

Undergraduate Parks, Recreation, and Leisure Education: Variables Associated With Recruitment and Implications For Retention

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Abstract

In New Zealand, as government funding of post-secondary education has dwindled, there has been an increasing reliance on student fees to maintain budgetary levels. The present study sought to examine variables that were influential to students' decisions to enroll at Lincoln University in the undergraduate degree offered by the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism. In addition, indicators of present student satisfaction and intentions to continue in the degree were examined in order to develop an initial understanding of variables related to student retention. Results suggested that brochures were the most important source of information about both the University and the degree, and that future employment opportunities was the most influential variable in the decision to enroll in the degree. While a number of students indicated that they were not happy with their experience in the degree, their dissatisfaction was unrelated to the intention to continue in the degree. Students in the first year were more likely to be happy with their experience but were less likely to plan on continuing in the degree.

Key words: Marketing university or college degrees, Student satisfaction, Student Intentions

Biographical Information

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Introduction

During the 1980s American universities and colleges were faced with a 10% decline in the number of graduating high school students (Dunn, 1994). In an effort to expand or maintain market share many of these institutions developed or increased the use of creative marketing campaigns to attract students. According to *Marketing News* (July 8, 1994, p. 11) "in today's competitive market for college enrollment, research-driven, values-based

marketing is the best strategy for educational institutions.” Administrators of curricula in the areas of parks/recreation/leisure may benefit greatly from knowledge regarding such marketing schemes, since the discipline is often what may be referred to as a “discovery major”, or an area of study that high school counselors may be less likely to promote due to lack of familiarity (Ward & Oberby, 1993). Knowledge regarding the effectiveness of department-level as well as university-level media may potentially empower decision makers in programs that are seeking to increase student enrollment.

Based on a study of graduating high school students, Stanley and Reynolds (1994) found that the choice of degree enrollment was primarily influenced by the nature of the degree offered in a student’s area of interest in addition to considerations related to the quality of the institution. The people most influential to the choice of university were parents, and the most important sources of information for student recruitment to universities was found to be (in order of importance) written information on the university, visits by representatives from institutions, media advertisements, and open days where students could visit. These results were not reported in reference to specific degree areas.

Little information exists regarding the media that draws students to (or push them away from) study in parks/recreation/leisure. However, it has been suggested that strategies for recruitment of students into parks/recreation/leisure departments should emphasize promoting careers in the field to high school students, increasing public awareness of employment opportunities, involving faculty on campus in promoting the degrees, and offering more generic leisure education classes to appeal to students outside the degree (Becker & Miko, 1992).

The decision of an individual to enroll in a degree or program has the potential to be relatively temporary. Tinto (1975) proposed that attrition from universities is the result of an incongruency between students and institutions. A student’s commitment to both their educational goals and to remaining in a given institution is affected by the student’s motivation and academic ability as well as by the institution’s academic and social characteristics. If incongruity exists, attrition is likely. Therefore, the likelihood of a parks/recreation/leisure student remaining in a given program may depend on interrelationships among variables such as whether the program presents a comfortable level of challenge (or lack of challenge) to the student, the level of mentoring offered within the program, the quality of student advisement (Becker & Miko, 1992; Gladwell, Dowd & Benzaquin, 1995), and the fit between students’ expected outcomes and those outcomes the program can offer. The prediction of factors related to student retention and attrition has evolved to include complicated statistical models that may or may not incorporate cognitive predictors (see Dey & Astin, 1993).

According to Bank, Biddle and Slavings (1992), research into attrition that is based upon models such as that proposed by Tinto (1975) have produced three general findings. Firstly, academic achievement and ability are predictive of student persistence in a degree; secondly, the influence of parents, teachers, and peers is important in continued enrollment; and finally, undergraduates influence their own persistence in a degree via their thoughts

and opinions about their program. Based on this information, parks/recreation/leisure departments should seek to enroll students with ability in their identified area of interest, should attempt to establish links with the social influences on students' decisions, and should develop an understanding of students' attitudes toward their program in an attempt to identify possible problem areas that may lead to attrition.

