



For Immediate Release

Educational Value is Prime Consideration in Students' College Enrollment Choice, Though Economy Still Weighs on Decisions

Maguire Associates/Fastweb Survey Also Confirms ROI, Financial Aid Appeals and Online/Social Tools Are Factors in Enrollment Decisions

CONCORD, MA - (July 12, 2011) – Even two years after the height of the recession, economic concerns continue to influence where students choose to enroll for college, forcing many into a school that was not their first choice, according to the latest research from [Maguire Associates](#) and [Fastweb.com](#). Ultimately, though, the primary factor in students' decisions is a combination of perceived educational quality and costs.

Nearly 2,400 high school seniors were surveyed in follow-up to the annual College Decision Impact Survey that was conducted in January for insights into the factors that were most important in determining where these students enrolled. Key factors included use of social media and reliance on schools' individual net price calculators (NPCs), which all US colleges and universities will be required to provide on their websites by late October 2011.

"Families are looking carefully at whether colleges and universities deliver the ROI they're promising to students," said Tara Scholder, Senior Vice President of Maguire Associates. "This means that to meet their enrollment management goals, institutions will need to prove their value as well as be strategic with their financial aid awards."

Economy Remains a Significant Factor

Despite relative improvements, the US economy is still a major factor when it comes to enrollment decisions; for instance, more than one-third (37 percent) of seniors reported that the current economy heavily or highly influenced where they ultimately enrolled. In fact, nearly one-third (31 percent) of those who did not enroll in their first-choice school said that their main reason was that they could not afford it.

The survey findings also confirm the importance of cost and financial aid in students' decision making. Two of the most important reasons they enrolled at their chosen school were financial – "scholarship or financial assistance" (43 percent) and "total costs" (41 percent). Still, "quality of major" ranked highest in their decisions (45 percent) and "academic reputation" (38 percent) was also paramount.

"Show Me the Money"

More than half of the seniors surveyed (56 percent) received need-based financial aid from their enrollment schools, and 50 percent received merit aid. However, many did not

receive what they were hoping for; eight out of 10 respondents (82 percent) applied for need-based financial aid.

Perhaps as a result of the “shortfall,” approximately one in five seniors said that they appealed their initial financial aid offer from their enrollment school. The responsiveness of schools seems to have led many students to reverse course, enrolling in public schools despite a preference for a private education, and vice versa. For instance, one-third (33 percent) of those who preferred a public education, but ultimately enrolled in a private school, appealed the initial aid package offered by the college/university they chose. Nearly half of them (45 percent) received more aid from their enrollment schools as a result.

Public schools that sweetened their aid packages were also successful in persuading students to enroll, even if those students had initially preferred a private school. One in five (19 percent) of these “switchers” to public institutions appealed their offers from their enrollment schools, and nearly one-third of this group (32 percent) were successful in garnering additional aid.

“Although students were less likely to switch their enrollment choice from their initial preference of a public college to a private institution than vice versa, financial issues were one of the most significant reasons for a switch in either direction,” said Mark Kantrowitz, Publisher, Fastweb.com. “These issues contributed to the difficulty of making their final choice.”

Online Influence: Social Media and Net Price Calculators

In addition, online and social content and tools may have helped tip the decision making scales for students:

- Over half (54 percent) of survey respondents recalled reading information on a social media site about the school where they chose to enroll.
- Approximately one-third of them (32 percent) completed the net price calculator (NPC) provided or hosted by their enrollment schools. These online NPCs help students estimate the cost of attending individual schools, based on their financial situations and aid opportunities.

“Increasingly, institutions that provide an accurate, easy-to-use NPC with messaging built into it will have the opportunity to influence prospective students by emphasizing value as well as net price,” said Tara Scholder, Maguire Associates.

About Maguire Associates

Maguire Associates is a research-based consulting firm that exclusively serves educational clients – close to 400 of them – from colleges and universities to independent and public schools, consortia and government organizations focused on education. For 25 years, the firm has applied innovations in market research, analysis, and predictive modeling to help clients understand the dynamics of past performance, apply insightful knowledge to sound decision-making, and attain desired outcomes. For more information, visit www.maguireassoc.com.

About Fastweb

Fastweb is the nation's recognized leader in helping students pay for school, by providing scholarship and financial aid information, as well as jobs and internships. One out of three

college-bound seniors use the site, and more than 50 million* members have benefited from Fastweb's information and services. Fastweb lets students create a personalized profile that can be matched against its expansive databases of colleges and scholarships. As the oldest and most popular free online scholarship matching service, the database has more than 1.5 million scholarships totaling over \$3.4 billion. (*9 million are active users of the site.) For more information, visit www.fastweb.com.

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