

**ACCESS TO PRIVATE CAREER COLLEGES: AN INVESTIGATION INTO
STUDENTS' DECISION TO APPLY FOR ADMISSION**

by © Arif M Toor.

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Abstract

Private career colleges have been around for more than one hundred (100) years and play an important role in Canadian post secondary education. It is only recently that researchers are attempting to know more about the composition of private colleges and type of students who enroll in the programs they offer. The purpose of this study was to explore students' decision making process towards private career college programs in Canada and to investigate factors that affect their decision. This study used a qualitative research methodology involving 16 randomly selected students from a private career college in Toronto, Ontario. Analyses of the data collected through semi-structured interviews using open ended questions revealed that a majority of the students in this private career college were female and selected post secondary education programs to enhance their skills in order to meet job market requirements. They shared distinct characteristics, and self identified as having evaluated available alternatives when making college selection and were satisfied with the outcome of their decisions.

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This report on a thesis investigating students' decision making process represents completion of an extremely enlightening and challenging personal milestone. My learning experience has been supported, encouraged and enhanced by countless people throughout this journey. It was my good fortune that I had an opportunity to work with esteemed professors, colleagues, and associates who helped me in this scholarly task.

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Participants of this study were extremely supportive and willing to share their experiences to enhance my understanding of their decisions and other factors important to them. For this, I thank you all and assure you that this learning exercise will not stop here and I will always cherish this experience of working closely with you. The interviews I conducted with all of you are a rich source of information for me to consider in my professional decision making as a tutor and mentor.

I dedicate this thesis to my entire family. My parents, who have always been an inspiration to me and taught me to brave challenges of magnitude beyond my known capacity; my wife and two daughters, who had to sacrifice a lot due to my inability to spend more time with them; my brothers and sisters, who always prayed for my success and supported me in difficult times. I thank you all and love you all.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction to the research topic, the purpose of this study and student choice of a higher education institution. The chapter is divided into sections to discuss private career colleges in Canada, student demographics, problem statement and research questions. Canada offers a variety of post secondary education options to students.

According to the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC), there are ninety eight (98) universities and three hundred (300) public colleges and institutions offering post secondary education in ten (10) Canadian provinces and three (3) territories (CICIC, 2013). This provides Canadian students with a number of choices to study post secondary education in public universities and colleges. Many students in Canada still elect to attend a private college to pursue career oriented studies.

1.1 Private Career Colleges in Canada

Private career colleges are an important component in Canada's post secondary education system as they offer specialized courses to equip students with work-related skills and expertise. Private career colleges have been around for over one hundred (100) years and provide an important service to individuals seeking practical skills and training to better their employment opportunities (Marin, 2009). There are more than one thousand (1000) private career colleges in Canada and until recently very little was known about students who study there (R.A. Malatest & Associates, 2007). As reported by Li (2006), given the paucity of academic research Canadian private career colleges are relatively unknown in post secondary education research. This study attempts to understand the factors that students self-identify to have an effect on a student's decision to apply to a private career college and the process which leads to that decision.

1.2 Choosing a Post Secondary Institution

The decision to choose a post secondary educational institution is complex and can have a significant impact on a student's career (Gilory, 2008). There is very little research available regarding a student's decision making process on how they choose a private career college but research indicates the selection of a university can include several sequential decisions (Dawes & Brown, 2005), and may involve multiple decision makers (Broekemier & Seshadri, 2000). Johnston (2010) reported that the process of selection of a university or a college involves multiple decision makers with different attributes, and can be laden with emotions as well as rational choice processes. Students collect information about a university and program from a variety of sources. Recent research indicated that most universities in the United States attract students through the internet using social media websites and blogs (Johnston, 2010). According to a study conducted by Barnes and Mattson (2009), the percentage of colleges in United States that used social media in recruiting students increased to eighty five (85) in 2008 as compared to fifty one (51) in 2007.

1.3 Factors Affecting Students' Choice

When deciding on where to study, students and their families must sort through a variety of factors such as price, quality of the institution, campus life, the college's standing in the corporate sector and national rankings (Obermeit, 2012). According to Noel-Levitz's (2007) report titled National Student Satisfaction and Priorities, college choice plays a significant role in student satisfaction. The report further stated that, regardless of institution type, students who enroll at their first-choice college express greater satisfaction and a greater likelihood to re-enroll. Students who are not satisfied or are attending institutions other than their first choice

could be at a greater risk of withdrawing (Noel-Levitz, 2007). Johnston (2010) conducted a study examining the influence of various sources of information on a student's decision to enroll in a university and concluded that "faculty, staff and career coaches are highly influential and ranked up with mother and father" (p. 20). During the same study Johnston (2010) suggested that students prefer to receive information through traditional media such as paper mail instead of the internet.

1.4 Private Career College Student Demographics

Private career college students in Canada are predominantly female, with family commitments and childcare responsibilities (Li, 2006). The recent enrolment trend in private colleges suggests a high female participation rate. Interestingly the college enrollments have been decreasing between the years 1993 and 2003 due to the decreased interest in private career college programs exhibited by female students. Li (2006) however, did not explore the reasons why students applied to courses offered by private career colleges. Li (2006) also concluded that there is no difference among earnings of private college certificate holders and of high school graduates.

Private career college certificate holders are more likely to be employed as compared with high school graduates. Li (2006) did not investigate whether better employability was the reason for students to apply to private career colleges. This was viewed as a missing link and provided one of the reasons this researcher chose to investigate what influences a student's decision to apply to a private college program instead of completing their high school diploma and moving into public colleges and universities.

Berger's (2009) findings are consistent with that of Li (2006). According to Berger (2009), post secondary participation rates have been falling, not rising, in recent years. At the

same time, the gap in the participation rates between wealthy and less wealthy Canadians has not narrowed. “The task of ensuring that Canada is well positioned, in terms of the development of its human capital, to meet the economic and social challenges of the 21st century is far from complete” (Berger, 2009, p. 27). DiMaria (2007) reported that for-profit and private colleges are the first choice for minorities, especially Hispanics living in the United States. DiMaria (2007) also suggested that private career colleges must be closely observed by state regulatory bodies and students should be provided with better platforms to address their reservations. Berger (2009) reported that Canadian private career colleges provide services to a different cohort of students than those who study in public colleges or universities. A majority of the students consider private colleges as their first choice and report a number of reasons why they accepted admission. These reasons include, career development, short term programs and flexibility of curricula (R.A. Malatest, 2009). Berger (2009) stated that private career colleges are popular among new immigrants because these colleges provide an opportunity to them to get Canadian credentials as their overseas qualifications are not recognized in Canada. This presents an opportunity for an investigation to understand the reasons immigrants are deciding to apply to private career college programs in Canada.

According to Auld (2005), private career colleges are more attractive for students not only because they offer specific and well targeted programs, but also due to their continuous entry admission policy, as compared with fixed entry times for public colleges and universities. Auld (2005) reported that the success of private career colleges is largely due to the combination of training available on demand and curricula focused on skills needed for entry-level jobs. Obermeit (2012) stated that a majority of the “current literature available on student choice of universities is dominated by three topics: (a) choice models, (b) choice factors, and (c)

information sources young people use to explore their options after school” (p. 208). University choice models explored in existing research explain “the influences affecting prospective students’ choice of which college to attend” (Chapman, 1981, p. 490) and choice factors stand for those criteria the deciding student uses to evaluate the available options (Kim & Gasman, 2011; Kotler & Fox, 2002). Dahari and Abduh (2011) reported that these influential factors include price, programs and prominence, promotion, facilities, environment convenience, and scholarships. This study is an attempt to further explore choice models and choice factors in terms of Canadian private career college students’ post secondary choices.

1.5 Statement of the Problem

The problem that the study was based upon is the lack of research available involving private career college students in Canada. Private career college students, like conventional students, experience diverse challenges when choosing an institution for their further studies. The complexity and importance of the decision requires an understanding of their post secondary choice motives. Unlike students who enroll into programs offered by public colleges and universities immediately after completing high school, little is known about the characteristics, and composition of students in private career colleges in Canada. Research has established that adult learners are different from traditional college learners as many of them have family and job responsibilities (Cercone, 2008). The majority of adult educators agree that adult learners are students who enter or re-enter education with special characteristics that differentiate them from other conventional learners (Majid, Othman & Rahmat, 2007).

There is little research on why students choose to apply for admission to private career colleges in Canada. After a thorough review of the literature, only one recent survey conducted by R.A. Malatest (2009) was found to explore the characteristics and nature of private career

college students in Canada. R.A. Malatest (2009) confirmed that private career colleges tend to serve students with a different profile and personal history than those enrolled in public colleges or universities. Students opt for career colleges not as a second choice after having failed to gain access to a public institution, but because these colleges provide an opportunity for them to acquire job-related training through comparatively short courses which can be completed without having to leave work for two or more years (Berger, 2009).

1.6 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate factors affecting students' decisions to apply to private career colleges and to analyze students' decision making processes to explore why they choose to apply for one of the programs offered by private career colleges in Canada. The study uses a qualitative method design to collect and analyze empirical data from randomly selected participants through semi-structured interviews. The researcher explored the reasons for students' choices involving private career college students in Canada. As suggested by Li (2006), a study such as this one further contributes to improving our understanding of private career college students and explores important factors they self identified with during the decision making process. On the basis of the findings, the study also provided possible suggestions to private college administrators to help them evaluate how they may improve access into their courses.

1.7 Researcher's Interest

My role working with private career students fuelled my interest in conducting this study. Serving as a lecturer in private career colleges for seven (7) years and leading course administration for two years, I had a clear understanding of the recruitment process in private career colleges and the most common objectives students have in mind when choosing a

program. I observed students facing unique challenges of balancing their personal, family and professional commitments. Being their teacher and mentor, it was part of my job to help them achieve their professional goals. I was always interested in exploring the reasons why students have selected to enroll in a for-profit institute where they are required to pay higher fees rather than going for the heavily subsidized Canadian public education system. I also observed students' informal discussions where they shared that continuous enrolment, fast-track learning, and career relevance are a few reasons why they preferred private career colleges over public post secondary education institutions. At the core of this study was my interest in qualifying and validating these observations and contributing to the literature involving private career college students where little currently exists. The fact that I am in an environment where I have the opportunity to access students' discussions on the topic of college selection, might be a potential source of bias as I have developed some preconceived ideas in this area.

1.8 Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What do the students self-identify as their main objective for further education?
2. What are the reasons a student self-identifies for applying for admission to a private career college program?
3. What factors contribute to their decision?
4. What is the process followed by students when making admission decisions?

The questions noted above all fall under a qualitative research design as noted by Creswell (1998). Lee, Mitchell, and Sablynski (1999) stated that questions that begin with how or what lend themselves to qualitative study. Questions in a qualitative research design often begin with 'what' or 'how' and inform the reader as to what the study will do (Kinmond, 2012). Qualitative

research is usually cyclical rather than linear (Reason & Rowan, 1981), and explores the qualitative experiences of the research subjects (Ewan, Kinmond, & Holmes, 2010). Thus questions that help explore feelings, experiences, and ideas are used in qualitative research (Kinmond, 2012). Qualitative methods aim to answer questions about the ‘what’, ‘how’ or ‘why’ of a phenomenon (Bricky & Green, 2007, p. 3).

1.9 Significance of the Study

This study described the factors influencing a student’s decision to apply to a private career college program. These findings contribute to the current body of Canadian research on the characteristics of private career college students, particularly the decision making factors that contribute to the students’ choice of career oriented studies at a private for-profit college versus the academic programs offered by the public institutions. The study also explored a student’s decision making process that may help to develop understanding of choice models adapted by career college students in Canada.

Research studies such as this one that attempts to investigate access to private career colleges and explore factors affecting students’ decisions to apply for admission were encouraged by Berger (2009), R.A. Malatest (2009), and Li (2006). Understanding the student demographics such as the size of student populations, their composition (Li, 2006), and why they choose private career college programs have practical applications for private career colleges, add to the field of research, and explore the understanding of individual students (R.A. Malatest (2009). This information is helpful, specifically for private career colleges and generally for all post secondary educational institutions in the development of policies and strategies for programs they offer based on student preferences. As reported by Maringe (2006), in order to optimize their activities, educational institutions need to understand students’ needs

and how to adapt methods which can best help students to decide where to attend university. This study may also be beneficial for decision makers responsible for allocating resources and revising program content. Just as important, the findings and conclusions drawn from this study can assist prospective students in making informed decisions about evaluating the programs offered by various private career colleges. The outcome of this study provides value to students in their decisions regarding transition to the world of work through education at a time when tough economic challenges and labour access play a key role in market negotiations.

1.10 Definition of Terms

- Private Career Colleges Act (2005) defined private career college as an “educational institution or other institution, agency or entity that provides one or more vocational programs to students for a fee and pursuant to individual contracts with the students.”
- The terms private career colleges and private colleges were used alternatively in this study report.
- A student was someone who was enrolled in one of the programs offered by one private career college in Canada.
- Student choice referred to the factors affecting prospective students’ choice including decision making processes adopted by students when selecting a higher education institution such as a college or university
- Choice factors referred to the criteria that students used when evaluating available options for their matriculation decisions
- Decision making is a process of making a choice from a number of alternatives to achieve a desired result (Eisenfuhr, 2011).

1.11 Overview of the Study

Chapter one presents an introduction to this study and the justification of the reasons for attempting it. This chapter points to the lack of empirical data available on private career college students' decision making factors and processes. The chapter also includes my personal and professional background, research questions, statement of the problem and the population under investigation. I have also discussed the qualitative research design and why it is suitable for a study like this one.

Chapter two provides a review of the literature on private career college students, student choice of higher education and the students' decision making process. I looked for the relevant material on private career college students using available data resources such as ERIC, MUN Library, and the internet, and decided to borrow the literature on student choice from university and community college research as little is available pertaining to private career college students. Data from other countries on student choice and decision making processes is also used to enhance understanding of the topic and to provide a comprehensive discussion of the literature. The decision making models such as rational decision making and bounded rationality decision making are briefly discussed.

Chapter three introduces the reader to the methodology used in this study. I have also explored the rationale for using social constructivism under a qualitative research regime and justified the use of interviews as a tool for data collection. The chapter also covers topics such as participants' selection, ethics review, data collection, and data analysis.

Chapter four provides the discussion and results. All data is compiled to extract appropriate themes to elaborate results. Themes are then described with statistics and trends

learned through data composition. This chapter expresses the results in order to understand private career college students' choice and decision making processes. Important themes such as why students choose private career colleges, students' reasons for continuing education and decision making process are explicitly mentioned in this chapter. This chapter also provides a platform for analyses and conclusion and builds on the selected methodology for this study.

Chapter five details the researcher's analysis of data collected and results of this study. It examines the results in light of the objectives of the study and provides an understanding of results to the reader. For analytical purposes, various decision making models discussed in the literature review are compared with the responses of participants collected during this study. The findings of this study are presented along with references from the literature.

Chapter six provides comparison of findings of this study with available research to draw conclusions and where required the need for further research is also noted. Conclusions drawn are mentioned in a point form with evidence drawn through the process of design, data collection, results and analyses of this study. This chapter also provides the limitations of this study and the scope of future research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter provides a review of the literature in order to establish the foundation and context for this study. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section provides findings of the existing literature about private career college students and their characteristics. The second section outlines the issues of students' choice of higher education institutions. The third section discusses the importance of decision making in an academic setting, the rational model of decision making as explained by Schoenfeld (2011), and the bounded rationality model introduced by Simon (1982, 1997, 2009).

2.1 Students in Private Career Colleges

Private career colleges play an important role in the provision of post secondary education in Canada. These colleges help to fill a competency gap in the education system by providing a more flexible study alternative to more traditional full time programs offered by the Canadian public sector (Li, 2006). There were an estimated one hundred fifty six thousand (156,000) students enrolled in certificate and diploma programs offered by private career colleges in Canada during the year 2005 (Berger, 2009). The above stated number does not include those studying language or through distance learning as these programs are of less than six (6) months duration and are considered off-campus offerings. Private career college students represented about nine percent (9%) of the total post secondary population in Canada for the year 2005 (Berger, 2009). The programs offered by private career colleges are diverse, flexible, and constantly adapt to the requirements of job markets. The range of programs includes business and commerce, financial management, secretarial science, computer sciences, health sciences and various others (Li, 2006). Although the public sector education institutions may offer programs in similar disciplines, students perceived private career college programs as more

targeted towards job market needs and their own professional development (Berger, 2009). Private career colleges have programs that are designed to offer skills according to the demands of labour market resulting in short more targeted curricula as compared with the public sector community colleges and universities (R.A. Malatest & Associates, 2008).

2.1.1 Characteristics of Private Career College Students

The majority of private career college students are over the age of twenty five (25) and more likely to have children when compared with students in community and other public colleges in Canada (R.A. Malatest & Associates, 2009). According to Berger (2009), seventy two percent (72%) of private career college students are female. Berger (2009) also reported that a majority of private career college students in Canada have lower levels of household income. Private career colleges in Canada usually attract students with a different profile and personal history than those enrolled in public colleges or universities (R.A. Malatest & Associates, 2009). According to R.A. Malatest & Associates (2008), the majority of career college students took a break between high school and post secondary education. Among these, sixty two percent (62%) reported career indecision or a lack of interest as a reason for delay. Twenty seven percent (27%) mentioned financial difficulties and twenty percent (20%) blamed it on personal and family issues, including social commitments. Perna (2002) also reported a high influence of government's financial policies on access to private colleges. Thompson and Zumeta (2001) reported institutional policies of finance and curriculum delivery have a direct impact on access to private post secondary education. As per R.A. Malatest and Associates (2009), thirty three percent (33%) of career college students show interest in post secondary education as a means to a career or job and twenty five percent (25%) reported general interest as reason for admission. The graduation rate among private career college students is considerably higher than those of

public colleges and universities (Berger, 2009). As further reported by R.A. Malatest and Associates (2009), ninety eight percent (98%) of private career college students successfully completed their courses. R.A. Malatest and Associates (2009) concluded that higher financial investment is one of the contributors towards high graduation rates but also agreed that private career college students are more committed and choose better courses of study as compared with public college and university students.