In recent years, student recruitment and retention have become major issues within universities in New Zealand due to significant reductions in government funding of post-secondary education. The past decade has seen a movement away from the total government subsidy of tuition (i.e., free university education) to a gradual increase in the reliance of tertiary institutions on student fees as a means of maintaining budgetary levels. Subsequently, New Zealand universities have experienced the introduction of a competitive climate where the concept of "market share" is highly relevant. In response to this situation, several of the country's post-secondary institutions have developed marketing strategies as a means of recruiting students.

One of these institutions is Lincoln University which is unique in terms of the fact that in late 1994 it was the initiator of the use of a "branded campaign" as a means of differentiating the institution from the other six universities within New Zealand (population 3.5 million). This campaign has involved developing brand recognition for Lincoln University through a multimedia approach, incorporating print, billboard, radio and television advertisements. The advertising campaign targeted both prospective students and their parents as evidenced by the time slots during which the television ads were run. For example, TV ads were placed in commercial breaks during programs ranging from "PBS-type" programs to shows such as *Beverly Hills 90210*.

Lincoln University is comprised of a small campus located eight miles southwest of Christchurch, New Zealand on the South Island of the country. Christchurch is the third largest city in the country, and has two universities within a fifteen mile radius. While the other university in the region has a population of over 11,000 students and offers a wide range of degrees, Lincoln University has a student population of approximately 4,000 and offers degrees primarily related to business administration and natural resources. One of the larger departments on campus is the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism which employs nineteen full-time academic staff, offers degrees ranging from the Bachelor of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management (BPRTM) through to Doctor of Philosophy, and has enrollment of close to 400 undergraduate students.

Knowledge regarding the variables that are influential to students' decisions to attend Lincoln University or to enroll in the BPRTM as a specific degree within the parks/recreation/leisure field is scarce. Furthermore, while recruitment was the main focus of Lincoln's branded advertising campaign, retention of students is also a major consideration in the current climate. Developing an understanding of present student attitudes may be integral in maintaining student numbers, both at the department and university levels (Bank et al., 1992).

Lincoln University has successfully achieved an increase in student enrollments, particularly at the freshman level. The benefits associated with these increases in freshman numbers will not be sustained if student attrition occurs after the first, or subsequent, years of enrollment. Even less is known about the variables that contribute to the continuation of studies in the degree.

Based on this discussion, the objectives of this research were to determine:

- 1) the variables influencing students' decisions to attend Lincoln University;
- 2) how students became aware of the BPRTM degree;
- 3) the variables that influenced the decision to enroll for the BPRTM degree;
- 4) students' attitudes towards their experiences of the degree and their intentions to continue in the BPRTM.

Methodology

Instrumentation

A quantitative survey was deemed to be appropriate because of the nature of the data to be collected and the number of participants required. A questionnaire was developed to address each of the research objectives. The final questionnaire was nine pages long, consisted of 23 questions, and required approximately 10 to 20 minutes to complete. In some cases, questions had multiple sections. The questions primarily involved fixed response categories, although some questions were open ended. Likert scales, multiple choice, and questions where students could pick all applicable responses were included. Students were also asked to provide their student identification number (which remained confidential to the researchers) in anticipation of future research to assess variables related to attrition.

Sample

In an attempt to include every BPRTM student in the study, instructors of core classes in the degree at each of the three years of study (100-, 200-, and 300-level) were approached. (Readers should note that in New Zealand, undergraduate degrees generally involve three years of study with students accepted into their fourth year for an honors degree.) Instructors were asked if they would be willing to give the research team twenty minutes of their class time. All instructors who were approached responded positively. Students present in each class were invited to fill out a survey if they (a) were enrolled in the BPRTM degree, and (b) had not completed a questionnaire in a previous class. While students were asked to cooperate by completing a survey, they were not required to participate.

