quality, prestige of UT degree, reputation of the school, and having graduates get good jobs, than other majors.

The methods by which respondents learned about and were influenced toward attending UT may reflect their last-minute inclination and strong focus on UT. The principal source of information that influenced college application decisions were: visiting the school (30%), friends (18%), college catalogues (13%), and previous experience (10%). ***Personal experiences and interpersonal networks (friends, bosses, family members, co-workers) and “word of mouth” influenced the initial pool of consideration, application, and the selection of a college, rather than formal media advertisements, mass mailings, one-stop booths, or websites.***²⁶ This pattern was consistent across all UC majors, and whether or not one remembered visiting the UT or UC website. Consistent with studies of gender differences, women were more interested in social influences--the input of friends, family, etc. and people age 30-50, while visits and previous experiences were viewed as information sources by both genders and by 18 to 24 year olds.²⁷

Similar, but less strong but perhaps more significant results were found when respondents were asked what type of advertising was most influential on their decision to attend UT. The listed options were media forms that comprise traditional advertising outlets. Yet over half of respondents chose “other” than TV, radio, direct mail, The Blade, or The City Paper. This majority of respondents inserted various descriptors of personal network members, despite the fact that such sources are not a “type of advertising” in the traditional sense.

²³ On-campus housing, student organizations, honors programs, campus neighborhoods, and similar aged student cohort.

²⁴ Safety, easy access, campus facilities, & financial aid.

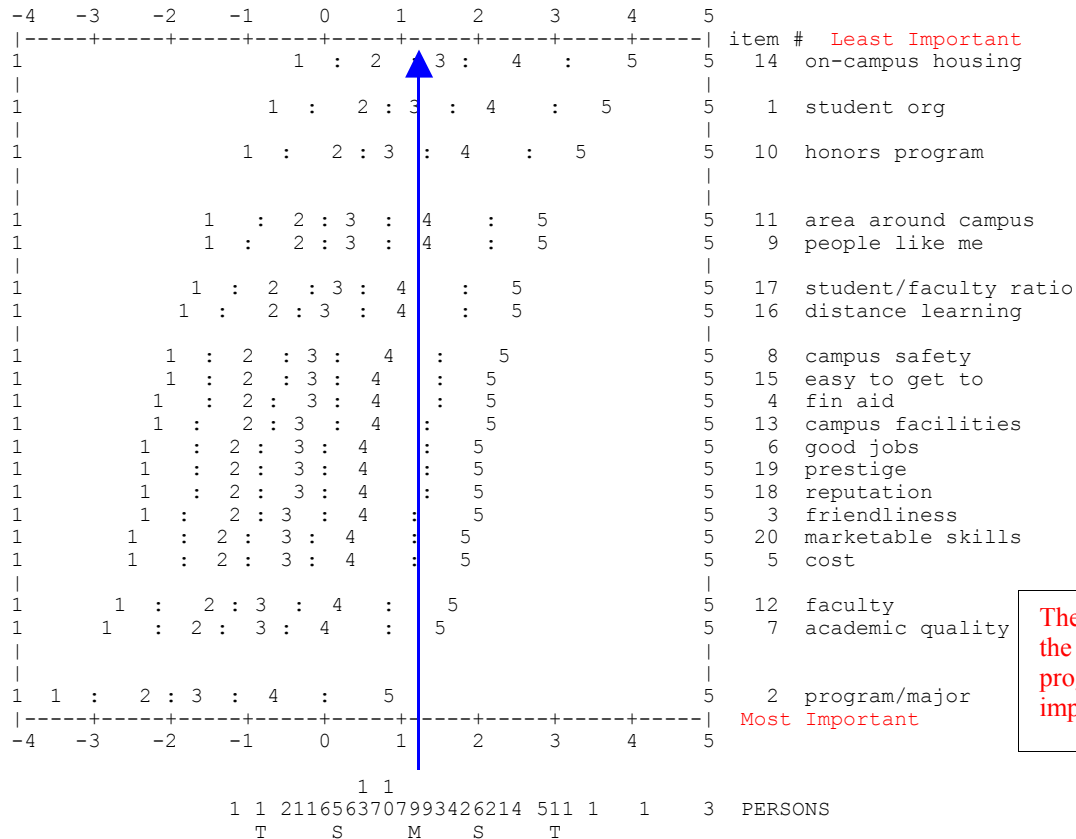
²⁵ Marketable skills, good jobs.

²⁶ This attribute is similar to the general Toledo population, as reflected in the J. Funk study of 3/02, Q # 32, 39.

²⁷ About 40% of all 18-24 year olds felt visits were a principle info source—accounting for almost 2/3 of all respondents who expressed this belief.