As reported by Berger (2009), private career college students can be placed in one of the following categories:

Older workers seeking retraining; younger students seeking programs not available elsewhere; individuals seeking very short-term, skills-oriented education; individuals considering career college as a springboard to public college or university studies; and immigrants seeking new skills acquisition since their education or credentials are not recognized in Canada. (p. 31)

Private career colleges are not considered a second choice for post secondary education by Canadian private career college students. Seventy two percent (72%) of career college students reported that the college where they were studying was their first choice (R.A. Malatest & Associates, 2009). Eight percent (8%) preferred to study in a different private career college and only twelve percent (12%) reported a preference for a public college. A study conducted in the United States also confirmed that career colleges attracted students with high enough grade point averages to go to four year university programs (Pluvoise, 2008). Another Canadian study by Trache and Sweet (2008) acknowledged that female students over the age of twenty five (25) prefer to enroll in private career college programs. As concluded by R.A. Malatest & Associates

(2009), students opt for career colleges not as a second choice after having failed to gain access to a public institution. These colleges provide an opportunity for them to acquire job-related training through comparatively short courses which, can be completed without having to leave work for two or more years (Berger, 2009).

There was an obvious decline in the student enrollment for private career colleges during the years 1993 and 2003. This trend can be attributed to lower enrollment among women. According to Li (2006), ten percent (10%) of female Canadians between the ages of twenty five (25) and thirty four (34) had a diploma from private career colleges in 1993. This ratio had decreased to five percent (5%) by 2003, showing a negative trend in overall enrolment. Li (2006) presented the economic shift as one of the reasons for the above trend. He reported that secretarial science was very popular in 1990s as thirty nine percent (39%) of all career college graduates had a certificate in this field. Similar to overall enrolment, the proportion of students enrolling in secretarial certificates also decreased to eighteen percent (18%) by 2003.

Young women shifted their focus on business and commerce instead of secretarial sciences. Another category of programs offered by the private career colleges appeared under the title miscellaneous. This included hairstyling, real estate training, tourism and travel certification (Li, 2006). The overall enrolment for male students between the age of twenty five (25) and thirty four (34) increased during the years 1993 and 2003. Li (2006) reported that difference between earnings of high school graduates and ones with private career college certificate was minimal. He concluded that graduates of private career colleges are more likely to be employed than high school graduates. R.A. Malatest & Associates (2009) reported that seventy nine percent (79%) of private college graduates were working either full or part time within six (6) to nine (9) months after graduation. Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) in

Ontario did not collect information on graduation rates and employment status of private career college students (MTCU, 2011).

Although the work of Li (2006) and R.A. Malatest & Associates (2009) presented fair records of enrolment and graduation of private career college students, the reasons why students applied for these courses were not extensively discussed. There were however, some studies from England and Scotland that suggested students choose universities based on reputation, scholarships, cost, location, and distance from home (Briggs, 2006; Callender & Jackson, 2008; Ridley, White, Styles, & Morrison, 2005). Griffith and Rask (2007) reported that college choices for students in the United States were affected by national rankings as students prefer to enroll in colleges with higher rankings. A study conducted by Hoover (2008) concluded that academic reputation and financial aid also played important roles in the college decision-making process for United States students.

2.2 Students' Choice of Higher Education Institutions

Educational institutions are challenged to attract good students each year in competition with other higher education institutions (Johnston, 2010). Marketing departments in most higher education institutions follow the perception that traditional means of communication are giving way to newer social media methods such as FaceBook, Twitter, and YouTube. (Marklein, 2009). Johnston (2009) reported that opinions of some consumers were highly credible and had a great impact on other consumers. As termed by Berry and Keller (2003), the "Influentials" have higher influence on others' opinions about what to buy, where to eat, and even who to vote for. Students' processes of admission decision making were influenced by the information they receive and also where the information was coming from (Johnston, 2010). In the same study

Johnston (2010) reported that students as well as the university staff consider personal sources of information, such as friends and family members, as most influential when making matriculation decisions. A research poll conducted by Ipsos Reid and the Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counseling (CERIC) found ninety five percent (95%) of young adults turned to their parents for career and job advice (CERIC, 2007).

Choosing a higher education institution involves multiple processes (Obermeit, 2012). Terenzini, Cabrera, and Bernal (2001) segmented the process of university choice into three (3) stages; predisposition, search, and choice. Brown, Varley, and Pal (2009) referred to Kotler's (1976) five (5) stages model; problem recognition, information search, evaluating alternatives, purchase decision, and post purchase behavior to evaluate student decision making in universities in the United Kingdom. Perna (2006) reported that most researchers agree with the fact that every student who is willing to go to university needs to pass through some stages, taking into account that the sequence may differ individually. Most research in the United States is undertaken either with a focus on the influences on the enrollment decision, which is one phase in the student choice process (DesJardins & Toutkoushian, 2005; Perna 2006), or tries to keep the whole process of matriculation decision in view (Galotti & Mark, 1994).

2.3 Factors Affecting Student Choice

It is important for education institutions to know what factors are considered highly influential by students when choosing a university (DesJardins, Dundar, & Hendel, 1999; Litten, 1982; Maringe, 2006). Galotti and Mark (1994) concluded that US "students structure the decision in remarkably similar ways throughout the period of time studied, considering an average of about eight to eleven criteria and four or five schools at any given time' (p. 603).

These factors include academic reputation of the institutions (Kim & Gasman, 2011; Pampaloni, 2010), good faculty and the quality of intended program (Hoyt & Brown, 2003; Maringe, 2006), financial considerations such as cost, scholarship availability, and bursaries (Galloti & Mark, 1994; Hoyt & Brown, 2003; Pampaloni, 2010; Rowan-Kenyon, Bell & Perna, 2008; Liang-Hsuan, 2008), distance from home (Bartl, 2009; Briggs, 2006), and type of the institution (Galloti & Mark 1994). Liang-Hsuan (2008) reported that graduate students enrolled in professional programs ranked factors such as the ranking of the program and affordability of tuition with high importance in choosing a Canadian graduate school.

2.3.1 Cost and Benefit of Higher Education

Some sort of cost and benefit analysis was one of the essential parts of students' choice processes (Schwartz, 2011). There was empirical evidence that higher education costs were important determinants of schooling choices, particularly for low-income families (Lillis & Tian, 2008; Long, 2004; McPherson & Shulenburg, 2008; Paulsen & St. John, 2002). The cost of attending a particular education institution included direct and indirect components that did not only consist of tuition fees but also the cost of living, travelling, and boarding and lodging as well (Schwartz, 2011). There are significant differences between the fees of public and private sector education organizations and these differences suggest that the decision to attend a particular college or university is associated with consumers' response to prices (Lillis & Tian, 2008). Price is a very important matter for students enrolling in a new program (Dahari & Abduh, 2011). Empirically, many researchers have found evidence that demand for education is negatively related to the price of attendance (Mansky & Wise, 1983; Montgomery, 2002; Avery & Hoxby, 2004; Ivy, 2008; Hsieh, 2010). In this regard, Jackson (1982) has proposed a model on

students' choice of university and concluded that tuition fees were among the most influential factors for them to pursue their next level of study (Dahari & Abduh, 2011).

Students' choice process is also influenced by expected benefits that may result from earning a degree from a particular institution (Moretti, 2004; Perna, 2005; Paulsen, 2001). Most students usually associate the expected benefits of pursuing post secondary education with income streams that are expected after earning a college/university degree (Arcidiacono, Hotz, & Kang, 2010; Long, 2004; Paulsen, 2001). Arcidiacono, Hotz, & Kang (2010) reported that expected earning is an important determinant of higher education choice. Benefits of choosing a particular university may include the prestige of being a graduate of a reputed institution (College Board, 2008; Hossler, Braxton & Coopersmith, 1989), an expectation of high earnings streams (Jimenez & Salas-Velasco, 2000), receiving tuition discounts and scholarships (Morphew & Taylor, 2011), and the quality of extracurricular programs (Menon, 2004). Availability of scholarships and grants was also another factor that influences students' decision when choosing a university. A study conducted in Malaysia revealed that the cost of tuition is one of the most important influences on students' choice when selecting a university (Dahari & Abduh, 2011). Drewes and Michael (2006) concluded that Canadian students prefer to apply to universities that spend more on scholarships and teaching.

2.3.2 Program Uniqueness

It is a common marketing strategy for higher education institutions to try to distinguish themselves by offering unique programs (Dahari & Abduh, 2011). Studies conducted by Paulsen (1990), Montgomery (2002), Avery and Hoxby (2004), and Hsieh (2010) revealed that the types of programs offered were among the significant factors influencing prospective students to enroll in a university. Liang-Hsuan's (2008) study concluded that the reputation of the program offered

is among the factors influencing students to enroll at a university. The work of Dahari and Abduh (2011) revealed that the type of programs offered was one of the most important influences on students' choice of an academic institution.

2.3.3 Sources of Information

The source of information is an important factor as students' decisions are impacted by advice received from parents, siblings, friends and teachers (Kim & Gasman, 2011). Forty one percent (41%) of Canadians reported mentors as the top rated source for career advice (CERIC, 2007). Research suggests that parents who are educated themselves were of great help in college selection as compared with the parents who did not have a college or university education (Galloti & Mark, 1994; Kim & Gasman, 2011). Brooks (2002) and Rowan-Kenyon et al. (2008) concluded that the high school attended by students also influenced the choice of college or/and university and helped in the whole application process. Obermeit (2012) reported that it is essential for universities "to know what messages they should spread through which media at what time to which target group, to increase the chance of being noticed by the students and convince them to apply and enroll" (p. 218). Students seek information either by directly searching using independent sources, or by requesting through universities, schools, and school counselors (Galloti & Mark, 1994). Working class individuals planning to enter vocational or technical college tend to quote their parents as the source of initial information and aspiration (Hemsley-Brown, 1999).

The kind of information students look for and will respond to differs individually as well as at various phases of the selection process (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). In the United States, university faculty and staff were among the top rated sources of information surpassing school

counselors, parents, friends, and siblings (Johnston, 2010). A recent poll conducted by Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counseling (CERIC), suggested mentors as the number one (1) source of career advice (CERIC, 2007). Briggs (2006) and Heine, Willich, Schneider, and Sommer (2008) reported that publications by and about universities had been the most used and best rated source of information. Liang-Hsuan (2008) reported that graduate students considered information provided by university marketing departments as the most valuable source.

2.3.4 Facilities and Environment

Physical evidence is the tangible component of the service offering (Dahari & Abduh, 2011). As reported by Ivy (2008), a variety of tangible aspects were evaluated by university target markets, ranging from the teaching materials to the appearance of the buildings and lecture facilities at the university. Similarly, international and comfortable living environments as well as convenience in parking areas, sport complexes, and hostels were also significant factors especially for international students (Hsieh, 2010). Liang-Hsuan (2008) also ranked location of the university as highly influential for international students seeking admission to Canadian higher education institutions.

2.4 Decision Making

Lunenburg (2010) discussed three key elements of decision making in an academic setting. First, there are a number of options to chose from, second, decision making involves more than simply selecting a final choice among alternatives, and third, it involves a purpose or target resulting from the mental activity of the decision maker (Lunenburg, 2010). Adult learners may make a decision to go to an educational institution for different reasons than traditional students (Mujtaba & McAtavey, 2006). Research conducted by March (2010) suggests that

historically scientists have emphasized two basic models of decision making: the rational model and the bounded rationality model (Lunenburg, 2010). Both of these models are discussed below.

2.4.1 The Rational Model

Under the rational model, decision makers make decisions under certainty (Lunenburg, 2010). This means they know their alternatives; they know their outcomes; they know their decision criteria; and they have the ability to make the optimum choice and then to implement it (Towler, 2010). The process of admission decision making is assumed to be rational (Lunenburg, 2010) and students may follow the six step process as explained by Schoenfeld (2011). (See Figure 1)

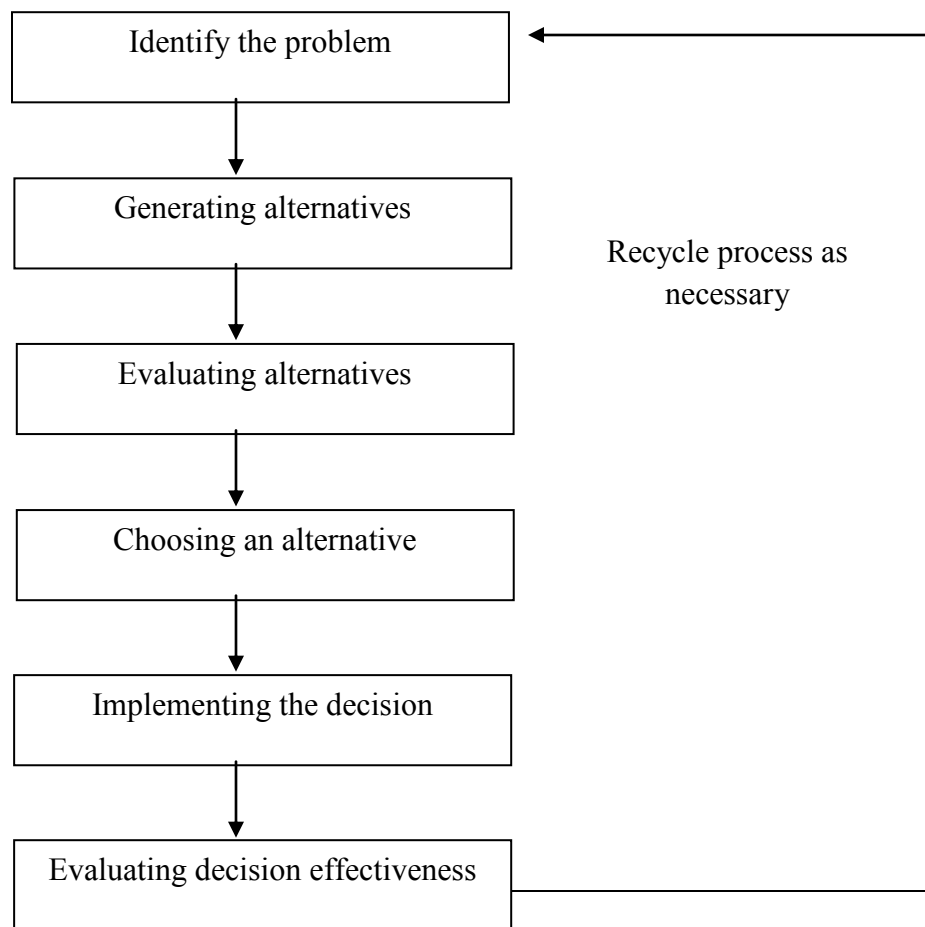


Figure 2.1: Schoenfeld's (2011) the decision-making process

The first step is to identify a problem or opportunity. In the scenario of admission decision making by private career college students, the problem or opportunity can be a need to improve one's skills to meet the job market requirements (see figure 2). The second stage is to generate alternatives available in the market. This can mean looking for programs in the required discipline offered by private career colleges in Canada (see figure 2). In the third stage, students evaluate the available information on all courses, colleges, cost, and other important decision making factors. A program of choice and college among the evaluated alternatives is selected as a result and students decide to apply admission. The last stage is when effectiveness of the decision is evaluated, such as students' satisfaction based upon their earlier perception of the quality of education they will receive. Perhaps one of the most important features of this model is the flexibility of repetition and recycling. As decision making is a recurring event (Lunenburg, 2010), students have the opportunity to learn from past decisions and refine the process as they feel fitting.

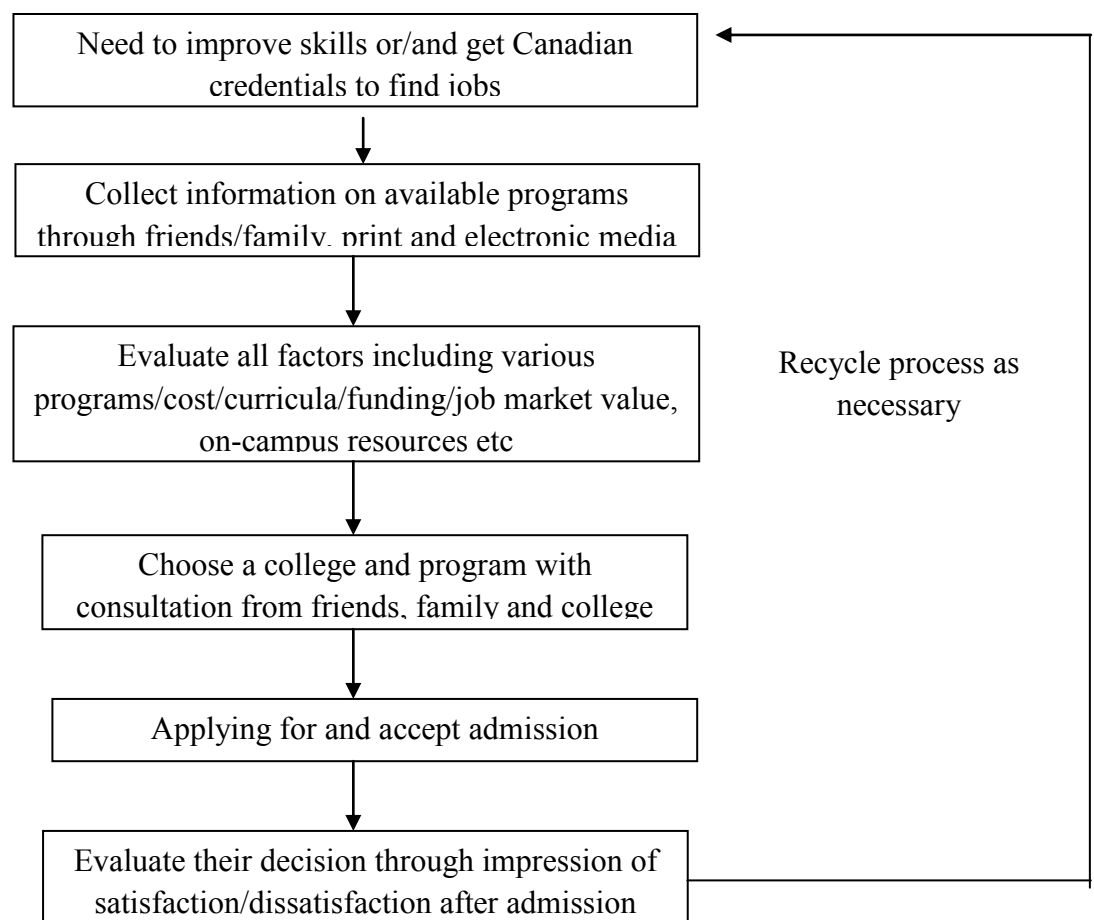


Figure 2.2: The decision-making scenario of a private career college student

2.4.2 The Bounded Rationality Model

The rational model characterizes the decision maker as completely rational ((Lunenburg, 2010). This implies that they have perfect information about all the alternatives and they are able to determine all consequences of their decisions. The decision maker is supposed to have the ability to establish a complete preference scale for their decisions ((Lunenburg, 2010). This may not be true for all decision makers as reality has its limitations which make the decision making process less than perfect (Simon, 1997, 2009). The term bounded rationality was introduced by Simon (1982, 1997, 2009) to describe the decision maker who would like to make the best decisions but normally settles for less than the optimal (Lunenburg, 2010).