The students who comprised the sample cannot be assumed to be representative of all students, since those people who were absent from class on the day of administration or students who refused to complete the survey may somehow be different from students who completed the survey.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected in April, 1995 which is mid-way through the first semester in New Zealand. Questionnaires were administered either prior to, or following the conclusion

of, lectures. Students were asked to read the instructions on the front page of the questionnaire, then complete the survey. Other verbal instructions were generally not offered.

In order to answer the research questions posed and based on the nature of the data collected, data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the chi-square test of independence. This simple approach to the treatment of data was useful in providing an overview of the role different variables may play in issues related to student recruitment, student intentions, and indicators of student satisfaction.

Results

General Characteristics of Students

Of the 377 students enrolled in the BPRTM during semester one 1995, 265 completed surveys (70%). The age of students ranged from 17 to 52 years of age ($\bar{X}=20.7$, $SD=3.1$). Subjects who identified themselves as being enrolled in the first year of their studies totalled 118 (77% of all first year students); 74 identified themselves as second year (representing 75% of second year students); and 73 respondents indicated that they were third year students (representing 59% of third year students). In some cases students may not have indicated their year of study in the same way the University would represent year. For example, a student who failed five first year classes the previous year may still be considered to be in their first year by University standards, but the student may have represented themselves as a second year student because they were in their second year of study at Lincoln. The researchers would submit that identifying with a certain year of study, rather than actually being in a certain year, is more important for the purposes of this study.

Gender was relatively evenly distributed in the sample with 129 males and 135 females participating in the study. One student failed to indicate their gender in an identifiable manner.

Students were asked whether they had commenced their tertiary study immediately after having completed high school. Two thirds ($n=171$) of students began their studies at Lincoln immediately following the completion of their high school qualifications. Of those respondents who did not attend Lincoln directly, 86% ($n=83$) had worked at some point prior to attending Lincoln, and 46% ($n=44$) had attended another institution. Sixty-nine percent of the students surveyed normally resided outside of the Canterbury region where the University is located.

Most students surveyed (84%, $n=223$) indicated that Lincoln University was their first choice for a tertiary institution; 31% of students who responded had applied to other tertiary institutions ($n=81$). For students who had applied to other institutions, places to which students most frequently applied were the University of Otago (the third university located in the South Island), and Polytechnic institutions (analogous to a community college or a vo-tech). The most common discipline for which students had applied to another institution was physical education.

Within the BPRTM degree, students may "major" or concentrate their studies in a number of areas. While the department suggests courses related to major areas of study, specific classes are not prescribed as part of a major; 73% of respondents (n=194) had decided on a major area of study within the BPRTM degree. The three most popular areas of study within the discipline (as commonly grouped within the department) were: (a) Parks/outdoor-related, 38% (n=74); (b) Tourism, 27% (n=53); and (c) Recreation, 21% (n=41). The number of students in each of the three major areas (Parks/outdoor-related, Tourism, and Recreation) were relatively consistent across years of study, as illustrated in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Major by Year of Study

Major	<u>Year of Study</u>			TOTAL
	First Year	Second Year	Third Year	
Outdoor-related	33	22	19	74
Tourism	25	13	15	53
Recreation	10	13	18	41
TOTAL	68	48	52	250

What Draws Students to the University?

When asked about the variables that influenced their decision to attend Lincoln University, over 70% of the students who reported that a given source of information was applicable to them indicated that brochures and school information presentations (n=160 and n=140, respectively) were influential to their decision (see Table 2). Newspaper advertisements, radio announcements, magazine advertisements, posters, billboards and information evenings at Lincoln (equivalent to open days) were not influential in students' overall decisions to attend Lincoln. Each of these categories had over 60% of respondents indicating that they were either not influential or neutral in terms of influencing their decision.

