

What Matters Most:
Factors Influencing the University Application Choice Decisions of Korean International
Students and Parents

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine factors influencing Korean parents' and students' university application choice decisions in three international schools in the Republic of Korea (South). Institutional and individual factors that influenced Korean students' university application choice decisions and their parents' university application choice decisions are examined.

Thirty students and fifteen parents completed online or paper surveys in either Korean or English. Ten students and nine parents participated in in-depth interviews. Influential factors are identified in the survey by calculating the frequency to which students and parents identify the factor as being influential in their university application choice decisions. A conceptually clustered matrix is used as the method to classify common themes and factors identified in the in-depth interviews. Parent and student survey answers are checked against their interview responses in order to discover any inconsistencies.

Findings indicate that both Korean students' and parents' university application choice decisions are influenced by the university's reputation and rank. A university's rank and reputation are perceived to impact the students' likelihood of obtaining a good job upon graduation. Perceived safety and location are also institutional factors named as important to students and their parents. Parents, the student, and older siblings are the most influential people identified by both students and parents.

Future research could be performed to analyze the perceived differences between university reputation and rank. Additionally, the father's role in the

university application process must be further examined. Mothers filled out the majority of the surveys and only mothers were selected for interviews. The findings of this study provide useful information about what matters most to Korean families during the university application choice process.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Choosing the university a student will attend after high school is a serious task for parents and students. Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) assert, "The decisions that students make about college have a lasting impact on their lives" (p. 3). Students' academic majors influence prospective job opportunities and the social networks formed in university can have a great impact on students' futures.

When a student is deciding on which university to attend, they often consult their families, particularly their parents. At times, the factors that influence students' choices to apply to a particular university differ from the factors influencing their parents. Regardless of these potential differences Broekemier and Seshadri (2002) suggest, "Students and parents expect a significant return on the sacrifices made and the time and money spent on earning a college degree" (p.1). In order to guarantee a good return on their investment, parents and students plan for higher education by researching institutions, preparing for entrance exams, and developing a strong student profile. For Korean families, this process can be very intense.

In Korean households planning for higher education starts early, and at times, brings a lot of stress to families even in the initial stages of the university search process. In the Republic of Korea (henceforth Korea), many students and parents start planning for university education as early as elementary school (Lee, 2002). Lee (2002) describes the emphasis on education, particularly planning for higher education, in Korea by stating:

Koreans are obsessed with education. The process begins early. Even before a child is born, pregnant mothers routinely subject themselves to classical music, English and whatnot for the unborn baby's education. When a child is three or four years old he or she begins the long and painful race to university. ...After finishing kindergarten, the child enters an elementary school, where the race toward a university becomes earnest and serious. (Lee, 2002 p. 6)

In 2009, over 80% of Korean high school graduates entered college or university (Korean Statistical Information Service, 2011). Although an impressive statistic, it is important to address the critical issues that Korean parents and students face as they plan for post-secondary education and ultimately choose a university. For the purposes of dissertation, a higher education institution is hereafter referred to as "university". In the United States, most people refer to the first four years of post-secondary education as "college"; institutions that contain a graduate program are named "universities". In Korea, families and educators commonly refer to the four years after high school as "university". For this reason, the term "university" is used as the umbrella term for the first four years of education after high school.

One of the expectations many Korean parents and their children have is for the student to attend a prestigious university. Lee and Shouse (2011) refer to this prestige orientation as "the degree to which students feel it is important to attend a top-ranked institution of higher learning" (p. 213). Students work tenaciously

throughout high school to attend one of Korea's top universities. Three of the most prestigious universities in Korea are Seoul National University, Korea University, and Yonsei University. Card (2005) asserts gaining admission into one of these prestigious universities is considered a Korean student's crowning life achievement.

The affiliation to a prestigious university carries life-long benefits for Korean students and their families. Kang (2004) provides three potential reasons why Korean students and families find the prestige of a university important. First, it is assumed that prestigious universities are more likely to provide quality curriculum, faculty and students. Secondly, Kang suggests that students who attend prestigious universities are believed to have higher innate abilities than do those who attend less prestigious universities. Finally, Kang proposes that the alumni networks and interpersonal connections after graduation are stronger for those who graduate from more esteemed universities. Lee and Brinton (1996) further support Kang's research by suggesting that the competition to gain entrance into prestigious universities in Korea is fueled by "the widespread popular belief that a degree from a prestigious university sets one on the track of upward mobility through status, class, and income structures" (p. 177).

One of the ways that students acquire a competitive edge when applying for prestigious universities is by enrolling in private tutoring (Bray, 2006). Private tutoring typically takes place after the regular school day providing little to no break for relaxing, playing with friends, or participating in other non-school related activities. Although private tutoring is optional for students in Korea, approximately 63% of students were involved in private education in 2009 (Korean Statistical

Information Service, 2011). In a study by Kwak (2004), 70% of Korean parents reported sending their children to private tutoring services for seven hours per week.

Neither the Korean government nor individual schools mandate students attend private tutoring in addition to the regular school day. Private education remains an optional choice for all Korean students. However, Jung and Lee (2010) argue that supplemental education is no longer an optional education choice for Korean students. Without additional preparation provided through supplemental tutoring Korean students cannot compete with their peers for university admission. Consequently, for the families who cannot afford weekly private tutoring, private tutoring has become not only an educational issue, but also a socioeconomic issue (Jung & Lee, 2010).

In a 2010 article in *The Korea Times*, it was estimated that the total household expenditure in Korea for private education was approximately 21.6 trillion won (KRW) in 2009 with an estimated 2.1 million won (KRW) (approximately 2,000 US Dollars) spent annually on private education by each family with school-aged children (Na, 2010). With private education extending from primary through secondary schooling, the cost to families is upwards of tens of thousands of US dollars per child by the time the student graduates high school.