As explained by Simon (1982, 1992, 2009) and quoted by Lunenburg (2010), the bounded rationality model implies the following:

1. Decisions will always be based on an incomplete and, to some degree, inadequate comprehension of the true nature of the problem being faced.
2. Decision makers will never succeed in generating all possible alternative solutions for consideration.
3. Alternatives are always evaluated incompletely because it is impossible to predict accurately all consequences associated with each alternative.
4. The ultimate decision regarding which alternative to choose must be based on some criterion other than maximization or optimization because it is impossible to ever determine which alternative is optimal. (p.8)

Students applying for matriculation at private career colleges may fall under the bounded rationality model of decision making as most college students face challenges such as lack of

availability of information, cost constraints, lack of knowledge about curriculum and reputation of the college (Boudarbat, 2006).

In summary, the rational model characterizes decision makers as completely rational and implies that they search through perfect information to make optimal decisions (Lunenborg, 2010); whereas the bounded rationality model considers the inherent imperfections of decision makers and the social and organizational systems in which they are imbedded that restrict decision makers to finding solutions that are less than optimal (Simon, 2009). An understanding of how career college students make matriculation decisions can further evaluate the implications of these two major decision making approaches on the selected population.

Chapter 3 Methodology

Given the nature and scope of this study, the researcher adopted a qualitative research methodology. As reported by Creswell (2012), “qualitative research is used to develop theories when partial or inadequate theories exist for certain populations and samples or existing theories do not adequately capture the complexity of the problem we are examining”(p. 48). According to McMillan and Wergin (2002), qualitative research “is a philosophy of knowing that focuses on understanding from the perspective of whoever and whatever is being studied ... [and is] based on the assumption that reality is subjective and dependent on context” (p.119). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) define qualitative research as a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. Qualitative research design allows researchers to look at the world as a “series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). These definitions provide a basic understanding of qualitative research and explain the salient characteristics of research design in qualitative genre.

Qualitative research’s definition by Creswell (1998) made similar points as noted above. According to Creswell (1998), qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports

detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. As noted by Lee, Mitchell, and Sablynski (1999), “Qualitative research is well suited for the purposes of description, interpretation, and explanation” (p. 164).

Use of interviews for data collection is common in qualitative research design as they help us find out what and how people feel (Bricky & Green, 2007). Qualitative design interviews are well suited to “explore meaning and perceptions to gain a better understanding and to generate hypotheses” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 314). Semi-structured interviews may be used as the sole data source for a qualitative research project (Adams, McIlvain, & Lacy, 2002). These interviews are usually scheduled in advance and preferably conducted outside of the routine work/life events (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured interviews generally consist of questions that require detailed answers from the respondents and might trigger supplemental questions from the discussion between researcher and the respondents. Semi-structured interviews are the most widely used interviewing format for qualitative research (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). These interviews can be conducted with an individual or in groups depending on the sample size and nature of the research. “Most commonly they are only conducted once for an individual or group and take between thirty (30) minutes to several hours to complete” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 315).

For this study, the researcher interviewed 16 students from an Ontario based private career college. Qualitative methodology with a socialist constructivist approach is used to collect and analyze data. Qualitative methodology resonates with this study as the researcher attempted to explore a complex problem in a naturalistic way, conducted face to face

interviews with participants in their natural habitat and responses are shared in their own words. Creswell (2012) presented the following reason for using qualitative methodology:

We conduct qualitative research because a problem or issue needs to be explored. We also conduct qualitative research because we need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue. This detail can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature. (p. 98)

A social constructivist approach within qualitative research methodology helped this researcher explore how each participant experienced different influences from various factors within their own circumstances. It also improved my understanding of the process of how each participant made the matriculation decision. Creswell (2012) argues that social constructivists hold assumptions that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work.

The constructivist approach was also chosen to ensure that the student voice was heard and reflected. This aspect is critical if the findings are to be used by private career colleges to develop programs that better meet student expectations and adjust their marketing strategies accordingly. The findings may also provide improved understanding of students' decision making process which can then be put into practice through tailored information sessions and niche targeting.

3.1 Participants

Participants for this study were students in a small private career college in the Province of Ontario. Name and location of the college was not provided to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of participants. The college had a student population of about four hundred (400) and

offered a variety of diploma programs in various disciplines including business, engineering technology, healthcare, and information technology. The majority of students were recipients of a government funded grant and some students were under the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP).

Qualitative data is information rich and collection is time consuming. A total of sixteen (16) students took part in this study. The invitations were sent to all students enrolled in programs offered by the selected private career college through display of a poster (Appendix B) at student notice boards and other visible areas on campus. The participation was without any prerequisite and participants were selected randomly. Due to the use of open invitation, all students had an equal opportunity to voluntarily participate in this study. This college has a total population of approximately four hundred (400) students in various disciplines. Initially twenty (20) students showed interest in participating however, four (4) could not come for an interview. The number of interviews conducted for this meets the requirement of qualitative design. Baker and Edwards (2012) presented a detailed argument on the number of interviews needed to be done in qualitative research and concluded:

The recurring answer to the question ‘how many’ is ‘it depends’. The usefulness of this resource for students, lecturers and researchers rests on the guidance offered by our contributors as to what it depends upon. These include epistemological and methodological questions about the nature and purpose of the research: whether the focus of the objectives and of analysis is on commonality or difference or uniqueness or complexity or comparison or instances, Practical issues to take into account include the level of degree, the time available, institutional committee requirements and both

philosophically and pragmatically, the judgment of the epistemic community in which a student or researcher wishes to be or is located, is another key consideration. (p. 42)

Sixty two and half percent (62.5% n=10) of participants who took part in this study were female, and thirty eight and a half percent (38.5% n=6) were male. The participants represented the overall student demographics of the female majority in the college, and were enrolled in a variety of programs such as business administration, computerized accounting, personal support worker, medical office assistant and engineering technologies. Given the total student population size, and its composition of student demographics, the sample size is representative of the broad population in the private career college where research participants were invited from.

3.2 Ethics

An ethics proposal was submitted and approved by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research at Memorial University and a second proposal was submitted to the institution which the students were attending. The approval letter is included in Appendix A. Every effort was made to acknowledge and address the following ethical issues: potential harms and benefits, storage of data, voluntary consent, free and informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. Respondents were not paid to participate in this study and were informed of the procedure to follow in case some harm came their way as a result of participating in this study. All participants voluntarily signed the required documents to give free and informed consent and their personal details were made anonymous to safeguard their identity. Respondents were also informed that they could decide not to participate or continue to participate in this study at any time prior to the interviews.

To ensure voluntary participation and maintain independence, the current students in the Diploma in Accounting and Finance program were not allowed to participate in the study as this is the course I currently teach. The poster designed for the purpose of inviting participants had clearly mentioned that students in direct connection with the researcher were not allowed to participate. The data collected was kept in a secure location and was only used for the purpose of this study. A copy of the poster is included in Appendix B.

3.3 Scope and Limitations

The study involves an investigation into students' decisions to apply into programs offered by one private career college in Ontario. It does not include their level of satisfaction, graduation rates or overall performance during their tenure as students. The participants were from one geographic area so the results may not generalize to the Canadian student population as a whole. As a staff member in a private career college and being involved in conducting assessments of students' admission applications, it is important to me be able to comprehend the individual experience of each student through formal research.

3.4 Bias

All researchers like other human beings can develop a bias towards a topic, person or area. Being a staff member in one of the private career colleges in Ontario, the researcher observes students and speaks with them regularly. This may pose a bias and allow the researcher's own views to be included in the analysis. To limit the bias, I used data collected only for the purpose of this study and college administration was requested to help in providing a conducive environment for data collection. In order to maintain independence, students from the classes taught by the researcher were not allowed to participate in this study.

3.5 Data Collection

The researcher used a qualitative methodology to collect and analyze data from participants to further understand the process and reasons for matriculation decision. All students in the college were invited to voluntarily take part in the study. The campus manager was requested through a letter (see Appendix C) for permission to contact students and to use the college's notice board to provide information. A poster (see Appendix B) was posted on the notice board on the main campus of the college. The poster included information in order to facilitate the participants' informed consent should they agree to participate, information about the study and what efforts were made to limit harm and protect their anonymity. The poster also emphasized that students were free to choose to participate and if they chose not to, it would not be held against them in anyway. My colleagues in the college were also requested to inform students in their classes about this research. A written script (see Appendix D) was given to my fellow lecturers and they read this to the students in their classes. Initially twenty (20) students chose to participate; however four (4) could not find time to come for an interview so sixteen (16) students were interviewed for this research. The response rate was eighty percent (80%) of the initial participants. A letter was sent to the students who voluntarily agreed to participate, outlining the purpose of the study as well as the topics to be discussed in the interview, allowing students ample time to consider the topic (see Appendix E). Interviews were conducted on the college campus during the summer of 2014.

The researcher chose to conduct interviews as the method for data collection as the interview embodies the "centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasizes the social situatedness of research data" (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 266). Data collection through interviews is an acceptable norm with the social constructivist paradigm as the interview

process allows participants “to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view” (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 266). For this study, the interviews were planned with the aim of uncovering how students chose, analyzed, and implemented their decisions to apply for admission through their individual priorities lens. Semi-structured interview questions were used to collect data. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed to help the analysis. Semi-structured interviews are suggested as a data collection approach in qualitative research and as noted by Creswell (2009), the qualitative researcher may “conduct semi-structured interview, audiotape the interview, and transcribe it” (p. 182). The interview questions were used to collect data as advised by Creswell (2009). The interview questionnaire was piloted with some students before using it for this study. The questions were:

1. What is the main objective of continuing your education?
2. What is the main reason that you applied for admission in this program?
3. How did you first hear about the program you are currently enrolled in?
4. What are the main reasons you chose to attend this particular private career college?
5. How did you select this course/program?
6. How did you select this college?
7. Was this institution your first choice?
8. Did you research programs offered by other institutions?
9. On what criteria you evaluated available programs and institutions?
10. Please explain the process of course and college selection in detail.
11. What resources you used to collect information for matriculation decision?
12. Did you investigate the job market value of this program?

13. Was this the only program you applied for?
14. Was this the only college you applied to for admission?
15. What are your plans after completing this program?
16. Do you think you made a good decision to select this program/institution?
17. Do you ever think you could have done things differently?

The interviews were planned to be between 30 to 45 minutes each however, most students provided brief and to the point answers limiting the length of interviews to around 20-25 minutes per participant. The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed by an independent transcription service. A non-disclosure agreement was signed with the transcription company to ensure data security and to safeguard participants' personal information (See Appendix F). The personal details of students were made anonymous and then codified to ensure no names were mentioned in the scripts.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data collected through the interviews was analyzed using steps suggested by Creswell (2009) (see figure 3. below). Raw data from interview transcripts was organized and prepared for analyses and then placed into various themes along with descriptions. All the data themes were read and codified for precision and referencing. These themes were then explained and interpreted to extract meaningful conclusions. Finally, the findings were compared with the known literature for commonalities and variances.

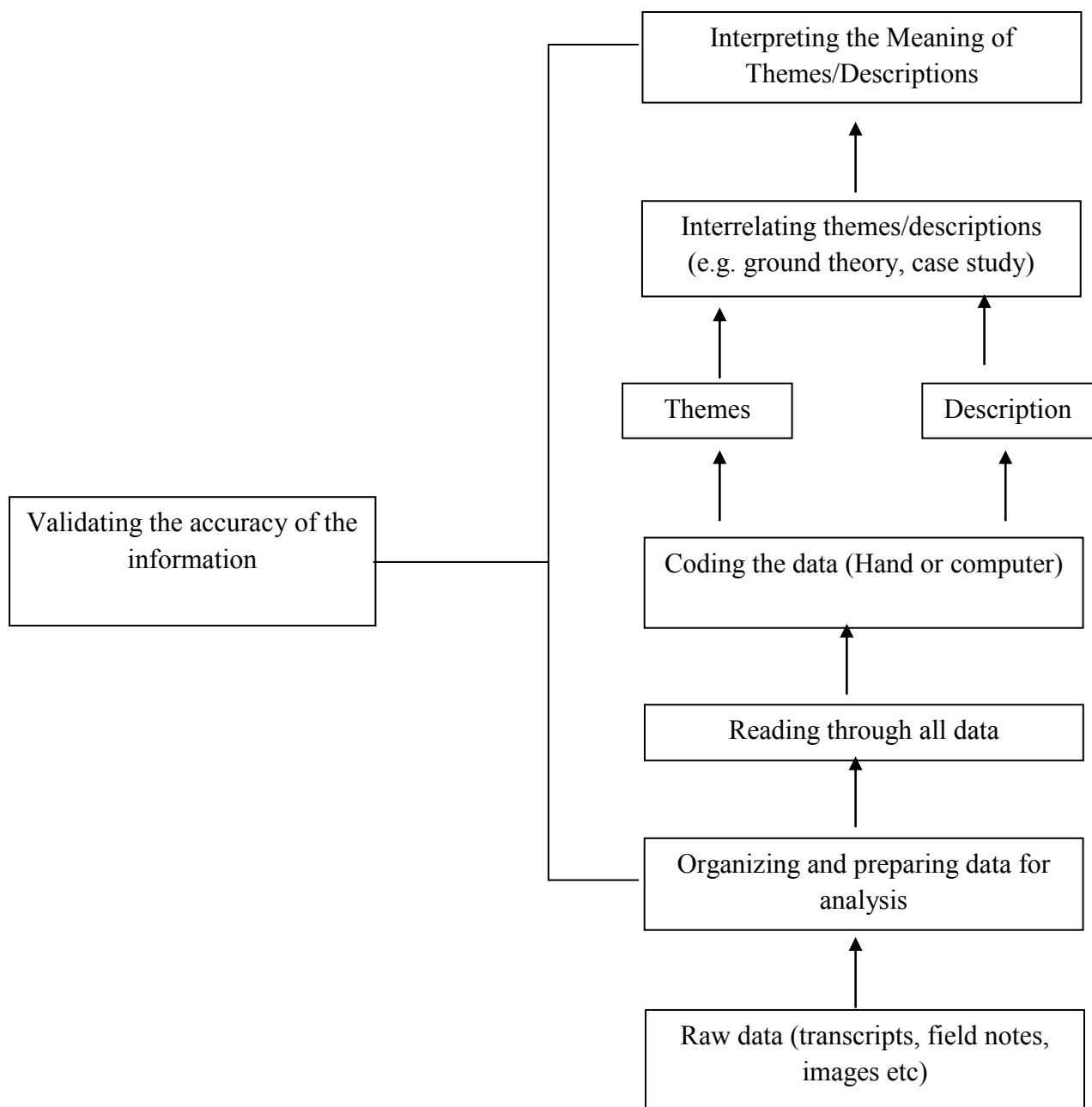


Figure 3.1: Data Analysis (Creswell, 2009)

Chapter 4 Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate factors affecting students decisions to apply to private career colleges and to explore their decision making process. As suggested by Creswell (2009), raw data was collected through interview transcriptions and then analyzed to prepare results. This section provides information on participants' responses on each of the three research questions. They shared what factors are considered important by students in their matriculation decision and how they make such decisions.

4.1 Reasons to Pursue Further Education

Participants shared their reasons for continuing their studies during the interviews. Although, each of them came from a different background and holds a different profile, most of them cited similar reasons for their decision to further educate themselves. Most of the respondents were female and were studying in business administration, computerized accounting, personal support worker, and engineering technology programs. Male students identified themselves as business administration, esthetics, and engineering technology program students. Almost ninety percent (90% n=14) of the respondents were over the age of twenty five (25), had children, grandchildren or both, and lived in urban areas. Almost thirty one percent (31% n=5) students self identified as recent immigrants to Canada.

The majority of participants shared that they wanted to continue their education to upgrade their skills. Fifty six percent (56% n=9) of participants quoted career progression and finding a better job as the sole reason for their decision to continue further studies. Twelve point five percent (12.5% n=2) of participants cited completion of post secondary studies as their objective to continue education and nineteen percent (19% n=3) of participants said they wanted

to get Canadian credentials through continuing education. Twelve point five percent (12.5% n=2) of participants mentioned achieving Canadian credentials and the hope of finding a better job after graduation as the reasons to improve their education.