TABLE 2
*Variables Influential to Students' Decisions to Attend
Lincoln University by Nature of Influence*

Variable	<u>Nature of Influence</u>			N
	% INFLUENTIAL	% NOT INFLUENTIAL	% NEUTRAL	
School information presentation	72	19	9	194
Brochures	71	18	12	226
Teachers/guidance counselors	54	22	24	194
Current Lincoln students	47	26	27	180
Parents	38	25	37	204

Friends	38	30	32	199
Contact with Lincoln staff	36	38	26	129
Not accepted to first choice institution	36	47	17	66
Employers	21	53	26	125
Television	17	59	32	144
Posters	13	65	22	158
Newspapers	13	71	16	165
Billboards	10	70	20	145
Magazines	9	71	20	152
Information evening at Lincoln	14	57	29	85
Financial	12	63	26	113
Radio	4	83	13	137

Note. Based on the number of students who indicated that the variable was applicable; neutral does not include "does not apply"; rounding may result in sum percents greater than 100%.

For younger students (those under the age of 25 and who were primarily first year students) the recent "branded" advertising campaign (TV advertisements, posters and billboards) appeared to be somewhat more influential to their decisions than for mature students (aged 25 and over); however, the low number of mature students in the sample precluded further statistical analysis of the relationship. The recently introduced television advertisements were reported to have influenced the decision to attend Lincoln University by approximately 20% of the first year students.

Students who attended Lincoln directly after completing their high school qualifications were more likely to report that school information presentations [$\chi^2 (2, N=193) = 48.33, p < .001$], encouragement from parents [$\chi^2 (2, 203) = 7.26, p < .05$], encouragement from teachers/guidance counselors [$\chi^2 (2, N=193) = 12.29, p < .01$], and encouragement from friends [$\chi^2 (2, N=190) = 9.59, p < .01$], were all influential to their decision to attend Lincoln University than students who took time away from school. There were no clear trends regarding variables influential to mature students' decisions to attend Lincoln.

Of those students who reported that Lincoln was their first choice of institution, encouragement from friends was significant in their decision [$\chi^2 (2, N= 196) = 6.26, p < .05$]. Year of study, major area of study (within the degree) and citizenship (due to the small representation) were all unrelated to students' decisions to attend Lincoln. Students who normally resided in Canterbury were more likely to have attended the Lincoln information evening [$\chi^2 (2, N= 84) = 15.55, p < .001$] and were more likely to have cited "financial reasons" as being important to their decision to attend Lincoln [$\chi^2 (2, N= 112) = 8.45, p < .05$].

What Draws Students to the degree?

Students surveyed reported that brochures (54%), school information presentations (41%), information from teachers/school counselors (46%) and information from friends (35%) were the main means by which they became familiar with the BPRTM degree (Table 3).

TABLE 3
How Students Became Aware of the BPRTM (N=265)

MEDIUM	FREQUENCY
Brochures	54%
Teachers/guidance counselors	46%
School information presentations	41%
Friends	35%
Lincoln Students	25%
Other	10%
Newspapers	5%
Employers	4%
Information evening at Lincoln	3%
Magazines	2%

High school based information (school information presentations and information from teachers/guidance counselors) was indicated more frequently as a means of finding out about BPRTM by students who had come directly to Lincoln from high school. No clear patterns regarding how mature students, or students from different geographical regions in New Zealand, gained information about the BPRTM were evident from the data.

In terms of the variables that were influential to students' decisions regarding enrollment in the BPRTM (see Table 4), future employment opportunities was the most highly featured response (86%), with the range of major study areas the second most influential variable (76%). The most influential people were teachers or guidance counselors, who were cited as influential by 47% of the students. As would be anticipated, there was a significant association between recommendations from teachers/guidance counselors and when students enrolled at Lincoln. Students who enrolled directly after high school were more likely to have indicated that teachers/guidance counselors were influential [χ^2 (2, N = 193) = 13.15, p < .001], as were recommendations from other BPRTM students [χ^2 (2, N = 177) = 5.73, p < .05], and publicity material [χ^2 (2, N = 181) = 8.26, p < .01].