Figure 3

Rating Scale Keymap for College Decision²⁸



The average respondent rated the factor “available program/major” as “very important”

²⁸ Figure 3 shows the items in order from most important to least important, after conversion to an equal interval scale. Items at the top of Figure 1 were rated the least important, whereas items at the bottom were rated the most important. The numbers inside the figure represent the rating scale categories of 1 to 5, and the vertical line drawn through these numbers represents the average person response. For example, the most important factor was “available program/major”, with the average response to this factor as 5 (very important). Note that the gap between this factor and the one of next importance, i.e., ‘academic quality’, is larger than the gap between the next two items. Because these factors are placed on an equal interval scale, we can ascertain not only the rank order of importance, but also the size of the difference. In fact, the difference between ‘available program/major’ and “academic quality” is .72 units, whereas the difference between “academic quality” and “faculty quality” is only .08 units (these numbers are not shown in the figure). Thus, because these are on an interval scale, we can infer that the difference between the first two factors is 9 times the psychological distance of the distance between the second two factors (interpreted in a similar way to an odds ratio in logistic regression).

Finally, the numbers inside the figure show the rating scale categories on an interval scale. Note that the leap from ‘somewhat unimportant’ to ‘unimportant’ is large, as is the difference between ‘very important’ and ‘somewhat important’. Thus, it was psychologically more difficult to move between these categories than it was to move between the more central categories of 2, 3, and 4.

Student Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction with UT, UC, and Their Departments

In order to ascertain what conditions or attributes influenced students' daily experiences at UT, UC, and in their Department majors, we asked two simple open-ended questions about each institutional level. We asked what they liked best, and liked worst about their experiences with each institutions. Most of the queries we posed earlier about interests, motives, methods, and rationale for entering UT and UC were chosen by selecting responses from a list of attributes that were created by the authors of this survey in collaboration with Cathy Zimmer, Director of UC College Relations, and UC Interim Dean Mary Jo Waldock. To some extent, the creation and array of the listed options may have shaped the conceptual framework and approach of respondents, although we actively attempted to provide an array of options including an "other" option that many respondents chose to use in some cases. Open-ended questions provide less guidance for respondents, and in so doing may elicit and reflect their current ideas and concerns without regard for larger structures and processes. However, the unique responses necessitate thematic organization and recoding consistent with the practices of en vivo coding noted earlier.

What respondents say they *like best* (30%) **about UT are their classes!** This category included responses noting class times, sizes, and the availability of the distance-learning format. The next three most commonly patterned responses were what might be described as "user-friendly" factors: Access (19%), campus conditions (15%), and staff friendliness (13.5%). Clearly, **respondents are generally content with the way they are treated.** These responses vary from UT student responses generally as expressed in the 1995 Noel/Levitz's report and the 3/2002 study of community perceptions by J. Funk Consulting (pg. 23).²⁹

What respondents *liked least about UT were: parking (16%), the campus facilities (11%), and cost of attendance (10%)*—factors strongly influenced by state funding and decisions by previous administrations that can not be addressed in a simple or short-term manner. **A distressing finding is respondent dissatisfaction with faculty attitude and language skills (16%), and staff attitude especially in student services (16%).**³⁰ This finding is important and is not countered by the fact that what many people liked best about UT was its user-friendliness. When word of mouth and personal experience are such important factors in student recruitment,³¹ dissatisfaction and anger about how one is treated can quickly translate into lost future student enrollment.

Students liked the academic flexibility (22%) and classes (16%) in University College. Many people lauded the friendliness and accessibility of faculty and staff, especially advising staff (27.7% combined)—a stark change from their comments noted immediately above with UT generally. **Dissatisfaction with University College was not widely expressed,** and concerns

²⁹Barely half (55%) of respondents answered this question. This might imply the absence of positive responses, but response rates for all 6 open-ended questions were low, more probably indicating fatigue in answering questions.

³⁰Again, only half (51%) of the pool of respondents provided input on this question. This response rate no more implies an absence of criticism, than rate on the previous question implied a preponderance of unstated dissatisfaction.

³¹ This is the case for respondents to this survey in particular, and for respondents to the general Toledo household survey by J. Funk 3/02.

revolved around service—Academic advising, classes, and class availability were each mentioned by 11% of respondents of a small respondent pool.³²

Almost 40% of respondents described flexibility as the best attributes of their Departments. The individualized program of study (26%) and academic flexibility (13%) led the list. ***The least desirable departmental attributes involved course availability (26%) and advising (9%). Both at the Department level and the UC level, the focus on availability goes back to the assumptions about class availability students made when selecting to attend UT and UC.***

We do need to note that the age and experiential background of students in different departments are quite different. The Business Technology majors are almost all under age 30, IDVP students are almost all 25-50, and ALS students are 30 and up. If BT majors had previously attended college courses (and many had), they generally had attended various community colleges, but few had completed degrees there. The IDVP majors with previous college experience were primarily from Owens CC, and had not only taken courses but had completed degrees there. A majority of ALS students with college experience had attended UT. ALS students who had completed college degrees had done so while attending colleges outside of the region.

These age and experiential attributes makes common marketing to these UC students difficult. However, it partially explains why the aggregated “like best and worst” (satisfaction) scores each have a high degree of commonality around issues such as friendliness of employees, curricular flexibility, and course availability. There are different expectations, motives, and age-based expectations of the college experience, and they interact with different employees, curricular requirements, and course availability.