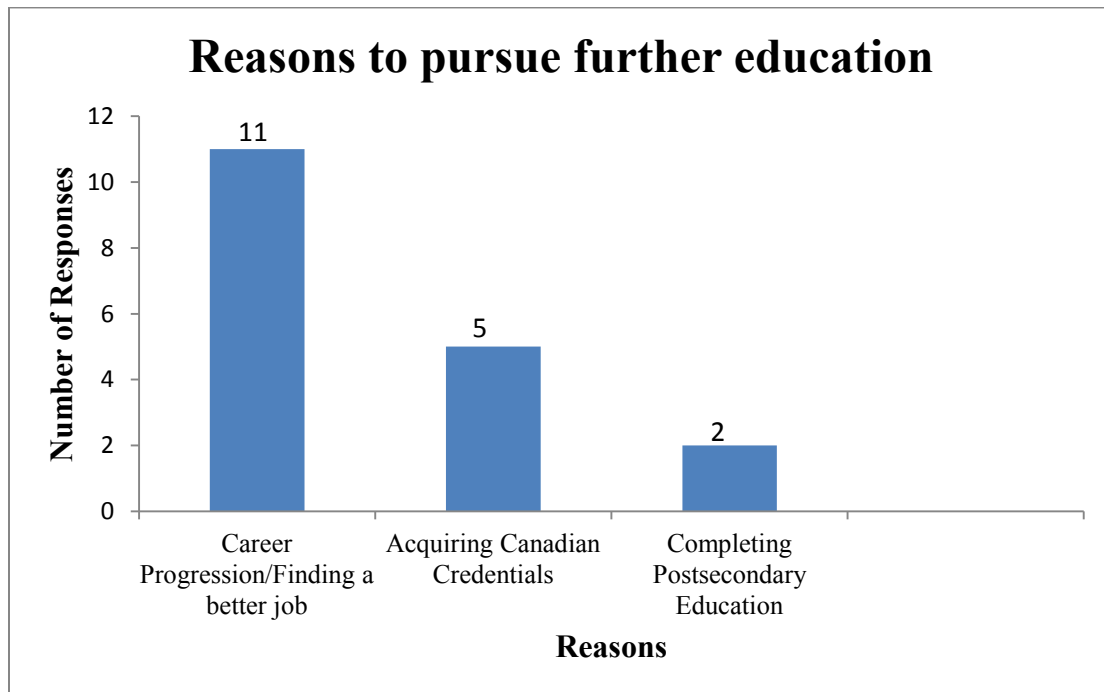


Figure 4.1: Students' reasons to pursue further education

4.1.1 Career progression and finding a better job. The reason to continue study quoted by the highest number of participants was career progression and to find a better job. Overall eleven (11) responses were received in this category. It is common for students to consider career progression and their chances of finding a better job after graduation when considering an institution for higher education (Hoi & Hiebert, 2005). Research has proven that student expectation of future earnings is an important factor in their education attainment. "A central tenet of the human capital theory is that people choose the optimal type and level of schooling based on the market returns to education" (Dyke, 2011, p. 3). A survey conducted by the American Council on Education (ACE) since 1976, quoted by Post Secondary Education

Opportunity in the year 1993 reported to get a better job and earn money as the most common reason for students to apply to college programs (Post Secondary Education Opportunity, 1993). Research shows that private career college students cited similar reasons for their choice of education attainment. R.A. Malatest, (2008) reported that students tend to apply to private career college programs due to their expectations of getting a better paying job after graduation.

Participants in this study shared similar reasons to continue higher education. Students were asked an open ended question to explain why they decided to continue their education. Following are the responses from students on this question:

Respondent 003 stated:

Really, I want to improve myself. I don't want to be stuck. We are getting older. Also, I don't want my studies and my learning to be stuck. So I want better opportunities for me and my family.

Respondent 004 stated a similar reason:

My main objective of continuing education is to upgrade my accounting background, especially in computerized accounting, what most companies or firms are using nowadays. And I also have an accounting degree back home.

Respondent 005 stated:

Very simple. Just to survive in this country. We're a new immigrant in this country. We never got the education from here. So if we want to find a good job in the future we must do something to adapt to society. That's the main purpose, to learn and to continue education

Respondent 006 stated:

The main objective has been ... to further upgrade myself and just learn more things. Because after coming here I have not studied further, so there has been a gap. So I just wanted to start off with something just to keep myself updated and just to keep pace with whatever is going on. And just to have a better position in the job market. So that has been the main objective

Respondent 007 stated:

Continuing education for me is the best and main idea of continuing education is to update my knowledge, and when I want to be in the job market and research for job market, and when you're continuing your education you have lot to learn [including] working with other people and how you reach to the people for applying for jobs or something like that and this is for me the main reasons for continuing education

Respondent 008 stated:

Just to update my skill, so that I can find a good job.

Respondent 010 stated:

My main objective for continuing education is to better equip myself on the changing times meaning the economy changes, so which means job changes, opportunities changes, so I feel I would be better equipped and to improve myself.

Respondent 011 responded:

The main objective of continuing education is I want to get a Second Career for my life. And I try again in the future when I finish through [this course] to get a job. With that job [I can apply] what I learned in the school

Respondent 001 stated:

My main objective for continuing education is to have Canadian certification required for job hunting

Respondent 012 stated:

Actually I according to today's market I need to upgrade my skills, so that's why I wanted to go for study

Respondent 015 said:

Actually to get a better paying job, really that's why.

It was evident from the respondents' comments that they all expected to be able to find a better paying job in the near future. This is consistent with the conclusion in the study conducted by Dominitz and Manski (1996) where they reported high school, university, male and female students in the United States, all shared expectations of better earnings after graduation. Another study of students in Europe by Brunello, Lucifora, and Winter-Ebmer (2001) concluded that

students' earnings depend on certain factors such as "field of study, gender, age, seniority in college, perceived student relative ability and family background. They also found that job prospects depend on the field of study and family background" (Dyke, 2011, p. 3). The participants of this study shared responses similar to one another regardless of them studying in different programs and being of a different gender, age, and hailing from diverse backgrounds.

4.1.2 Acquiring Canadian credentials. This reason was reported by participants who are recent immigrants and wanted to get Canadian credentials to find jobs in their own field. Five (5) participants included this in their responses. The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) recently reported an increased interest by new immigrants in getting admission to Canadian college and university programs (AUCC, 2011). Canada attracts a high number of immigrants every year and most of them come with university degrees from their country of origin, however, they still "may have a greater need to supplement their previous education to enable them to more fully utilize their skills, knowledge and talents in the (Canadian) workplace (AUCC, 2011, p. 32).

Following are the students' responses on an open ended question about their reasons to continue their education in Canada;

Respondent 009 said:

Actually to adapt to the Canadian method of techniques and method of, what you call, engineering principles, right, so I need to understand how it works really in the field of electrical and electronics engineering. I have the background of about 20, 25 years of electrical engineering, but to adapt to the Canadian society I need to have very short; because I don't have much time to go to a public school or something, so therefore I needed to get the correct course at shortest time which is why I chose this what you call fast track discourse. Actually, I think it will be useful for me; 10, 15 years I can work still, so I can use that technology to bridge with the Canadian requirement.

Respondent 001 shared a similar reason:

As an immigrant, my scholastic record is not recognized in this country. So I find a need to have an internship application.

Respondent 013 said:

My main objective of continuing education was that I am an immigrant who came to Canada five years back from India. I am a university graduate from India, [and] an accountant. So I needed to get a job in my accounting field [in Canada]. For that I needed to get Canadian education. That's why I chose to upgrade myself in this accounting field.

Respondent 016 stated:

Actually, I was working as an accounting clerk overseas. Some mid [level] job, combination of the computers and [accounting]. Then I came [to Canada] and also [had my] baby. After that when I wanted to go back to my [previous] job there was no opportunities for me so I start to work towards a Canadian post secondary qualification to get acceptability in finding a new job in the field of accounting

Respondent 005 stated;

We're new immigrants in this country. We never got the education from [Canada]. If we want to find a good job in the future we must do something to adapt to [Canadian] society. That's the main purpose, to [decided] learn and continue [my] education.

New immigrants to Canada pursue higher education in Canada in order to enable themselves to provide financial support and encouragement to their families that will drive higher levels of university participation by their children (AUCC, 2011). The above noted responses from the participants clearly demonstrated that they consider higher education an important tool to become a valuable member of Canadian society and to be able to find good jobs.

4.1.3 Completing post secondary education. The third reason for participants to continue their education was completion of post secondary education. These participants reported that they took this opportunity to achieve a post secondary diploma in Canada as they

were unable to complete their university before for various reasons. Two (2) participants mentioned completion of post secondary education as their primary objective to apply to admission in this college. The students responded with the following:

Respondent 002 stated:

Well, my main objective is [that] I didn't complete my studies before. I was a university student but I didn't finish my program. So my main objective for continuing my secondary or my post secondary education was to achieve something. So I mean going to college was the next best thing for me. So that's the main reason why I returned to school to get the diploma

Respondent 014 cited a similar reason:

My main objective in continuing education is to get a diploma in the profession that would award me at the end of my program a Canadian credential as a medical office assistant. I hope to continue further in the healthcare field even after this diploma as I was unable to graduate [from post secondary courses] earlier.

Participants believed completing post secondary education is highly important to achieve their professional goals and they considered the opportunity provided by this private career college as of high value.

4.2 Reasons to Choose a Private Career College

One of the objectives of this study was to find out why students apply for admission to private career college programs and this was the theme of more than one question in the interview. Participants shared the reasons why they applied for private career college programs and some of them also contrasted these programs with the ones offered by public colleges. Almost sixty nine percent (69 % n=11) students reported more than one reasons for their application for admission to this private career college program with sixty three percent (63% n=7) of these giving two (2), and thirty seven percent (37% n=4) providing three (3) reasons for

their choice. Thirty one percent (31% n=5) mentioned a single reason for their choice. A total of sixteen (16) students (n=16) gave 31 responses (r=31).

The most common reason was course duration and flexibility of timing with thirty two percent (32% r=10) responses followed by course content and unique program offerings at twenty two point five percent (22.5% r=7), availability of on-campus resources at nineteen percent (19% r=6), assistance provided by college staff at ten percent (10% r=3), availability of funding at six (6% r=2), and student demographics, student success rate, and college location at three percent (3% r=1) each. The questions were “what were the main reasons that you chose to apply for admission in this particular private college?” and “on what criteria you evaluated the programs offered by all colleges?”

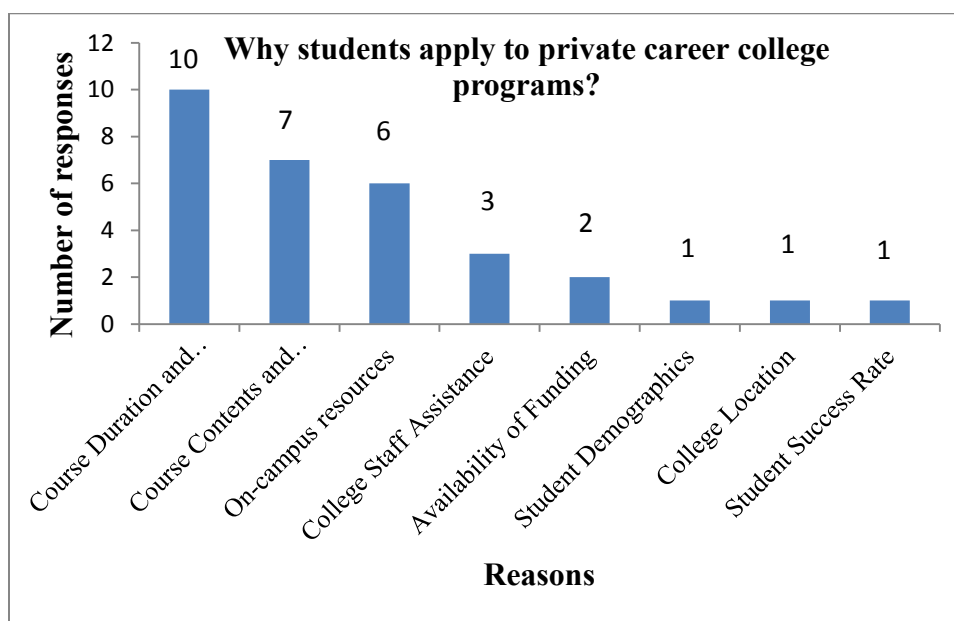


Figure 4.2: Students' reasons to apply to private career college programs

4.2.1 Course duration and flexibility of timing. The majority of respondents to this question shared that they applied for admission in private career college because of the shorter course duration and flexibility in class timings. Thirty two percent (32% n=10) of responses

included this reason as one of the main factors for the participants' admission application to private career college programs. Program length is one of the most important criterion for school selection among private career college students (R.A. Malatest, 2008). Forty four percent (44%) of media and information technology, and thirty seven percent (37%) of all students surveyed by R.A. Malatest (2008) decided to attend a private career college due to short course duration. Eleven percent (11%) considered flexible class timings and overall program schedule (R.A. Malatest, 2008).

Participants of this study were asked open ended questions to explore why they chose to apply to a specific program offered by a private career college. Following is the summary of participants' responses to the questions;

Respondent 02 stated:

The flexibility I did find that was really an important factor. Definitely the itinerary of the course, the amount of time, the cost and the courses within the program provided classroom size. Those are the main things I can remember

Respondent 03 shared a similar reason:

Basically timelines were so quick. I was looking for something that can be completed in short pace of time so this college provided me all the information quickly and course was also fast paced

Respondent 06 stated:

The first and the foremost reason has been my personal situation. I had some time constraints. For that particular reason, I cannot extend my timing for the studies beyond this point. And this college is offering two shifts. One is in the morning, and [the other in the] afternoon. So it's kind of really flexible and feasible for me to continue in that way. Otherwise, other colleges, they have extended hours and all that, which I really cannot to afford to have at this point in time

Respondent 08 stated:

Many reasons, one is the duration of the course, like 7 months, and then classes are small, and overall environment is good. Here the students are friendly, the teachers are good

Respondent 09 stated:

I tried other colleges and I researched about ... how long the courses are and various kinds of other things and especially I wanted a short program. Also my friend who referred me he explained me about the teacher, and the staff, and other facilities in this school is far better than the other colleges but the main reasons were short term course and tailor-made course content and that is why I chose this school

Respondent 010 stated:

I mostly took into consideration the [program] timeframe. With a private college you go straight meaning one year course continuous while on the Centennial College or perhaps the university you see that there's – they can skip meaning not the subjects will be offered in the next semester, something like that

Respondent 013 stated:

There are several factors. As I mentioned earlier, the main factor was its curriculum. Its curriculum was so vast, so in depth that – and it was in a short duration also I don't want to waste my two or three years in a community college and then having the same knowledge after three years when I can get same in one year here.

Respondent 014 stated:

My main reason for choosing to attend the Private College was its fast track program. This [program in] a community college can take up to two years. I wanted to get back into the work force as soon as possible

Respondent 015 stated:

The hours actually because it's only half day and it's a condensed course, so I didn't want to get stuck taking like a two year program because I don't have the time to commit to a two year program, that's why

Respondent 016 stated:

People advised me that I should choose the private college instead of the community college; otherwise the time table schedule would be very tight and difficult. That's why I decided to choose the private college.

Private career college students are different from conventional students and demonstrate various distinct reasons for choosing a college (Berger, 2009). Thirteen percent (13%) of students in the survey by R.A. Malatest (2008) identified class timing as a key factor in their college selection. Program duration was an important factor as this had an impact on how soon they could graduate and enter the workforce. Students shared a desire to go back to work quickly, so short duration of the program was helpful to them. Some of the participants were already working part time and preferred a flexible schedule where they could complete their studies while they were working.

4.2.2 Course content and unique program offerings. Twenty-two point five percent (22.5% $n=7$) of responses mentioned private career college programs tend to be tailored according to job market requirements. Their selected programs are not offered by public colleges/universities and the content suits the students' needs. Forty five percent (45%) of the participants in the R.A. Malatest, (2008) survey considered program availability and being able to study specific content to be among the most important criteria for school selection. This percentage was fifty two (52) in media and design technology students. Nineteen percent (19%) students chose a private career college because of the unavailability of same program in public colleges and universities (R. A. Malatest, 2008). Myrie and Mujtaba (2011) reported ninety one percent (91%) of students in a university in the West Indies considered program content and program offerings as important factors when choosing to apply.

Participants in this study shared similar reasons for their decision to apply to private career college programs. The summary of their answers is reported below:

Respondent 001 stated:

This college offers two [programs] of my interest; civil engineering and information technology. These two are only available in this college from the colleges that I have searched and compared. Both civil engineering and IT are only available in this college. So that's the main reason; the availability of the course.

Respondent 003 also shared a similar reason:

Mainly I paid special attention if they had subjects that are related to the fields that I was looking for, especially taxation. But if they had other subjects that were not very related to that, that's why I didn't choose those things

Respondent 004 stated:

I read the modules for the program and I found out that other institution only offered computerized accounting. They don't have basic accounting, which is very important in order to know the foundation of accounting before using software. This college offers principles of accounting course as part of the computerized accounting diploma and that's what I liked here

Respondent 009 stated:

I looked at the program that how long is it, and the course contents, and how the course contents are distributed and setup, I mean courses are delivered one after the other, and not all at the same time.