TABLE 4
*Variables Influential to Students' Decisions to Enroll in the BPRTM**

Variable	Nature of Influence			N
	% INFLUENTIAL	% NOT INFLUENTIAL	NEUTRAL	
Employment opportunities	86	6	8	254
Range of major study areas	76	11	13	257
Opportunity to take subjects in other areas	70	16	15	239
Teacher/counselor	47	27	26	194

Specific offerings in major	47	24	30	170
Range of 300-level subjects	44	21	35	237
Publicity material	35	34	31	182
Recommendation from other				
PRT students	35	32	33	178
Range of 200-level subjects	32	26	43	233
Not accepted to first				
choice institution	27	53	20	66
Friends doing BPRTM	15	62	23	138
Department size	11	60	30	157
Reputation as an "easy" degree	10	60	32	176
Information evening at Lincoln	9	53	39	93
Reputation of teaching staff	8	43	49	187

Note. Based on the number of students who indicated that the variable was applicable; neutral does not include "does not apply"; rounding may result in sum percents greater than 100%

There was a significant relationship between year of study and future employment opportunities as a variable important to the decision to enroll for the BPRTM with first year students reporting that this was influential to their decision [$\chi^2(2, N=252) = 18.13, p < .001$]. Second and third year students indicated that specific offerings in their major were influential to their decision [$\chi^2(2, N=169) = 15.56, p < .01$].

In terms of major area of study, the only variable significantly associated with the decision to enroll in the BPRTM was the opportunity to take other subjects in a variety of other areas (including classes from other departments in the University). A chi-square analysis illustrated that students who identified themselves as majoring in the areas of parks/outdoor related fields were the most likely to indicate that the opportunity to take subjects in other areas was influential, whereas those students majoring in the area of recreation indicated that this opportunity was not influential in their decision to enroll in the degree [$\chi^2(2, N=147) = 10.13, p < .05$].

Present Attitudes toward Enrollment in the degree

Included in the questionnaire were a number of items related to students' present attitudes towards their enrollment in the BPRTM and their future plans with regard to whether they anticipated graduating with the degree. According to Ajzen & Fishbein's (1980) theory of reasoned action, attitudes are not clear predictors of behavior. However, Bank et al. (1992) suggested that students' thoughts and intentions *are* useful predictors of attrition. The researchers anticipated that measuring these constructs may be useful in determining student retention in follow-up studies.

Students were asked to reflect on their experience to date in the BPRTM in terms of whether they were happy they had enrolled in the BPRTM. Fifty-three percent of the subjects responded positively to this question (n=139). The results clearly suggest that students in

later years of study were less likely to be as happy that they enrolled than those who were in the earlier years of their degree [$\chi^2 (2, N = 265) = 33.94, p < .001$]. This result was consistent across majors as students' happiness was found to be unrelated to their major area of study [$\chi^2 (2, N = 168) = 3.71, p > .05$].

Twenty percent of subjects ($n=51$) were uncertain about how they felt regarding their enrollment in the BPRTM. Students who were in the early stages of their academic program were less likely to indicate that they were uncertain about their present enrollment than students at higher levels [$\chi^2 (2, N = 265) = 6.17, p < .05$]. There was no significant relationship between students' major and their indication of uncertainty with regard to their enrollment [$\chi^2 (2, N = 168) = 0.71, p > .05$].

Six percent of subjects ($n=15$) indicated that they were dissatisfied with their enrollment in the BPRTM. Of these subjects, two thirds ($n=10$) were third year students. However, the significance of the relationship between level of study (or any other variable) and dissatisfaction with enrollment could not be statistically determined due to the small frequency of students indicating dissatisfaction.

Fifty-four percent of the subjects ($n=143$) indicated that they planned to continue in the degree and graduate with a BPRTM. Students who were enrolled in the third year were the most likely to indicate that they planned on continuing in the degree. The relationship between planning to continue in the BPRTM and level of study was significant [$\chi^2 (2, N = 265) = 19.29, p < .001$]. There was no significant relationship between whether a person planned to continue in the degree and their major study area [$\chi^2 (2, N = 168) = 1.20, p > .05$].

