


# Coming to America: Sixth form students' reasons for considering undergraduate study in the United States



Education in a Changing Environment  
Conference

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15 September 2009

# Students considering undergraduate study in the United States



- ✦ The Educational Advisory Service received more than 700,000 inquiries about study in the United States for 2004/2005. (Shepherd, 2006).
- ✦ *Open Doors* (2007) reports that there was a 2% increase in British students attending undergraduate study in the United States over the previous year. Based on indications from Ivy League institutions the number of inquiries is even greater. (Woolcock & Jagger, 2007)

# Information from News Media



- ✦ According to articles found in the *London Times* students cite many different reasons for studying in the United States:
  - ✦ the ability to take diverse coursework
  - ✦ prestige of certain institutions in the United States
  - ✦ need blind admissions policies of Ivy League institutions (Shephard, 2006; Woolcock, 2007; Woolcock & Jagger, 2007) .

# Undergraduate study in the United States vs. in the United Kingdom



	United States	United Kingdom
Length of Study	4-5 years	3 years
Cost	Up to \$50,000/year	£3,000/yr
Coursework	Varies	Specialized


# University Selection in the UK



- ✦ Important factors affecting student choice include
  - ✦ location
  - ✦ academic reputation
  - ✦ program of study
  - ✦ future employment opportunities
  - ✦ infrastructure
  - ✦ costs
  - ✦ quality of life
  - ✦ academic reputation
  - ✦ distance from home


(Briggs, 2006), (Veloutsou, 2004), (Moogan & Baron, 2003)

# Purpose of this study



- ✦ The purpose of this research was to explore the underlying reasons why an increasing number of students in the United Kingdom were considering undergraduate study in the United States. More specifically, this research examined what experiences contributed to the participants' consideration of undergraduate study in the United States.

# Methodological Approach: Basic Interpretive Qualitative



- ✦ In a basic interpretive qualitative study, the researcher is interested in “understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon, this meaning is mediated through the researcher as instrument, the strategy is inductive, and the outcome is descriptive.” (Merriam, 2004, p. 6).
- ✦ Basic interpretive qualitative studies borrow from phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. Phenomenology allows individuals to interpret everyday experiences from their own perspective and determine the meaning these experiences have for them (Merriam, 2004).

### Individual Cases

- Personal History
- Current Conception of Phenomenon of Interest
- Future Plans

### Groupings

- Theoretically Relevant Categories
- Preconceived or Derived Through Analysis

### Summary

- Theories
- Typologies
- General Observations



# Research Questions



- ✦ The primary guiding research question was to understand why there has been a significant increase in British students inquiring about undergraduate study in the United States. To further the information available to admissions professionals and policymakers, this study seeks to explore the following questions:
- ✦ 1. What experiences relate to British students' interest in undergraduate study in the United States?
- ✦ 2. How do particular students' characteristics (e.g., socio-economic class, race, sex, etc) relate to their interest in studying in the United States?

# Research Questions (Continued)



- ✦ 3. Who and what influence students to consider undergraduate study in the United States?
- ✦ 4. How do British students anticipate coming to a decision whether or not to pursue undergraduate study in the United States?

# Locations



- ✦ Eton College
- ✦ Christ's Hospital Boarding School
- ✦ CATS Cambridge

# Data Collection



- ✦ Individual interviews were conducted with each participant, audio recorded, and transcribed. A semi-structured interview protocol was used.
- ✦ Biographical questionnaires were utilized to provide demographic information about the participants.

# Data Analysis



- ✦ A research team, comprised of the researcher and one other individual, assembled after the collection of the data.
- ✦ Each member of the research team read through the transcriptions and biographical questionnaires.
- ✦ The researcher borrowed from the grounded theory analytic process, the data were coded and categorized by each team member and a consensus was reached on the emerging themes and patterns.

# Findings



- ✦ Findings related to three categories:
  1. Characteristics of U.S. Universities
  2. Influences
  3. Choosing Universities and Final Decisions

# Characteristics of U.S. Universities



## ✦ *Liberal Arts—Not having to choose a major immediately*

- ✦ “From what I’ve seen and heard, you have.... you can do a broad range of subjects your first year. I think that’s a good idea. You can get more knowledge straight away instead of focusing on just one area.”