Respondent 011 stated:

The main reason for me is that I want to get the best course that can help me through my career in the future. I want to learn some special skills and these are only available in the program offered by this college

Respondent 013 stated:

The main factor was its curriculum. Its curriculum was so vast, and in depth

Respondent 015 stated:

I looked at the content of the course and really liked it. The courses were designed in an ideal way for me and content was up to date. This helped me in short-listing this college for my final selection

Course content and uniqueness of program offerings are important factors that impact the students' college/university choice. It is important for career progression that students evaluate the curriculum of the programs they intend to apply to. Brown, Varley, and Pal (2009) reported thirty percent (30%) of students considered program content as an important factor when evaluating their choices of available universities. Answers by participants of this study showed an emphasis on course content and unique program offerings in their decision making process. All the respondents in this category expressed their understanding of the curricula and identified this as an important reason for program selection.

4.2.3 On-campus resources. Participants also mentioned that availability and provision of on-campus resources is a factor that has high impact on their selection process. This includes class size, teaching methods, availability of career advice, and other learning resources such as computers and software. The participants were asked two (2) open ended questions during the interview that cover these themes. A total of nineteen percent (19% $n=6$) of responses included this factor as important for the participants. Class size was considered an important deciding factor reported by twenty two percent (22%) of participants in the R.A. Malatest (2008) survey.

Participants in this study seem to prefer small class sizes as this provided them a better opportunity to interact with instructors and to be able to use other available learning resources. Students also mentioned that it was easy for them to interact with others in the class room due to small class size and this helped them in learning from each other. I have reported an account of student answers as follows:

Respondent 004 stated:

Main reasons I chose to attend this particular private college are; first there is no sharing of computers. No sharing of books. Second, there is availability of unlimited reading material and one-on-one discussion with the instructors

Respondent 005 shared a similar reason:

The other colleges teach you by computer. You don't know the people. Just to sit beside you. What they're learning you don't know. You have no teacher and just learn everything online by yourself. So I don't need that actually. I need a network. I need people to answer my questions. I need to feel I got some help from other people. So this college, they have a small class to teach you. You have a teacher in front of you. This college is very traditional

Respondent 007 stated:

When I went to other colleges, there were so many things that I don't like for example; most of the courses or classes is full of students and tutor or someone that teaches people is very busy to do their work and I prefer to receive personal attention. I don't want such education that will not increase my knowledge. I want only to update my knowledge and something like that and I prefer for example, the core classes are for example four or five at most eight people in this class, but in the other college I saw that in some classes there are more than 30 people in the class. Here in this college we have small class sizes and I am happy

Respondent 008 stated:

I chose this college because I like small classes, I don't like to be in a big classroom with lot of students. I can feel that the teachers can pay more attention to you if the class size is small and that's what I have experienced. The teachers are very good. If anything you didn't understand just ask the teachers and they will help you. They pay more attention on you that's what I want to say

Respondent 012 stated:

This college is actually good for education and also helping students to get a job. They're sending job posting to students, so they can apply for those jobs and get a job sooner and that is the main reason

Respondent 013 stated:

One of the best things was the student-to-teacher ratio. So the class size was small, that's why they were more focused on each and every student so that the student get more knowledge about the program.

College facilities are an important factor in students' choice of a higher education institution (Myrie & Mujtaba, 2011). Participants in this study mentioned this as a positive attribute of their college and through their answers, elaborated on how this helped them learn. Drewes and Michael (2006) conducted an analysis of applications to universities in Ontario and reported more than forty two percent (42%) of applicants preferred small class sizes. Brown, Varley, and Pal (2009) found eleven percent (11%) of applicants in their study considered class size as an important factor in student choice.

4.2.4 Assistance and Quality of advice provided by college staff. A number of participants considered the assistance and quality of advice provided by college staff as an important factor for their choice of this particular private career college. Students admitted that college staff motivated them and helped them make the decision. Support offered by this private career college in terms of advice, guidance, and course selection was vital to the decision of many students. Some of them acknowledged that they might not have been able to make a decision on the program selection if college staff were not helpful. The assistance ranged from providing prompt program information, helping in completing admission application forms, filing necessary paper work with relevant government agencies for funding, and being a source of overall motivation to improve students' confidence. Ten percent (10% $r=3$) of responses were received in this category.

Respondent 002 shared:

I don't really have a lot of reasons other than it was the first place where I actually got direct knowledge. I didn't really think about going to any other schools. It was like this is the first one I went to and I was like, it looks good. And that was enough for me. There was no further need to research anything. I did discuss it one of the advisors on campus. And she made my decision a bit smoother. She made it easier for me. I pretty much had decided that I was going to come here,

but she made it seem like a more reasonable decision, the way she described the program and the way she described how it would help me once I finished. She also helped me fill out all the paper work and that was of great help.

Respondent 003 mentioned a similar reason:

When I called this school they answered very fast. I tried to call other schools to get details about the programs, how could I apply and many things, but they took ages. And time is something I don't have too much of. I have kids and I am a mom. Time is valuable for me

Respondent 005 said:

I called several colleges to collect information. And this college was the first to respond. The people here are so warmhearted. They just asked me to come in and helped me a lot with paper work and understanding what my options were. So their role helped me to apply for this college. That provided me with opportunity to continue my education which is very important for me.

Students referred to their comparison of how relevant information was provided to them by this school and their attempt(s) to get it from other schools. It is evident from the above noted responses that students preferred a speedy response on their admission and other program related inquiries. Higher education institutions must ensure they provide reliable enrolment information to prospective students through their marketing departments (Johnston, 2010).

4.2.5 Availability of funding. Participants also reflected upon their financial situation and declared availability of funding an important factor for their matriculation decision. For some students, the decision to apply to a private career college depended on availability of government and institutional funding. Four percent (4%) of students in R.A. Malatest (2008) reported availability of funding as an important factor in their college choice. Drewes and Michael (2006) concluded that Canadian students prefer universities that offer better funding options including scholarships. Six percent (6% $r=2$) of the responses included availability of

financial aid as the main reason why they applied to this college. Below is a summary of these responses;

Respondent 002 shared:

The main reason is because I was given an opportunity for funding for schooling. I just happened to walk into the college office at a mall by my home and picked up a pamphlet, spoke to the person that was there, and was given some ideas. So that was really my first entry into I guess applying for school. But again the main reason was availability of funding through second career

Respondent 007 stated a similar reason:

As a new immigrant I cannot afford to pay for the tuition fee or something like that. Then, I decided to use off the OSAP loans or other available funding options so I tried three different private colleges... and this one helped with getting funding through Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP). I cannot afford to pay the fees of other colleges. I came to this college and fortunately all of the things that I expected from their courses, and their classes, and something like that all of them are in their college and I found that in this college they accept the OSAP Program and OSAP loans so I decided to take admission here.

The above noted comments presented the views of some of the students who shared their financial inability to continue their education if funding was not available. These students based their selection decision on the college's assistance in helping them get funding from government grants and other loan programs.

4.2.6 Student demographics, success rate, and college location. Three percent (3%
r=1) of respondents shared that they applied for this private career college due to the demographics of students in class, student success rate, and location of the college. Research shows that the reputation of a college is an important factor in student choice. Thirty seven percent (37%) of respondents in R.A. Malatest (2008) reported that a good name of the college helped them make selection decision. A majority of the students considered college location being close to amenities an important factor in their choice process (Myrie & Mujtaba, 2011).

One respondent of this study was pleased to see others from similar age group in classes and mentioned feeling uncomfortable among younger students. The other respondent mentioned childcare responsibilities and challenges that impacted her decision to find a college close to her place of residence.

Respondent 010 stated:

In private colleges you get to see more people of your age, not of the youngsters, right. So which means socializing with students around your age, the same age group you have is much better the way I look at it and you don't feel inferior. I suppose that you come here, so you're older than those students that's one thing too

Respondent 012 shared:

Actually according to job market value and the student success rate of finding jobs, so this college is really good, as most of the students are finding jobs after completing this course

Respondent 015 said:

College's location [is important] too, I don't live far from here so it is very convenient for me

4.3 Program Selection and Decision Making Process

Most participants of this study selected their program without any formal third party consultations or seeking advice from any professionals other than the college counselors. Students were asked open ended questions to explore their decision making process in detail and if they took advice from anybody else in the decision making process. As reported by CERIC (2007), a majority of the students showed discontent with their career planning efforts and intended to use services of a professional in future decision making. Participants of this study shared the sources they relied upon and processes they followed when making their selection. Their responses showed that they followed advice from family, friends, and college counselors when deciding a program of study and college.

4.3.1 Sources of Matriculation Advice

A total of seventeen (17) responses were received on the questions in this regard with only about twelve (12 % $r=2$) claiming to have spoken to a professional outside of the college to seek advice. Almost forty seven percent (47% $r=8$) of respondents claimed they talked to the college staff, and their family and friends during the process of decision making whereas forty one percent (41% $r=7$) stated they only relied on the advice received from the college counselors.

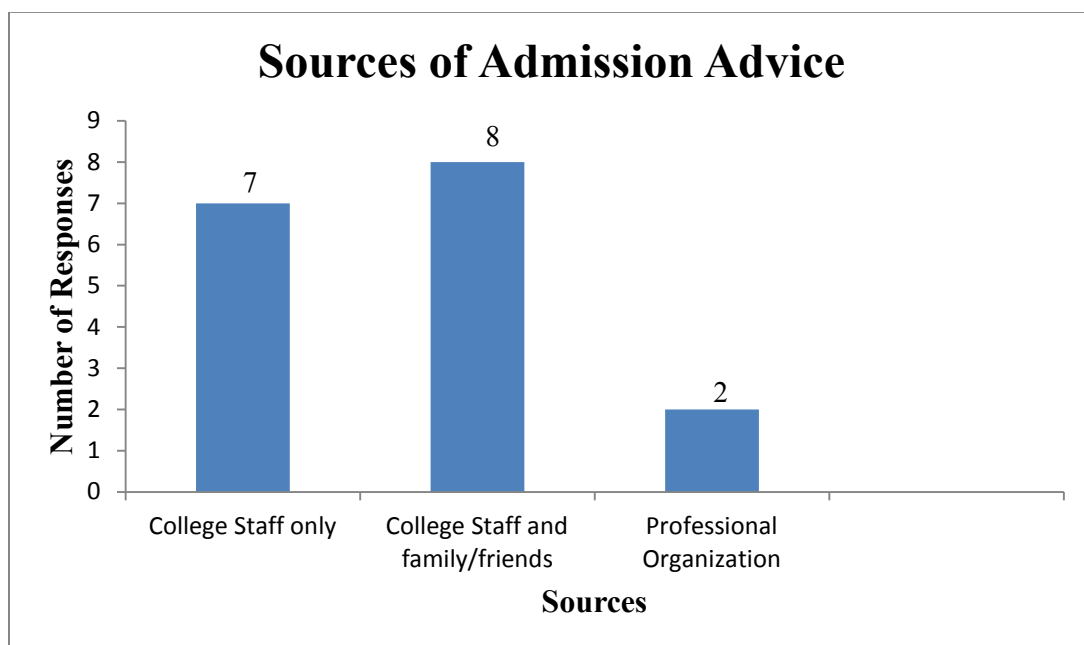


Figure 4.3: Sources of admission advice

4.3.1.1 College staff only. Forty one percent (41% $r=7$) of respondents shared that they only spoke with the college staff during course selection process and to seek advice for admission. Counselors play an important role in students' college choice decisions (Roberts, Bouknight, & Karan, 2010). The participants of this study showed a great degree of reliance on the information provided by the college counselors as forty one percent (41%) acted upon their

advice and did not seek information from any other sources not even family members or friends.

Following is a summary of all responses received in this regard:

Respondent 001 stated:

With this school, when I applied online, I was able to talk with somebody and I was scheduled for an interview. Basically that's how I decided to move on with this college because I had personal interview with somebody and [they] explained [in detail] to me how it could [be done]

Respondent 002 shared similar reasons:

I did discuss it with one of the financial advisors on campus. And she made my decision a bit smoother. She made it easier for me. I pretty much had decided that I was going to come here, but she made my decision seem more reasonable. The way she described the program and the way she described how it would help me once I finished

Respondent 004 stated:

After seeing the brochure, I immediately called this college and the counselor asked me to come to the college for a meeting and then she provided me more information about this

Respondent 005 stated:

I called several colleges to collect information and this college was the first to respond. The people here are so warmhearted. They just asked me to come in and helped me a lot with paper work and understanding what my options were. So their role helped me to apply for this college. That provided me with opportunity to continue my education which is very important for me

Respondent 007 said:

I came to this college and fortunately all of the things that I expected from their courses, and their classes, were available here. The college staff provided me with excellent advice and that was enough for me to decide on coming to study here

Respondent 008 stated:

Some friend referred me to this college and gave me the phone number. I called the college and spoke with the counselor here. I made an appointment and the counselor gave me good encouragement and introduced me to many subjects. So,

finally acting on the counselor's advice, I chose medical office assistant (MOA). I think this is best course for me

Respondent 015 stated:

The counselor asked me to come and meet with her because I was laid off work. So I was looking into the training programs under Second Career. The college counselor looked at my documents and advised me on various options to study and that's how I made the decision

Participants of this study were moved by the frequent availability and tailored career advice provided by the counseling staff at this college. As reported by Plank and Jordan (2001), when counselors are consistently and frequently available to provide relevant advice to students, this can have a positive impact on students' choice decisions. Most of the respondents in this category mentioned that the advice from counselors was well targeted and suited their situation. This in the end helped them in choosing this college for their studies.

4.3.1.2 College staff, friends and family members. The highest number of responses received indicates that students did seek advice from college staff as well as their friends/family members when deciding to apply for admission to the private career college. A total of forty seven percent (47% $n=8$) of respondents shared this as part of their decision making. Hoi and Heibert (2005) noted that participants in their study had self claimed to receive "support from parents and/or partners to pursue higher education and develop their own careers" (p. 27). This was also evident from a CERIC research poll that reported ninety five percent (95%) of young adults surveyed tried to get career and job advice from their parents (CERIC, 2007). Following is a summary of participants' responses:

Respondent 003 shared:

I short listed the schools that had this program and then I started calling them to set up an appointment or an interview. I came to this school and discussed with the counselor who advised me on available options. Then I went home and I read

all the answers that they gave me and discussed with my husband. After that, I called again for further clarifications and finally ended up getting admission here

Respondent 006 mentioned of the similar reasons:

My friend told me that she was in a similar situation like me. She had been laid off work was referred by someone to this college. She came here and then she was offered her ideal courses and all that and she did the same for me and helped me in selecting the right course and college. She told me that in this college I will find people that will be giving you some nice advice about the selection of the program. Not that they are just pressurizing you just to have the vacant places filled out. That was exactly what happened with me

Respondent 009 stated:

I met with my friend and he advised me to get education in a valuable field for my career. He also said that to grab a good job you should have the Canadian type of techniques and the engineering qualification and I agree. So I started researching where to go for further education and then found this college. My friend and the counselors here guided me on what course to select

Respondent 011 stated:

My friend told me about this school and diploma and a lot about quality of education here. It is a good school. So I contacted this school, spoke to the counselor and I selected to study here. It is a great place for learning

Respondent 012 stated:

I spoke to college councilor and consulted with her about my situation and what my profile was and then she recommended this course to me. I also spoke to my friend who was doing the same course. She said this is the good course, so that's why [I selected this program]

Respondent 013 said:

One of my friends told me about this college, then I called the coordinator in the college and he gave me an appointment, then I personally visited the college. Then the coordinator thoroughly explained to me about the program, the fee structure, about the curriculum etc. He showed me the labs also; I mean computer labs where I can get more hands on training in the software. So this is how I decided on this college

Respondent 014 stated:

I had come in for an interview with the counselor and from there I went to see another member of the college's marketing team. They provided me with all the information. I discussed this with my husband who is also doing a diploma in a private career college

Respondent 016 said:

I personally went to this college for advice and found their admission process way easier than the community colleges. I also asked my husband for help as he is studying to become a lawyer. The college staff helped me with filling in all application forms and completing other second career requirement.

Participants in this study collected information from the college and had discussions with their family members and friends before making the final selection. Research shows that a majority of the parents did not get involved in helping their kids plan a career (CERIC, 2007); however, in this study the trend demonstrated by the participants confirmed that friends and family members played an important role in students' choice of higher education institutions.

4.3.1.3 Professional organization. Only about twelve percent (12% $r=2$) of respondents reported that they went to a professional organization such as an education consultancy or career service for advice. Forty one percent (41%) of respondents to CERIC (2007) poll had shared regret that they did not go to a professional organization for career advice and given an opportunity, seventy one percent (71%) agreed to get professional advice when making career choices. The number of participants who approached a professional outside of the college for advice was small and showed similar trends to the CERIC (2007) research poll. Responses of these students are presented below:

Respondent 009 said:

I went to an education consultancy and advice center and they helped me a lot. They told me how to get admission in a better private college and also secure

funding under the Second Career program. Then, I came to the college and met the management

Respondent 010 cited similar process:

I have to do through the employment resource center. At the employment resource center, I presented them about me and then took a few lessons from them. They educated me about what's Second Career or the course of action or the diploma I can enroll in. After this I contacted the college for specific program advice and started the admission process

4.3.2 Source of Program Information

Respondents were asked to share how they heard about the program they enrolled in as part of the decision making process. Family and friends came out as one of the two most prominent sources of initial program information as forty one percent (41% $r=7$) of the respondents said they heard about their particular program through friends and family members. Internet and print media including newspaper, flyers, and brochures was the second most prominent source used by students when collecting information about their intended programs as almost forty one percent (41% $r=7$) of responses included this source. Almost six percent (6% $r=1$) of responses from the above two categories, included both family/friends and internet searches as their sources of information for their program selection. Almost eighteen percent (18% $r=3$) of responses mentioned college's marketing staff as their source of program information.