While 47% of undergraduate students indicated that they were not happy within the degree and 46% did not plan on continuing in the degree, these two responses were not significantly related [$\chi^2 (2, N = 265) = 0.98, p > .05$].

The plans of those students who did not anticipate continuing in the degree were unclear. Six percent of subjects ($n=15$) indicated that they were thinking about changing degrees while one percent ($n=3$) were planning to change degrees in the next year. Results suggest that students who were thinking of changing to a different degree were more likely to be enrolled at the 100-level; however, the significance of this association cannot be ascertained because of the limited numbers of subjects who were thinking about changing degrees.

Discussion

Similar to the findings of Stanley & Reynolds (1994), the present research determined the key variables that were influential to students' decisions to attend Lincoln University were brochures and school visits by representatives of the University. Lincoln University's departure from traditional university marketing approaches by implementing a multi-media "branded" marketing campaign appeared to capture the interest of students; for example,

approximately 20% of the first year class reported that television advertisements were influential to their decisions to attend Lincoln University.

Differential influences on the decision to attend the University existed with regard to local versus non-local students. Information evenings held at the University and financial reasons were more likely to have been cited as being influential by local students than students from outside the region. Clearly in the case of information evenings, and to a lesser degree financial aspects, proximity to the University is an important consideration when developing marketing strategies.

The most common sources of becoming aware of the Bachelor of Parks, Recreation and Tourism degree were brochures and information from teachers or guidance counselors. This finding is counter to the suggestion by Ward and Oberby (1993) that high school based employees do not promote degrees in the area because of lack of familiarity. However, the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism at Lincoln University may be in a somewhat unique position as it may be considered the premier department in the field in New Zealand based on student enrollments and the number of faculty members. In terms of the variables influencing students' decisions to enroll in the BPRTM degree, future employment opportunities was the most frequently cited response, which concurs with the suggestion that promotion of careers in the parks/recreation/leisure field and emphasis on employment opportunities are important to a successful recruitment strategy (Becker & Miko, 1992). Interestingly, first year students were the most likely cohort to indicate employment opportunities as being influential. Second and third year students were more likely than first year students to indicate specific offerings in their major as being influential. While an initial interpretation may lead to conclusions regarding differences in cohorts in terms of the importance of employment, an alternative explanation may be that the recall of students in later years of study may have been affected by their present experience, perhaps through cognitive dissonance regarding a more realistic evaluation of employment opportunities.

In general, the data suggest that the task of identifying the variables that influence undergraduates in the decisions to enroll in the degree is relatively straightforward when considering students of "traditional" age. This study did not elucidate variables which were influential to the decisions of mature students. Further research into the methods by which mature students gather information about universities may increase the likelihood that degrees in parks/recreation/leisure can capture this growing market.

Slightly more than half of the students reported that they were generally happy with their enrollment in the BPRTM. There was a significant decrease in this general sense of contentment with enrollment as students progressed through their degrees. This could be the result of several variables. First, there could simply be cohort differences that are unrelated to year of study; perhaps third year students were simply more pessimistic in their outlook while first year students were more optimistic. Other explanations may involve the actual development of the ability to criticize as students progress through the degree (one of the goals of a university education), or perhaps students become disenfranchised with the

realization that the BPRTM may not offer them all they anticipated when they enrolled. This difference in expectations versus reality may exist particularly in relation to future employment; as students progress through the degree they may become aware that they had potentially unrealistic expectations of employment opportunities entering the degree.

First year students were significantly more likely to express that they felt uncertain about their enrollment in the degree than those students who were further along in their studies. Again, this finding could be the result of several factors. Although the results suggest that uncertainty with enrollment decreases with level of study, we can not be certain that this relationship is causal. Additionally, while there appeared to be a significant relationship between being dissatisfied with enrollment and level of study (students in their last year were two times as likely to indicate dissatisfaction than students in their first or second years), such a conclusion may be spurious as there were too few subjects who had indicated they were dissatisfied. Interestingly, while students in later years appeared to be less satisfied with the degree, students who were in the first year of the degree were more likely to be considering leaving the degree which suggests that dissatisfaction was not linked to first year attrition.