## ✦ *Student Life*

- ✦ “My music, my drama, my community action. I want to carry it all on.” She explained, “I spoke with loads of my friends at university over here and I say, ‘Are you doing all that music?’ They go, ‘Well we don’t really have a chance.’”

## ✦ *Quality of Education*

- ✦ “I suppose it must go back to resources. Look at MIT and Stanford. The resources there seem to be a lot more updated.” When he started researching schools in the U.S. he found that “they seem to spend a lot of money on broadening the size of mechanics and getting some very interesting pieces of machinery which I am fascinated by.”

## ✦ *Areas of Country*

- ✦ “I’m pretty open but probably best to be on East Coast because I have family there.”

# Influences



## ✦ *Family and Friends*

- ✦ “I have a lot of family and friends that live in the U.S. and a lot of them studied in the U.S. and they told me that Berkley is really good for architecture.”

## ✦ *Careers Advisors*

- ✦ “I received a letter from Mr. S about studying in the United States. At first I brushed it off, but when I started to speak with him about it, then I started to consider it. Also, he sent a letter to my mother, and when she questioned me about it, then I thought, “Why not?””

## ✦ *Adventurous Spirit*

- ✦ “For me it’s just to experience a new country and just to experience it and I like that fact that I don’t have to make my mind up right away (about a major) and I can learn and experience things in a different country.”



# Influences



## ✦ *Visiting the United States*

- ✦ “By already going to America, I think about what it would be like to go to school there. Which is probably is one of the main (reasons), after having found out about the American university (system) and I can sort of choose lots of subjects instead of one really had got me thinking.”

## ✦ *Culture*

- ✦ “I’ve always wanted to learn about their culture and their different way of living. I feel I would become a bigger and better person if I was to go over there than if I were to just stay here.”

# Choosing Universities and Final Decisions



## ✦ *Choosing a University*

- ✦ Scholarship program pipeline
- ✦ Universities recruiters visiting school (Eton)
- ✦ Prestige of U.S. Universities
- ✦ Influence of family and friends

## ✦ *Final Decision*

- ✦ “It depends where I get into and working out financial and everything.”
- ✦ “Via scholarship is the only way it would be possible.”
- ✦ “Although the education is very important, it has to be in a situation that you really like.”

# Discussion



- ✦ The students in the United Kingdom who are considering undergraduate study in the United States are interested in universities in the United States based upon their perceived prestige and quality.
- ✦ For some students, the final decision will come down to scholarships and affordability. Some of the students are basing their university selection on the prevalence of need blind admissions policies.
- ✦ Students feel that the quality of life in United States higher education is superior to that offered in the U.K..
- ✦ Students are looking at schools in the United States because they feel the schools infrastructure is better than the schools found in the United Kingdom. Specifically, they feel that more money is invested in schools in the United States allowing the schools to offer more opportunities and provide better facilities.
- ✦ Students are primarily looking at schools with international reputations because they feel schools that do not have an international reputation will hinder their future employment opportunities.
- ✦ All of the students in the study identified the ability to delay choosing their major as being a contributing factor in their decision to consider undergraduate study in the United States.
- ✦ The students in this study were intrigued and persuaded to consider undergraduate study in the United States based upon the university life culture found in the United States.

# Discussion



- ✦ Many of the students felt that they could go to Oxford or Cambridge in the United Kingdom and receive a high quality education. Beyond those two universities, one would be unable to receive the quality of education at a U.K. University that will equal the quality of their current educational experience.
- ✦ The media has influenced many of these perceptions cited by the students. There has been negative publicity surrounding universities in the United Kingdom. More specifically, there has been negative publicity surrounding the amount of funding allotted to universities.
- ✦ The influences of friends, family and careers advisors also played a role in student's decisions to consider undergraduate study in the United States. For some of the students, their parents encouraged them to consider going to the United States for undergraduate study. For others, the interest started when their careers advisor shared information on undergraduate study in the United States

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