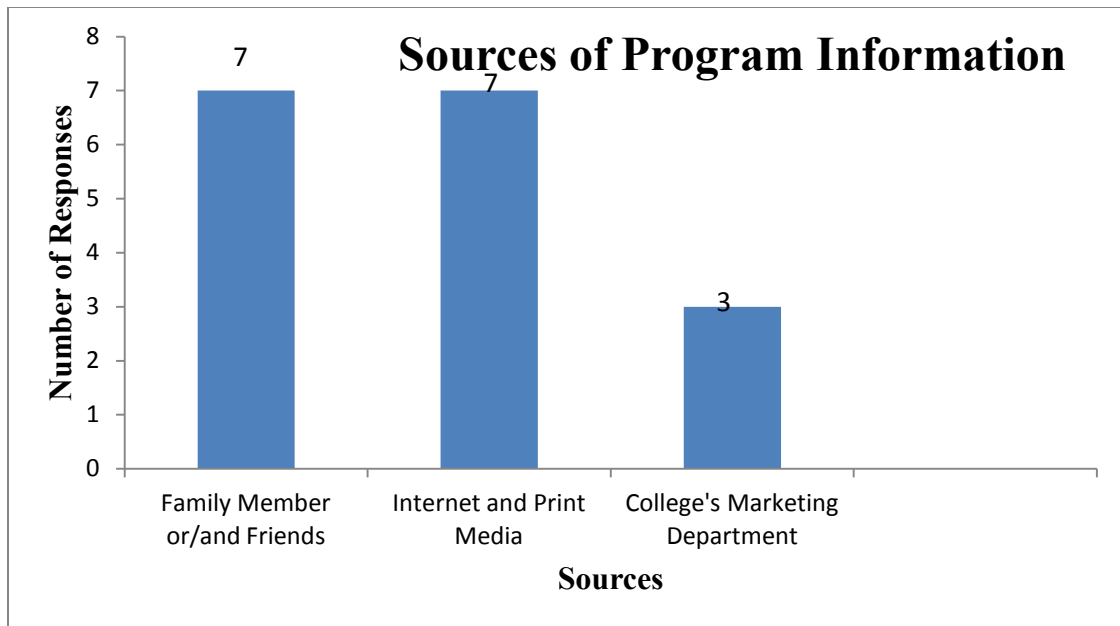


Figure 4.4: Sources of program information

4.3.2.1 Family member and friends. Forty one percent (41% $r=7$) of respondents said that their family members or friends were the initial source of program information. It is common for decision makers to pay more attention to advice from their close associates, including relatives and friends when making key decisions (Johnston, 2010). A study conducted by Litten and Brodigan (1982) rated parents and immediate family as the highest source of information for student choice in the United States.

Participants in this study showed high reliance on the advice from their family members and friends. There seemed to be a higher degree of confidence in the information received through reliable sources as most of them did not expand their research after getting positive responses about the college from their friends or family members. Following is a summary of their responses:

Respondent 003 said:

My husband told me [about the program]. Actually he was the one who was contacted by the school. I don't know how [the school] got [his information], but he told me if I like to study, you should [go] there

Respondent 006 mentioned a similar source:

I heard about this program from my friend. She has done it from the same college and she was enrolled in the same program. So that was the first time I heard about [the program]

Respondent 008 stated:

I was referred [this program] by some friends

Respondent 009 said:

Actually, one of my friends referred me [for this program] as he did this course [earlier]. He graduated from this college with the highest marks or one of the top people and he is doing a very good job right now [as] a factory engineer. He has come to top level and he is my colleague and one of my friends. He referred [this program to] me

Respondent 011 stated:

I heard [about] this program [from] my friend, she told me [about this course]. She was a student [in this college] and she got a good job after finishing her course

Respondent 012 mentioned:

I was doing volunteer work in one firm where I met a friend who was doing this course, so she [suggested] to me to enroll in this course

Respondent 013 said:

One of my friends did his diploma in accounting from the same college few years ago. So he referred [this course] to me that this is a reputed institution which gives you a very good in depth knowledge of the course, and the faculty is very good. So that's where I heard about this program.

Most students mentioned that their friends had already enrolled in similar programs and in some cases the same program in this college and therefore were in the right position to provide advice.

The idea of influential discussed by Berry and Keller (2003) seemed to resonate with this situation as advice from friends and family had a high impact on their choice. Thirty five percent (35%) of participants in R.A. Malatest (2008) research claimed to acquire admission advice from friends and seventeen percent (17%) from family.

4.3.2.2 Internet and print media. Thirty nine percent (39% $r=7$) of respondents mentioned the internet and print media as their initial source of program information. The idea of using the internet such as social media is among the most popular information sources now (Gillin, 2007). Johnston (2010) also reported that students browsed university websites, and blogs as a source of program information. The use of the internet, especially social media and blogs has increased in recent times (Gillin, 2007). Participants in this study reported the use of the internet and advertisements in print media as sources of initial program information. Their responses are cited below:

Respondent 001 said:

I was looking for work. So, I always search the internet [for jobs] and [that's how I found and applied] for admission in this college. I find [the college's advertisement] it in the local classified ads, employment papers, and the free papers that are available near my place

Respondent 003 shared a similar source:

I was first looking through the internet [for program information and colleges and then] I short listed the schools that had this program and then I started calling them to set up an appointment or an interview. I came to this school and discussed with the counselor who advised me on available options

Respondent 004 stated:

First I researched the demand of computerized accounting diploma using internet. I searched through websites like Indeed, Monster, workopolis etc, before I enrolled in this program with the help of counselors

Respondent 005 shared:

I saw it in the newspaper. I saw the advertisement [about program]

Respondent 007 stated:

For the first time I saw some ads in some job newspaper, and I prefer to do some research on this; so many things in this program and even the college which option is good, which option is not good and I tried to at least collect and gather some information about I think four colleges and four other programs in Toronto

Respondent 010 stated

I found out about the program through advertisements and there's a television ad regarding Second Career and mostly they mention about employment and taking the path to Second Career.

Respondent 016 said:

The [college] flyers were sent [to us] in the mail. I saw that one that there is some choice of the college and there was some program which was called Second Career that I hadn't heard at that time. So second career flyer from this college came to my house

Students used the internet and college advertisements as sources of initial program information and then validated the information by calling the college office. The information collected was then used to make their final selection. Some students also mentioned that they were approached by the college through direct mail and brochures. It is not clear however, how the college acquired access to the students' mailing addresses. Twenty seven percent (27%) of students surveyed by R.A Malatest (2008) collected program information through the internet and print media.

4.3.2.3 College's marketing department. Sixteen percent (16% $r=3$) of responses included efforts by the college's marketing department as their initial source of program information. Most of these students were approached through off-campus marketing booths that this college has at various locations throughout the city of Toronto. One (1) student telephoned

the college office to enquire about employment and was provided program information as an alternative.

Respondent 002 stated:

I actually walked into the off-campus office at the mall and picked the pamphlet and was made aware of all the different programs that were offered

Respondent 014 mentioned a similar source:

I heard about the program through a representative from the college in the area that I live. So I was actually shopping and they approached me. They have this table set up and now they have these brochures and I just went over to have a look at them. Then they started asking me questions, so from there – then I put my name down on the form and then they called me from there

Respondent 015 said:

When I spoke with the college counselor, she told me about this course and that's how I heard about this program.

Johnston (2010) reported university's marketing department as one of the most frequent and reliable sources of information used by potential students. R.A. Malatest (2008) reported that eight percent (8%) of students received initial program information through colleges' marketing departments. A small number of participants (3) in this study also used this college's marketing department to collect initial program information.

4.3.3 Resources Used to Research Other Programs/Institutions

One hundred percent (100% n=16) of respondents shared that they researched similar programs offered by other institutions with almost seventy five percent (75% n=12) using multiple resources such as the internet, visits to the college, and program flyers. Twenty five percent (25% n=4) of respondents said they used the internet as their sole source for comparative

research. The students were asked if they researched programs offered by other institutions and what resources they used to collect information for comparison purposes.

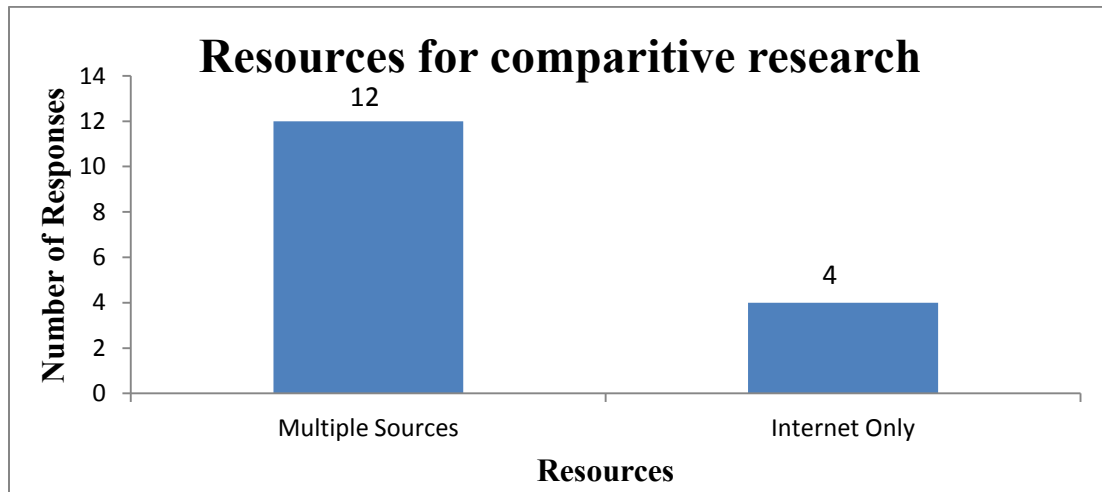


Figure 4.5: Resources used for comparative program research

4.3.3.1 Multiple resources. Seventy five percent (75% $n=12$) of respondents said that they used more than one resource when conducting comparative program searches. One third of the students visited campuses, studied program brochures, and browsed the websites of universities of their choice during the selection process (Johnston, 2010). Research has shown that evaluation of available alternatives is a complicated process that may limit students' decision making and depends on students' personal attributes, program entry requirements, and affordability (Brown, Varley, & Pal, 2009).

Collecting information for comparison is an essential prerequisite to evaluate alternatives (Kotler, 1976). A majority of participants in this study used multiple resources to collect program information for comparative analysis. Following is the summary of their comments:

Respondent 001 shared:

I used the internet; sent emails to contact with the colleges. I [also] made telephone calls. Then I did one on one meetings with them to collect information about the colleges and this college what I found to be the most convenient that have the best services given to me

Respondent 003 cited similar sources:

Actually, I searched through internet and then went to other schools and I got some pamphlets. I read it and I tried to see someone that can explain more in detail. But no, I decided to choose this school because they answered fast

Respondent 004 stated:

I researched through internet, flyers, and through college counselors

Respondent 005 said:

I always go on site to interview with the school [counselors]. That's the way I evaluate the school. I do look at the website as well but I don't trust them. Because some schools, make the website so pretty, so detailed. But I don't like the way they're teaching. So it's better to go on site to see how the school is performing

Respondent 007 stated:

I looked at the ads in the newspaper and online that mentioned information about the college, for example this college has so many programs and what are the credits in this program, and after that I tried to find some and gather some information from my friends and someone that before me enrolled in such classes, not exactly in this college, but in such classes, and after that I've gone to these colleges or other college, and took some information and brochure from the colleges, and even visited these classes or talked to the person that teaches in these programs

Respondent 008 stated:

I looked briefly at the websites of three colleges and I personally visited all these three colleges like Centennial, this College, and one more I forgot the name of. I did visit these colleges personally and they gave me brochures and flyers. I looked at it and I chose this college

Respondent 009 said:

I got most of [brochures] from this college and the other colleges and I compared those. I also visited the colleges in person and looked at their websites for program evaluation and comparison

Respondent 010 mentioned:

I looked at the broucher. [The colleges] have this big magazine type [prospectus] where all the courses are outlined. I visited colleges and looked at their websites too

Respondent 012 said:

Actually I was talking to my friends who were looking for jobs and then I consulted with the [college] counselor also. I visited websites of various colleges and discussed with friends again

Respondent 013 stated:

I searched through websites. I found there are various colleges offering similar courses. The reputation for this particular college was good. And then I personally visited all the colleges, but I found this one was better

Respondent 014 stated:

I was on the internet, found some of the institutions by search and talked to the managers there to get some insight on some of the programs that were available and also received some material like brochures in the mail too

Respondent 016 shared:

Internet, friends, some of my friends told me this was a good college and if I really wanted to study, the teachers are good there. So you can say internet, friends, counselor and brochures.

4.3.3.2 Internet only. Twenty five percent (25% n=4) of respondents shared that they only used the internet as a tool to complete comparative analysis of the available programs and colleges. Students hoping to enroll in different programs may use different tools to collect and evaluate information required to aid their decision (R.A. Malatest, 2008). Most of the students from engineering technology and personal support worker programs relied only on the internet to

collect data for comparative analysis. A summary of the students' answers in response to these questions is below:

Respondents 002 said:

It was all over the internet. There are some government websites I was able to get into that would talk about the program reviews, jobs available, the percentage of [success] depending on the industry, what industries were hiring for that type of job which was all of them

Respondent 006 shared a similar source:

I had searched the courses and gathered all the information through the information available in their websites. They have like how many modules they're offering and what will be the duration of each of the modules. So that's how basically I evaluated the courses

Respondent 011 stated:

I further investigated programs offered through websites of various schools and liked this one

Respondent 015 shared:

I used the internet for comparison. I attended Seneca College ten years ago, so I kind of know how the Community College works. So I was actually only really interested in a Private Colleges. I didn't want to attend a Community College

4.3.4 Institution of First Choice

Sixty nine percent (69% $r=11$) of respondents claimed that the college was their first choice with thirty one percent (31% $r=5$) claiming they settled for the second best available institution. The participants were asked if the college was the institution of their first choice. The responses of students were brief as most of them responded with "yes it was" or "yes" to this question. Some students replied as "no" or "it was not my first choice". The response from participants of this study is consistent with of R.A. Malatest (2008) where seventy two percent (72%) of students surveyed declared private career college as their college of choice.

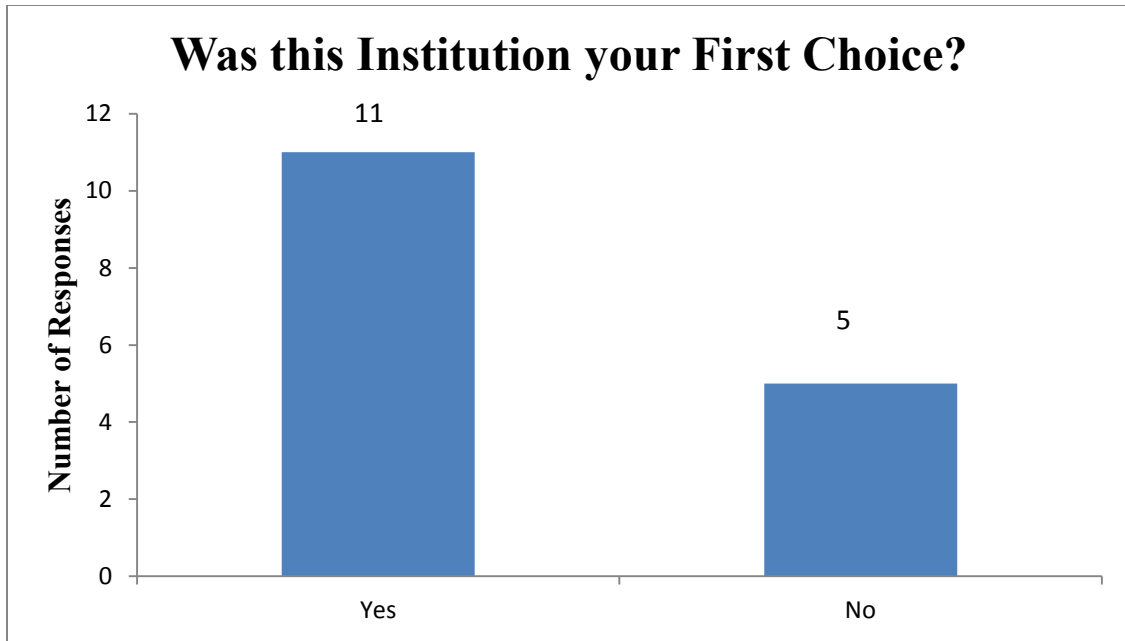


Figure 4.6: Institution of choice?