The overlap and inter-penetration of best and worst may also be reflecting the fact that flexibility, curricular requirements and course availability are complementary—sort of like substitutable commodities. What may be underlying this dynamic is that students perceive impediments due to curricular requirements. However, ***sufficient curricular flexibility may allow individuals to continue toward degree despite the institutions’ failure to offer a specific course, and therein affect both the perceived (and vaunted) curricular flexibility while leaving a lamentation regarding course availability and curricular rigidity.*** This would explain the findings at the UC and Department level, and would indicate the continued importance of flexibility in the higher student satisfaction level expressed by UC students relative to UT students generally and the Toledo public in recent surveys. It also suggests that ***continued flexibility may be crucial to student satisfaction, especially in a College with so few faculty and minimal ability to influence course offerings beyond their own limited repertoire.***

Conclusions

Several insights can be gleaned from this study.

The strong overlap of “worst” and “best” attributes at the College and Department level indicates the primacy of student’s commitment to completing a degree in a timely manner. Flexibility, course availability, and avoiding superfluous requirements are recurring themes of respondents. While they laud the flexibility and personalized approach of UC, such efforts to not

³² Only 33 people responded to this question, and 25% of these noted no dissatisfaction.

go far enough to provide full satisfaction to respondents. Or, respondents are commenting on experiences in different parts of the University or at different times in their student careers.

Second, the motives and interests of ALS and IDVP students are similar regardless of age, race, or family status. Those involved in BT tend to be younger, and (not surprisingly given that they are in a 2 year program in what is predominately a baccalaureate College and University) their motives and concerns are slightly different. Regardless of these age/major differences, respondents' reaction to advertising and their view of influential sources of information are similar, including gender differentiated pattern attributes. All respondents' expect to receive attention and service from faculty and staff. ***The respondents generally reflect a consumer's attitude.*** They believe that they know what they need, and/or that obtaining a "substitute good" when they need it, may be more important than getting the exact "good" a little later.

Third, there was more dissatisfaction with the faculty and staff of UT in general, and with curricular requirements, than with University College or Department faculty, or the UC requirements. This gives pause to wonder whether the dissatisfaction with faculty and staff generally, and responses about flexibility and requirements, may have motivated so many respondents to move to UC from other UT colleges. If so, the more positive comments about and reduced complaints about faculty and staff reflect a more positive experience relative to the respondents' expectations. In which case, ***one benefit of UC in general and the IDVP and ALS programs in particular, is that it has acted as a viable alternative to students dissatisfied in other colleges,*** but who chose to transfer to UC rather than exiting the University.³³ If this deduction is correct, ***absent University College, the University of Toledo might have lost scores, hundreds, and perhaps even thousands of students and subsequently alumni.***³⁴ Further, ***these programs may be a major reason why UT's six-year completion rate is so high compared to other non-residential Universities in Ohio.***

This insight leads to a final observation with implications for the larger University. As UT navigates a period of reduced state funding, fewer faculty, and larger (and less frequent) classes, we can logically expect increased student dissatisfaction with course offerings and curricular requirements that impede their progress toward graduation. For years, the Faculty Senate, Arts and Science Council, and other similar entities have created and/or approved departmental, college, and university requirements with the caveat that it is the faculty's responsibility to create these requirements and the University's responsibility to find the resources (faculty, courses, and equipment) needed for the students to navigate the requirements successfully. The wisdom of this practice must be reconsidered in light of the dissatisfaction of students and problems of matriculation noted herein, and in other studies of UT students' experiences. Given the relationship between flexibility and student satisfaction indicated herein, implies that there should be a consideration of the impediments to smooth matriculations, and to the creation of increased flexibility across the University. This suggests the need for ***a thorough review and possible removal of unnecessary, outdated, and/or inappropriate requirements from College***

³³ A review of the negative comments about UT and the positive about University College and its Departments, indicate that availability of courses, limited majors, language requirements, lack of flexibility in standard curriculums etc. is a recurring theme in both sets of responses—factors supporting this deductive conclusion.

³⁴ Business Technology's niche is different but its importance is similar. BT students chose to attend UT because of job pressures and in pursuit of a particular curriculum and courses. If this degree program did not exist at UT, the responses of these students suggest that they would not be attending the University of Toledo.

and Departmental curriculum. Until such a review is completed, the administration might mandate that a department's first priority be to offer service courses that are part of those requirements and only secondarily staff courses for their own majors. Realigning resource expenditures with the rationale for resource provision might reduce faculty and departmental resistance to revising curricular requirements.

Until impediments to smooth matriculation are reduced via increased course availability and/or reduced numbers of requirements, time to degree and graduation rates will suffer and student dissatisfaction will continue to affect word-of-mouth recruiting. While curricular rigidity benefits UC, it is a detriment to the institution generally. ***Absent a reduction of the burdens of curricular requirements³⁵ and/or elimination of impediments to timely matriculation by other colleges, for the good of the College and the University of Toledo, UC should actively recruit UT students from other colleges.***

³⁵ This could be done either by reducing or eliminating the superfluous requirements or increasing the number and frequency of offering sections at various times of day, and in various semesters.