These data highlight the importance of addressing the issue of first year attrition. Clearly Lincoln University would benefit by identifying factors associated with the decision not to continue in the degree since a relatively large number of first year students indicated that they did not intend to continue in the degree. For example, are there problems with the introductory level subjects that cause students to re-evaluate their enrollment? Are the entry criteria for the degree associated with attrition levels since academic ability has been identified as a key factor in student retention (Bank et al., 1992)?

There were a number of limitations to this study. The questionnaire required self-reports and recall of decisions made prior to enrolling at Lincoln University. In the case of third years students, such decisions may have been made more than three years prior to the data collection, and the recall of these decisions may have been influenced by present circumstances. Additionally, third year students were under-represented in the research due to low class attendance on the days of data collection. This high rate of student absence may have resulted in an underestimation of student dissatisfaction, if not attending class is related to low satisfaction. Ideally, a longitudinal design would establish with greater validity the factors that are "influential". The reliance upon recollective, self-report measures in this cross-sectional study does not allow for analysis which could reveal predictive variables. In addition, the validity of constructs such as "happiness" and "uncertainty" with the degree and enrollment respectively has not been established. Finally, demand characteristics may have been present that influenced the results. For example, students may have responded more favorably to items since student identification numbers were collected with the survey.

Implications

The results of this research have implications for administrators of curricula in the area of parks/recreation/leisure in terms of recruitment of the students to university, the attraction of students to parks/recreation/leisure degrees, and retention of students in such programs. Based on the findings of this research, decision makers at the university-wide level should emphasize the following as part of their marketing campaigns: (a) the utilization of brochures and school visits to disseminate information, particularly for students who will attend university directly after having completed high school; (b) the use of a "branded" multi-media campaign to differentiate and clearly highlight the image of the university as compared to other tertiary institutions; (c) hosting of information evenings or events in regions outside of where the university is located (perhaps involving currently enrolled students, given the importance of their influence to students' decisions); and (d) highlighting of financial aid information for students who are not proximate to the university.

In order to attract students to parks/recreation/leisure degrees, high school teachers and counselors should be encouraged to disseminate information directly to high school students. Since employment was identified as the main influence in students' decisions to enroll in a parks/recreation/leisure degree (particularly for those students in their first year), potential employment opportunities should be one of aspects that is highlighted in the information provided. However, given the results and implications of the present research, such information might best be presented in the context of current socio-economic conditions (i.e., availability of entry-level jobs in parks/recreation/leisure), and should emphasize not only future employment possibilities, but also the breadth of offerings in the degree program supporting the development of a broad skills base. Also, given the importance of employment opportunities to students' decisions to enroll in this type of degree program, administrators and educators in the parks/recreation/leisure area may wish to strengthen their links with industry (e.g., in terms of scholarships, internships, practical experience placements etc.), and incorporate these ties into their promotional material.

Attracting students to a university or degree program is only truly successful if those students can be retained. In terms of retention, careful evaluation of entry criteria for students may have a positive effect on retention rates. Increasing students' commitment to their degree program, as well as fostering a supportive social climate (i.e., through mentoring, advising, student-staff contact, etc.) may also help promote the retention of students. Finally, further research needs to be undertaken to identify the factors associated with, and predictive of, both retention and attrition for students in parks/recreation/leisure programs.

Future Research

Ideally, future research should be established as a longitudinal program, tracking students from entry through to exit, whether their exit be through graduation or attrition from the University. The focus of future research should be on the development of models of student attraction and attrition, allowing more predictive and explanatory statistical

analyses than those utilized in the present study. While attracting students is important to universities, establishing the behavioral links between student satisfaction and retention may also assist these institutions in increasing student numbers.

Finally, the potential for cultural differences between New Zealand and other international contexts has not been addressed in this study; therefore, future research that includes cross-cultural comparisons of variables influencing student recruitment and retention may provide interesting insight into commonalities and differences across cultures over time.

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