4.3.5 Investigating Job Market Value of the Programs

A significant majority of students investigated the job market value of their program before deciding to submit admission applications. Ninety four percent (94% n=15) of respondents said they used the internet and other resources to investigate how much they would be able to earn after graduation. Six percent (6% n=1) of respondents stated that they did not investigate the job market value of their intended program. The question asked was if students researched the job market value of their course before applying and again very brief answers were received in response. Most of the students just said “yes” or “yes I did”. The responses reported below summarize views cited by almost all the students:

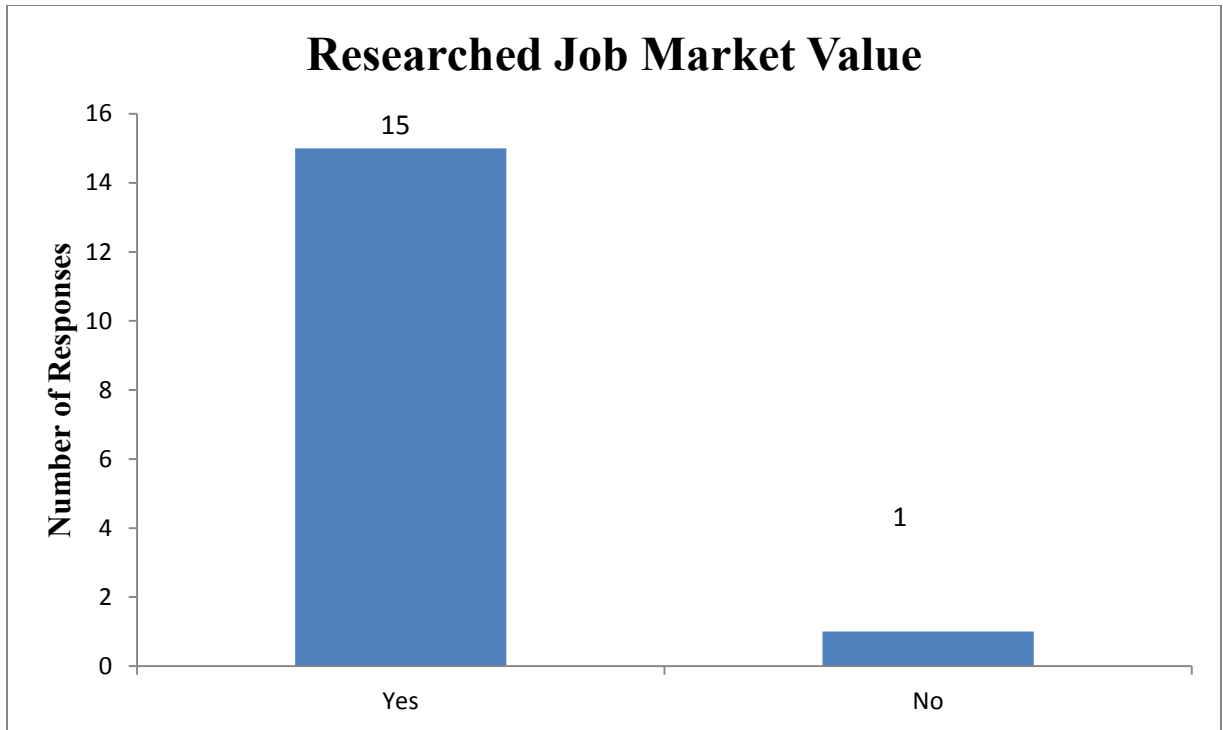


Figure 4.7: Researched job market value of the chosen program?

Respondent 001 reported:

Yes, since I was job hunting before I applied to this college and I have seen a lot of job opportunities for this course. So I decided to go ahead and enroll in this program

Respondent 002 stated:

I did not investigate the job value of this program. I was told by my college counselors about this program being highly valuable and I trust their opinion

Respondent 006 shared:

Yes I did [investigate the job market value]. Basically the thing which inspired me the most is that I have seen the modules in this course which are like very appealing and very much up to date, up to the current market requirements

4.4 Student Satisfaction

A majority of the respondents reported that they are happy to have made the decision and would not like to do things differently if another opportunity was given. Eighty eight percent

(88% $r=14$) of respondents shared that they are satisfied with their decision and its outcome. Six percent (6% $r=1$) each of responses were received with 'unsatisfied' and 'not sure' answer. The questions asked were if the student was happy with the decision they made and if possible, would they have done things any differently.

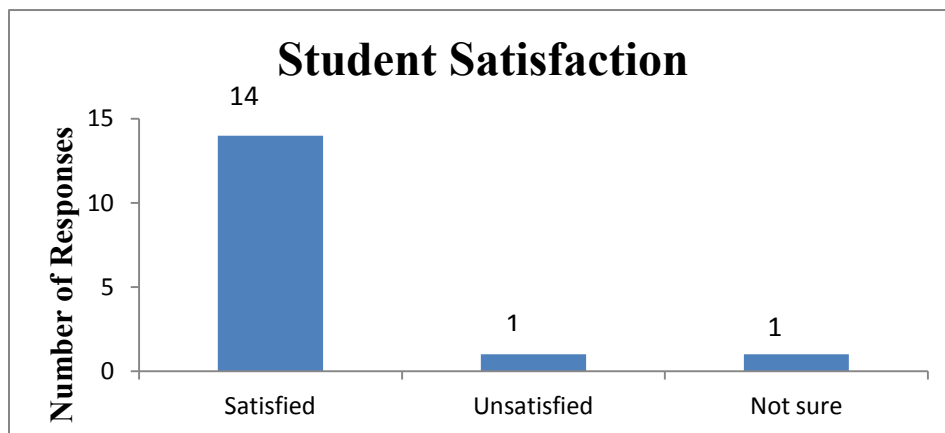


Figure 4.8: Student satisfaction on the outcome of their decision

4.4.1 Satisfied. A Majority of the students claimed that they are happy with the decision they made and the likely outcome of it. Almost eighty eight percent (88% $n=14$) of respondents reported satisfaction over their decisions. Students' satisfaction was an overall occurrence and this study did not investigate specific areas such as facilities, teaching, career counseling, and inclusion. R. A. Malatest (2009) also reported a majority of students being satisfied with their choice of private career colleges. A total of sixty six percent (66%) students reported that they are happy to be a student in one of the private career colleges (R.A. Malatest, 2009). Below is the summary of the students' responses in this regard:

Respondent 003 said:

Yes I did [make] a good decision because it really helps me. And also I know I'm going to get a better job and better pay through this

Respondent 004 shared similar thoughts:

My interest and passion is here. I must say that I made a good decision to select this program. And this institution is a good instrument to fulfill my goal. I'm happy with the outcome of my decision

Respondent 005 stated:

Yeah. I think it's a good decision. It really built up my confidence about my English. And I never trained before, so I always had the fear to face other people when I speak English with other people. So after this program I built up my confidence. I think it's a very good decision to select this program

Respondent 006 shared:

I have made a good decision because I am happy and satisfied with whatever the things are going on. I'm pretty much happy because I feel like it's your own commitment and your own dedication to where you want to get knowledge and education

Respondent 007 stated:

It is best decision for me and fortunately this is a good decision to select this program and this institution too

Respondent 008 said:

I am very happy and couldn't have done things differently

Respondent 009 cited:

Definitely. I am happy with my decision.

Respondent 010 stated:

I'm happy that I had this opportunity which is not perfect to everyone because I could have gotten the job, right. I could have gotten a job, I would have done a job, so I could go back to where I left, but trying to get this opportunity it doesn't come that easy. And this opportunity is something that will make you better through the education of what you will learn in school, what you will learn in the classroom

Respondent 011 shared:

I am very happy in this school and I continue to study more and get a good job in the future. I would be a good aesthetician and business person in the future

Respondent 012 said:

Yes, I'm very positive about the outcome of my decision

Respondent 013 cited:

Yes, I think so I made a fairly good decision. I have already consulted my friends, my family members and everybody else. I personally visited there, also the various colleges. So I think this is the thing which I wanted to do and I got it

Respondent 014 stated:

Yes I made a good decision and I am happy

Respondent 015 shared:

Yes I am happy to make this decision

Respondent 016 said:

For the time being, it's very good. Due to my family constraints, time, and all the teachers who are here I found they are good and competent.

4.4.2 Unsatisfied. Six percent (6% n=1) of respondents showed a clear discontent with the outcome of their decision and shared that they really could have gone to another school. R.A. Malatest (2009) reported fifteen percent (15%) of private career college students were unsatisfied and wished to go to another school instead. The participant's response is narrated below:

Respondent 001 stated:

If the other school offered the same services that this school gave me, namely the prompt scheduling for assistance for counseling and for OSAP orientation, I could have gone to school near my place. So I can avoid the inconvenience of having to travel four hours every day just to go to school

Although the student shared dissatisfaction, the reasons mentioned were apparently more personal than academic or professional. This student wanted to go to a different school to avoid the "inconvenience" of commuting to and from this school. Therefore, the discontent is due to

the location of the school. The student also mentioned that the right program and funding was available in this school so “the positives surpass the negatives” in terms of initial selection.

4.4.3 Not sure. Six percent (6% n=1) of respondents mentioned they are unsure if they are satisfied or not with the outcome of their decision. The student’s below answer clearly shows a lack of certainty in terms of the decision making style of the student.

Respondent 002 stated:

Personally I think I did [make a good decision] because, it was a quick way to get my diploma and it was a lot of work, but it was worth all the work. But I am not sure if this was the right decision for me. May be doing something else [like] studying in another program might [have] helped me finding work that I am actually happy with

It is not unusual for private career college students to provide a mixed or neutral response when asked about the outcome of their college selection choices (Berger, 2009). Nineteen percent (19%) of students gave a neutral response to questions about satisfaction on the outcome of their decision (R.A. Malatest, 2009) in this study the percentage of such responses was six (6).

Chapter 5 Analysis and Discussion of the Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate factors which influenced students' private career college choice, and to investigate their decision making process and reasons for their application to career college programs. The data collected clearly demonstrated that these students are choosing private career college programs for specific reasons. They do some initial data gathering before making the final selection and show a high degree of satisfaction on the outcome of their decisions.

5.1 Reasons to Continue Education

The first question explored what is the main reason for students to continue their education and most students provided a career specific answer. As reported by Arcidiacono, Hotz, and Kang (2010), the expectations of earning higher income and getting better paying jobs after graduation are among the key reasons for students to choose a university education. Although the purpose of this study was not to compare differences between higher education and earnings, it was found that results of this study were not any different from the one conducted by Arcidiacono, Hotz, and Kang (2010) as all students involved in this study believed the correlation between higher earnings and post secondary education to be positive. They shared success stories of others who were able to find better paying jobs after completing similar courses and cited this as one of the key reasons to continue their education. For example respondent 006 said:

I heard about this program from my friend. She had done a similar course and now she is working in a very good job. I really like to work in a good organization as my friend is doing

Another student (respondent 008) mentioned similar hopes;

I have some friends who did the same course from this college and they all got good jobs in hospitals. I want to do that job [too].

Results of this study have shown trends that are similar to the existing literature findings. Analyses of the collected data revealed that a majority of the students decided to continue their education to pursue career progression, upgrade their skills, and in hopes of finding a better paying job after graduation. Participants who self identified themselves as new immigrants also shared that they were required to take a Canadian diploma in order to qualify for jobs in their profession of practice. A small number of participants also shared that they took the opportunity to complete some sort of post secondary education as they were previously unable to finish their high school.

It was evident from the analyses of the study data that all students showed hope that higher education would help them get better earning jobs in the near future. The findings of this study are consistent with the research by Chao and Good (2004) that nontraditional students show a high level of hopefulness when making decisions to enroll in a college or university. Synder, Rang, and Sigmon (2002) reported that hopefulness reflects the belief that an individual can find pathways to desired goals and motivates him/her to use these pathways, hopefulness thus serves to enhance positive emotions and well-being.

5.2 Reasons for Students' Choice

A number of aspects can affect a student's decision regarding which institution to select for higher education (Heblich, Wozniak, & Timmins, 2012). A study conducted by Arcidiacono (2005) examined the importance of availability of financial aid, and labour market value of the programs on students' decision making. Gibbons and Vignoles (2012) emphasized the

importance of distance between students' home and institution on participation. Heblich, Wozniak, and Timmins (2012) reported that students' ability to choose a higher education institution was driven by his or her socio-economic background. Another study by Drewes and Michael (2006) found that applicants prefer higher education institutions that are located closer to their homes and had more financial aid programs available. Their study also concluded that pre-dominantly, female students prefer smaller class sizes and show high relationship between expected future earnings and choice of an institution or program.

5.2.1 Why Private Career Colleges?

One of the key areas explored by this study was to investigate reasons for students' choices of a higher education institution specifically, a private career college. Participants of the study provided very clear responses on this as they shared explicit reasons as to why they selected a private career college program. This section shows overall deliberation of the participants' responses with regards to why they selected a private career college program. As noted by Heblich, Wozniak, and Timmins (2012), it is crucial for better institutional policy development if we understand the factors which affect the students' decisions in choosing a higher education institution. The findings of this study reveal that students choose to apply to private career college programs due to shorter course duration, flexibility of class schedules, uniqueness of the courses offered, availability of funding, and tailored on-campus resources. Assistance provided by college staff, specifically counselors, during the process of admission, location of the college, and student demographics including the success rate were also mentioned as reasons to apply for admission in private career college programs.

Results of this study confirm the findings of the previous literature such as that of Li (2006) that private career colleges are successful in attracting students due to the unique program offerings and flexible class timings. It also conforms to the findings of R.A. Malatest and Associates (2008) that private career college students are predominantly female, show greater concern for their future earnings, and have family responsibilities. Participants also considered student demographics and location of the college when deciding on which private career college to select. The graph below represents the percentages of all the relative factors considered by students.

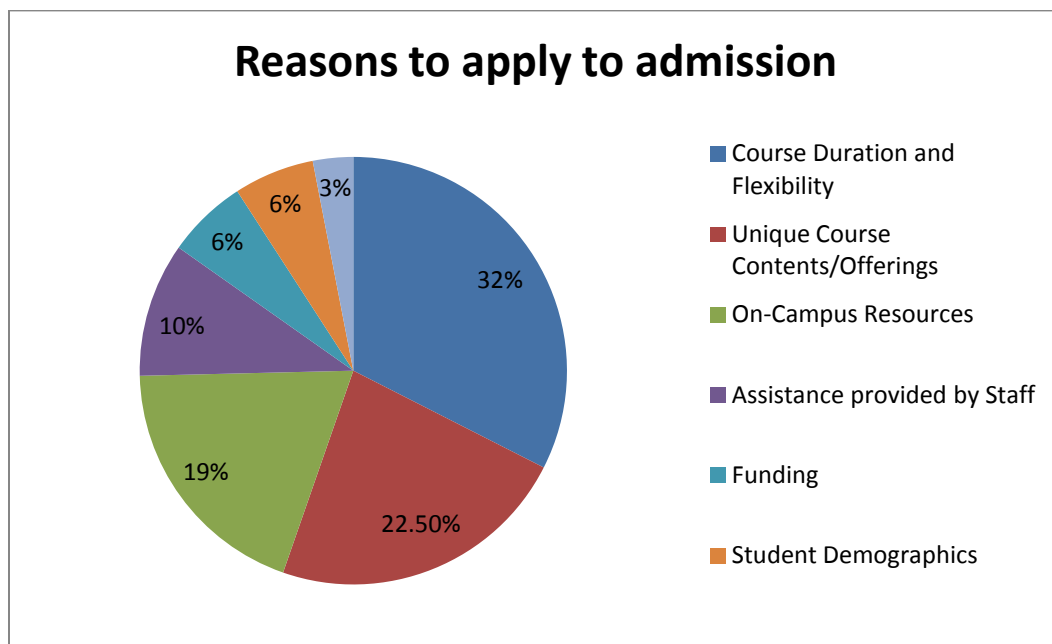


Figure 5.1: Reasons to apply admission

5.3 Social Constructivism and Decision Making

Decision making is not a lone task but a process of learning from the environment. It is also suggested by researchers that not all factors influence our decision making equally (Johnston, 2010). This is the view of social constructivists that a decision is not made by an

individual alone but decided upon together in a social way (Cottone, 2004). Researchers have reported that career decision making is fundamentally relationally oriented, given that people seek out support, advice, and ideas from significant people in their lives (Blustein, Schultheiss & Flum, 2004).

5.3.1 Factors Affecting Decisions

As in social constructivism, an individual is impacted by the factors surrounding him/her. There were many factors involved in a student's choice of private career college in this study as well. This study demonstrated that students collect course/college information during the process of their matriculation decision from various sources including family, friends and college counselors. The participants also emphasized the importance of the sources of such information. Although it was not the objective of this study to test the impact of each source of information, it was revealed that students consider college counselors, family and friends more reliable sources than other sources such as internet and print media.

The next step shown in the decision making pattern was to collect advice on which course to choose. The participants of this study shared that they took matriculation advice from friends, family members, college counselors, and professional organizations such as education advisories and consultancies. A further analysis of the data revealed that students rely on advice from friends and family members more than any other sources. Although this was not the objective of this study to measure students' reliance on sources of matriculation advice, it was learned that participants of this study showed a greater trust of information received through family and friends rather than the college counselors or professional organizations.

Students used a variety of sources to research programs offered by other colleges for comparison to facilitate their decision making. These sources included looking at the colleges' websites, comparison of brochures and other marketing material available, visits to campuses to get first hand information on quality of on-campus services, and meeting with college counselors. A majority of the participants stated that the college they chose was their first choice among all institutions they evaluated. Some of them cited family commitments and personal circumstances as more important reasons as to why private career college is a better fit for their needs. As reported by respondent 006:

The first and the foremost reason has been my personal situation. I had some time constraints. For that particular reason, I cannot extend my timing for the studies beyond this point. And this college is offering two shifts. One is in the morning, and [other in the] afternoon. So it's kind of really flexible and feasible for me to continue in that way. Otherwise, other colleges, they have extended hours and all that, which I really cannot to afford to have at this point in time. So basically my time constraints and personal situation has led me to decide on a private career college

Another student said:

I did [researched other colleges] and like I said they have classes that start at 8 am, some are evening classes and I can't manage that. I'm a single mother, so I can't attend classes like that. They don't work with my daycare, so again it's the hours of this school that worked for me

This study also revealed that private career college students look at the job market value of their intended program during the matriculation process. Participants unequivocally demonstrate that investigating the job market value of an educational program plays an important role in their selection of this particular private career college. Participants of this study used a variety of resources to collect such information. These resources included the internet, especially job advertisement websites, visits to professional organizations such as The Career Foundation Toronto, and testimonials from previous students from the same college. Although it was not one

of the objectives of this study to test students' level of satisfaction, it was revealed however, that students show greater satisfaction on the outcome of their decisions. A majority of the students shared that they are "very happy" and are "extremely satisfied" with their choice of private career college.

Chapter 6 Summary and Conclusions

Research has shown that private career college students in Canada are “diverse, they share some similarities that differentiate them from those in the public college system (R.A. Malatest, 2009, p. 57). There is a considerable body of research available regarding transition to workforce from the public post secondary system in Canada; however, very little research has been completed with participation from students enrolled in a private post secondary education program (R.A. Malatest, 2007). This is also supported by Li (2006) who stated private career colleges in Canada are a “lesser known player in post secondary education” (p. 3) and provide “an alternative to more traditional postsecondary education programs” that give students a “flexible education that constantly adapts to changes in the labour market” (p. 4).

The purpose of this study was to explore characteristics of private career college students and what factors contribute to their decision to choose to apply to a program offered by one private career college. This study also investigated the decision making process of students when enrolling in a private career college program. The objectives of this study were met. Through semi-structured interview questions posed to the students of a small private career college in Ontario, this study was able to determine: a) why students decided to continue further studies; b) what motivated students to apply to a private career college program; c) how they made their decision; and d) what factors impacted their decision to apply. This chapter summarizes the findings, according to the research questions, and presents conclusions including limitations of the study and recommendations for future research. This study was guided by four (4) research questions:

1. What does the students self identify as their main objective for further education?

2. What are the reasons a student self identifies as his/her reason to apply for admission to a private career college program?
3. What factors contribute to their decision?
4. What is the process followed by students when making an admission decisions?

Analysis of the data collected through interviews indicated the following with respect to these research questions:

1. Private career college students chose to continue their education to upgrade their skills and expected to be able to find better paying jobs after graduation. The students who self identified themselves as immigrants used this pathway to acquire Canadian credentials and employer acceptability, in order to be able to enter the Canadian workforce.
2. Students consider private career colleges as an alternative pathway to achieve post secondary credentials in Canada. This is common among students who were unable to finish their high school, college or university in the past.
3. A majority of the private career college students self-identify as having previous work experience in their chosen profession in Canada or overseas.
4. Students apply to private career college programs because these are shorter in duration and have small class sizes when compared with community college and university programs. Private career colleges have flexible entry requirements and their programs are available to start throughout the year unlike the fixed in-take dates offered by public post secondary institutions.
5. Students considered private career college program contents different from what was being offered by community colleges and universities in Ontario. A majority

of the students were under the impression that private career college programs are more in line with current workforce requirements and were able to equip students with better skills to compete in the job market.

6. Staff at this private career college provided relevant and timely admission advice to students. This advice included guidance on funding, available program options, student demographics and was considered valuable by students when deciding to choose this private career college.
7. Students collected program information through multiple sources such as family members, friends, the college's marketing department, internet, and brochures. Most of the students made their decision to apply after consulting family and friends. Some visited professional organizations such as career counselors for advice.
8. This private career college was the institution of choice for students in post secondary studies. The students in this study researched similar programs offered by other private and public post secondary institutions before making a final selection. The evaluation criteria included program length, funding availability, location, and reputation of the colleges.
9. Students evaluate the job market value of their intended program before applying for admission and showed satisfaction with the outcome of their decision.

It was found through this research that students in this private career college were predominantly female, above the age of twenty five (25), share childcare responsibilities, and are keen to upgrade their skills in order to find appropriate employment. These characteristics were similar to the students surveyed by R.A. Malatest (2008). Although Li (2006) reported an overall

decline in private career college enrolments between the years 1993 and 2003, this study did not investigate if the same was true in this private career college. Further research involving a review of previous years' enrolment data can help us explore this.

All participants of this study followed some kind of decision making process. They collected the data for evaluation through various sources and conducted evaluation analyses before arriving at a final decision. A particular factor of significant importance revealed through investigation into their decision making process was the students' personal circumstances. A number of students shared that they had some personal challenges that contributed towards their selection of this private career college. One respondent for example gave the following statement when asked about the reason for selecting this private career college;

The first and the foremost reason has been my personal situation. I had some time constraints. For that particular reason, I cannot extend my timing for the studies beyond this point. Respondent 006.

Another student shared the same reason:

I don't live far from this [college] and I have young kids so my personal limitations of not been able to travel far for studies is why I [chose to] attend this college. Respondent 015.

The above accounts of statements show that students in this study made their decisions under limitations imposed by their personal situation. This led to the belief that the decision making process of this private career college students was more commonly associated with the one described by Simon (1982, 1997, 2009) as a bounded rationality model. This decision making model describes the decision maker who would like to make the best decisions but normally settles for less than the optimal (Lunenburg, 2010). The investigation into the overall impact of decision making factors, and measurement of each individual factor was not performed in this study and warrants further research.

6.1 Lessons for Private Career College Administrators

This study investigated the factors students self identified as being important for them when selecting a private career college. The findings of this study were used to list the following information that may be helpful if used by private career college administrators:

1. Private career college programs that have rich job market value are found to be attractive by future students.
2. Marketing departments may benefit from collaborating with friends and family members of the potential students when providing program advice.
3. Provision of appropriate and complete guidance about financial aid can support students' decision making process.
4. It may be beneficial for private career colleges to use a variety of platforms to provide information. These must include but should not be limited to direct mailing, the internet, social media, brochures, and career events.
5. Development and provision of clear and easily understood program contents are found to be helpful in a student's choice process
6. Private career college students prefer small class size and more interaction with facilitators/tutors.

6.2 Research Limitations

The sample size of participants (16) is a clear limitation of this study. This and the fact that the sample was drawn from one private career college in Ontario makes it difficult to draw conclusions about decision making factors and processes in other private career colleges in Canada with certainty. The students' answers to interview questions relied on memories, opinions, reflections, and to some degree the amount of time and effort that each participant

spent preparing for the interview. The very personal and subjective recounts may have resulted in inaccuracies in the findings and missed opportunities for a complete understanding of the student attributes and decision making process.

6.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Two recommendations have been noted above, namely further investigation into the gender specific enrolment trends in private career colleges and the impact of all individual decision making factors on the student choice process. The limitations of this study guide some of the additional recommendations for future research. First and foremost, replicating this research to students in other private career colleges in Canada would help to account for possible variances among student characteristics and the decision making processes they employ. In addition, an investigation with a larger sample size would contribute to the efficacy of this study. Along the same lines, a larger sample size could afford an understanding of variances depending on demographic factors such as age, gender, marital status, and ethnicity.

Further research including student participation from both private career colleges and in public post secondary education institutions is also important. It will be interesting to compare private career college students with students in community colleges or universities in Canada to see variances in attributes and decision making processes.

6.4 Conclusions

Fundamental to this study was learning who private career college students were and how they made their decision to apply to a post secondary program. The findings of this study suggest that private career college students are a diverse group comprised of people with many years of domestic or international work experience, new immigrants to Canada, and all have family

members they are responsible for. These characteristics play an important role in their selection of a higher education institution for further studies. The students' decision making process of college choice is evidently impacted by certain factors that range from being of a personal to an institutional nature. All students found it useful to conduct an evaluation of available alternatives when making the final selection and show a high degree of satisfaction on the outcome of their decision. Finally, I would like to conclude with a quote from one participant who represented the approach of most of the private career college students I came across in my nine (9) years of teaching;

To me, and also the way I was brought up, it's a no-brainer that I had to get good education to be a valuable member of this society. [One] must do something that's practical and has good market value. I always wanted to do something for myself that suits who I am as a person in my heart and this was an excellent opportunity for me to realize my dream

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Appendix A

Ethics Letter



**Interdisciplinary Committee on
Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR)**

Office of Research Services
St. John's, NL, Canada A1C 5S7
Tel: 709 864 2561 Fax: 709 864 4612
www.mun.ca/research

ICEHR Number:	20141407-ED
Approval Period:	April 22, 2014 – April 30, 2015
Funding Source:	
Responsible Faculty:	Dr. Rob Shea Faculty of Education
Title of Project:	<i>Access to Private Career Colleges: An Investigation into Students' Decision to Apply for Admission</i>

April 22, 2014

Mr. Arif Toor
Faculty of Education
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Dear Mr. Toor:

Thank you for your email correspondence of April 11, 2014 addressing the issues raised by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) concerning the above-named research project.

The ICEHR has re-examined the proposal with the clarification and revisions submitted, and is satisfied that the concerns raised by the Committee have been adequately addressed. In accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2)*, the project has been granted *full ethics clearance* to April 30, 2015.

If you need to make changes during the course of the project, which may raise ethical concerns, please forward an amendment request form with a description of these changes to icehr@mun.ca for the Committee's consideration.

The *TCPS2* requires that you submit an annual update form to the ICEHR before April 30, 2015. If you plan to continue the project, you need to request renewal of your ethics clearance, and include a brief summary on the progress of your research. When the project no longer requires contact with human participants, is completed and/or terminated, you need to provide the annual update form with a final brief summary, and your file will be closed.

The annual update form and amendment request form are on the ICEHR website at <http://www.mun.ca/research/ethics/humans/icehr/applications/>.

We wish you success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gail Wideman".

Gail Wideman, Ph.D.
Vice-Chair, Interdisciplinary Committee on
Ethics in Human Research

GW/th

copy: Supervisor – Dr. Rob Shea, Faculty of Education
Associate Dean, Graduate Programs, Faculty of Education

Appendix B

Participant Recruitment Poster

Research Participants Needed



My name is Arif Toor and I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland. I am conducting a research involving private career college students and looking for volunteers to take part in an interview lasting 30-45 minutes during May-June 2014.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and all information collected, used and/or disclosed will be used for research purpose only. To assure voluntary participation, students in the Diploma in Accounting and Finance Program are not allowed to take part in this study.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. ICEHR approval has been granted under ICEHR No. 20141407-ED. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the chairperson of ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at (709) 864 2561.

If interested in participation, please contact me at [REDACTED] or email amt835@mun.ca

Thank you

Arif Toor

Appendix C

Permission Request to the college

May 20, 2014

Mrs. [REDACTED]

Campus Manager,
[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED],

My name is Arif Toor and I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland. I am writing to request your permission to contact NA college students for voluntary participation in my research.

As part of my degree of Education in Postsecondary Studies, I am required to complete a thesis. My thesis is entitled *Access to Private Career Colleges: An investigation into students' decision to apply for admission*. My research is being supervised by Dr. Rob Shea, a professor in the faculty of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

The purpose of my research is to learn more about factors that influence matriculation decisions made by private career college students. Private career colleges are significant yet lesser-known players in Canadian postsecondary education system. Little is known about composition and nature of students who chose to study in private career college students. By participating in this research, NA College students will be contributing to our understanding, as well as potentially allowing you to reflect on your own decision making process and influential factors. To assure voluntary participation, students in the Diploma in Accounting and Finance Program are not allowed to take part in this study.

If a student agrees to participate in my research, his/her involvement would be one 30 – 45 minutes interview with me at a mutually convenient place and time during May or June 2014. The interview will consist of 16 semi-structured questions surrounding the students' process of researching, evaluating, and selecting a private career college program. They will be given questions prior to the interview to allow time to reflect upon and recall their experiences. The interview will be audio-recorded and then transcribed.

All information gathered in this study is strictly confidential and every reasonable effort will be made to ensure privacy and confidentiality of participants. The results of the study may be published and direct quotes from participants may be used. Participants' names and locations will not be identified. If direct quotes are used in my publications, care will be taken to ensure that they are general in nature and cannot be associated to a particular individual. The digital records will be encrypted and transcripts will be held in a locked and secured location in my office in the admin block of North American College located at suite 207, 730 Yonge Street Toronto ON M4Y 2B7 for at least five years as per Memorial University's policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research. Only I and Prof. Shea will have access to the transcripts.

I believe it is unlikely that harm will come to your organization and students as a result of participating in this study. I would ensure that students receive appropriate support if they were to experience anxiety and stress while participating in the study.

Participation in this research is voluntary and not binding. If the students choose to participate, they may decline or withdraw any time before the interview(s) has been completed without any negative consequences.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. ICEHR approval has been granted under ICEHR No.20141407-ED. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the chairperson of ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at (709) 864 2561.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for helping me with my research.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Arif Toor', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Arif Toor

Appendix D

Recruitment Script for Colleagues

Hello students;

Our colleague Mr. Arif Toor is conducting a research involving private career college students and looking for volunteers to take part in an interview lasting 30-45 minutes during March-April 2014.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and all information collected, used and/or disclosed will be used for research purpose only. Your participation or/and denial to participate will not harm you in any way possible.

If interested in participation, please contact him at [REDACTED] or email amt835@mun.ca

Thank you

Appendix E

Informed Consent Form



Faculty of Education
Graduate Programs

St. John's, NL, Canada A1B 3X8
Tel: 709 864 8553 Fax: 709 864 4379
www.mun.ca/educ

Informed Consent Form

Title: *Access to Private Career Colleges: An investigation into students' decision to apply for admission.*

Researcher(s): *Arif M Toor, Graduate Student, Master of Education in Postsecondary Studies, Faculty of Education, [REDACTED] e-mail: amt835@mun.ca*

My name is Arif Toor and I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland and an instructor with North American College. I am writing to request your voluntary participation in my research.

As part of my Masters of Education in Postsecondary Studies, I am required to complete a thesis. My thesis is entitled *Access to Private Career Colleges: An investigation into students' decision to apply for admission*. My research is being supervised by Dr. Rob Shea, a professor in the faculty of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland. The purpose of my research is to learn more about factors that influence matriculation decisions of private career college students. Private career colleges are significant yet lesser-known players in Canadian postsecondary education system. Little is known about composition and nature of students who chose to study in private career college students. By participating in this research, you will be contributing to our understanding, as well as potentially allowing you to reflect on your own decision making process and influential factors.

If you agree to participate in my research, your involvement would be one 30 – 45 minutes interview with me at a mutually convenient place and time during May or June 2014. The interview will consist of 17 semi-structured questions surrounding your process of researching, evaluating, and selecting a private career college program. You will be given questions prior to the interview to allow time to reflect upon and recall your experiences. The interview will be audio-recorded and then transcribed.

All information gathered in this study is strictly confidential and every reasonable effort will be made to ensure privacy and confidentiality of participants. The results of the study may be published and direct quotes from participants may be used. Participants' names and locations will not be identified. If direct quotes are used in my publications, care will be taken to ensure that they are general in nature and cannot be associated to a particular individual. The digital records will be encrypted and transcripts will be held in a locked and secured location in my office in the admin block of [REDACTED] located at suite [REDACTED]. As per Memorial University's policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research, all data collected with respect to this research will be retained for at least five years for research purpose only. Only I and Prof. Shea will have access to the transcripts.



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I believe it is unlikely that harm will come to you as a result of participating in this study. I would ensure that you receive appropriate support if you were to experience anxiety and stress while participating in the study.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. ICEHR approval has been granted under ICEHR No... 20141407-ED. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the chairperson of ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at (709) 864 2561.

Participation in this research is voluntary and not binding. If you choose to participate, you may decline or withdraw any time before the interview(s) has been completed, without any negative consequences. You must inform the researcher before or during the interview of your intentions to withdraw, otherwise it will not be possible to remove the data collected as it will be anonymized after completion of the interview and researcher will be unable to identify any one person's interview data.

Finally, I am undertaking this research as a student of Memorial University of Newfoundland. My research is TOTALLY UNRELATED to the position I hold at North American College. Any participation or lack thereof will not affect you, your studies, reputation or involvement at North American College whatsoever.

If you are in agreement to participate in this study, please contact me by phone at [REDACTED] or email amt835@mun.ca. You must sign the consent form on the next page and return to me prior to your interview.

Thank you for considering my research.

Consent:

Your signature on this form means that:

- You have read the information about the research.
- You have been able to ask questions about this study.
- You are satisfied with the answers to all your questions.
- You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing.
- You understand that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time before the completion of interview, without having to give a reason, and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future.
- You understand that any data collected from you up to the point of your withdrawal will be retained by the researcher for a period of five years for use in the research only, as per Memorial University's policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research).
- You must inform the researcher before or during the interview of your intentions to withdraw, otherwise it will not be possible to remove the data collected as it will be



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If you sign this form, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researchers from their professional responsibilities.

Your signature:

I have read what this study is about and understood the risks and benefits. I have had adequate time to think about this and had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered.

- ☐ I agree to participate in the research project understanding the risks and contributions of my participation, that my participation is voluntary, and that I may end my participation at any time before the interview.
- ☐ I agree to be audio-recorded during the interview

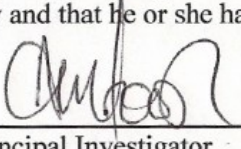
A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

Signature of participant

Date

Researcher's Signature:

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.



Signature of Principal Investigator



Date

Appendix F

Non-Disclosure Agreement

Confidentiality Agreement form

Confidentiality Agreement between IntelleANTS Transcription Service (and its employees) and client, **Arif M Toor**.

IntelleANTS Transcription Service transcribers and administrators are bound to confidentiality and nondisclosure of all information contained in the (Project) audio and subsequent transcripts. All audio and transcripts in any and all formats (including but not limited to physical and digital media) must be deleted upon completion of the project with IntelleANTS Transcription Service.

By signing or typing below, the transcriber and/or administrator agree to the confidentiality, nondisclosure, and requirements for file deletion.



Signature
Name: Edward Isaac M

Administrator
Indicate: Transcriber or Administrator

06/22/2014
Date

Appendix G

Interview Questions and Probes

1. What is the main objective of continuing your education?
2. What is the main reason that you applied for admission in this program?
3. How did you first hear about the program you are currently enrolled in?
4. What are the main reasons you chose to attend this particular private career college?
5. How did you select this course/program?
6. How did you select this college?
7. Was this institution your first choice?
8. Did you research programs offered by other institutions?
9. On what criteria you evaluated available programs and institutions?
10. Please explain the process of course and college selection in detail.
11. What resources you used to collect information for matriculation decision?
12. Did you investigate the job market value of this program?
13. Was this the only program you applied for?
14. Was this the only college you applied to for admission?
15. What are your plans after completing this program?
16. Do you think you made a good decision to select this program/institution?
17. Do you ever think you could have done things differently?

Appendix H

Participation Confirmation Letter