The money and time parents invest in private education is one way they express the expectation that their child do well academically. Parents, particularly mothers, have high expectations for their children; in part, because a parent's personal self-worth is associated with his or her child's academic and career

success. In Korea, parents' statuses change when their child does well in school, obtains a high mark on an important exam, or earns admission into a prestigious university. Kim and Hoppe-Graff (2001) assert "South Koreans parents invest as much time, money, and emotional support as possible in the supposed high-quality education of their children, and their self-evaluations are closely related to the children's school and job success" (p. 3). When students do not meet the academic expectations set forth by their parents the results can be devastating. Children may experience feelings of frustration and guilt (Kim, 1993). These feelings may later affect students' mental health.

Korean high school students often experience high anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation when the pressure of preparing for higher education becomes overwhelming. In 2008, according to the Korean Statistical Information Service, 64% of Korean students experienced stress in their lives. For those aged 15-24, worry and stress over "school performance" was listed as the leading cause of suicidal ideation (Korean Statistical Information Service, 2011). In relation to other countries, Korea has a higher rate of suicidal behaviors (Jeon et al, 2010). Unfortunately this trend is not diminishing among Korean adolescents. Kim and Kim (2008) assert, "in recent years there has been growing concern regarding the increasing rate of suicidal behaviors, including suicidal ideation and attempted suicide among Korean adolescents" (p. 221). Park et al (2010) further confirms that the risk of depression and suicide increase when students are pressured to perform high academically. In order to continue to understand why higher education is so important to Korean students and their families it is important to determine the

reasons Korean families remain adamant about choosing specific universities. In doing so, it is important to understand the factors that affect Korean students' and parents' decisions regarding university application choice.

The process students and parents go through when choosing a university to apply to and eventually attend is described in models of student university choice. The College Choice Model is used as the main theoretical framework for this study. Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999); DesJardins, Dundar, and Hendel (1999) and Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) suggest the university choice process occurs in three distinct stages – Predisposition, Search, and Choice. In the Predisposition stage, students begin to think about postsecondary education. In the Search stage students begin to research universities of interest. Lastly, in the Choice stage, students choose a university where they will eventually enroll. R. Chapman (1986) proposes an alternative five-stage behavioral model of university choice. Chapman declares the university choice process has five “components”: pre-search behavior, search behavior, application decision, choice decision, and matriculation decision. Finally university choice models that focus on the factors, and not the process, affecting students' decisions to apply and attend specific universities are of particular importance when working with international school students choosing universities abroad (Maringe, 2006; Marrazol & Soutar, 2002; Chapman, 1981).

Statement of Study Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to determine the factors influencing Korean parents' and students' university application choice decisions in three international schools in the Republic of Korea (South).

Research Questions:

1. What factors influence Korean international students' university application choice decisions?
2. What factors influence Korean parents' university application choice decisions?

Importance of Study

Chapman (1981) declares there is an "incomplete understanding of the multiple influences that affect student [college] choice" (p.502). This study is important given the uniqueness of Korean students; the limited research conducted focusing both on parents and students in the university application choice process, and the need for counselors and other educators working with Korean populations to understand the university application choice process in a Korean context.

Researchers have attempted to identify factors that affect students' university choices (Choy & Ottinger, 1998; DesJardins, Dundar, & Hendel, 1999; Broekeimer & Seshadri, 2000; Hodges & Barbuto, 2002). However, no research has been done with a Korean-only sample. In 2004, Teranishi, Ceja, Antonio, Allen, and McDonough attempted to explore the university choice process for the diverse group, Asian-Pacific Americans. These researchers studied thirty-four different ethnic groups, including Korean Americans. The varied findings of Teranishi, Ceja, Antonio, Allen, and McDonough (2004) suggest that the university decision-making processes experienced by Asian-Pacific Islanders vary by ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Therefore, it is important to research specific populations, such as Koreans, independently from other Asian-Pacific groups.

Koreans, particularly Korean youth, are a unique group. Byon, Chan, and Thomas (1999) suggest Koreans are influenced culturally in three dissimilar ways. Koreans are shaped by traditional Confucian ideologies and individualism with a Western overlay (Byon, Chan & Thomas, 1999). Since Korean students are such a unique population, the university planning process may be different than those of other student populations.

In addition to the lack of studies focusing on Korean students, little research has been completed to compare the factors that influence parents and students in the university application process. Broekemier and Seshadri (2000) suggest students and parents are influenced by different factors throughout the university choice process. Students are more influenced by social life, friends at the university or college, and athletic programs than their parents. Parents, on the other hand, are influenced by factors such as the program/major, cost, facility, and reputation (Broekemier & Seshadri, 2000). Although Broekemier and Seshadri identify factors affecting both students and parents during the university choice process, the sample used in their study consisted of American families. Factors influencing Korean parents and students may be dramatically different than those important to American students and parents.

Finally, this study is important to the school educators working with Korean families as they plan for higher education. School counselors and other educators work with students and their parents throughout the process of applying to university. The findings in this study may affect information presented to both parents and students going through the university planning process. School

counselors may wish to revisit current counseling program curricula, parent presentations, and other counseling services provided to their Korean students and families. Additionally, for those counselors and educators working with Korean families, data gathered in this study may help non-Korean counselors understand student and parent university application choice from a Korean cultural context. This is particularly true for those educators working in international school settings with Korean families.

Context for Study: International School Profiles

The three schools in this particular study are all identified as “international schools”. According to Hill (2006), “international schools have a very culturally diverse student body, ideally with no one nationality significantly dominating the others. They are almost invariably private, independent institutions and they teach an international education programme” (p. 8). The Korean international schools in this study are separate from free public school education offered through the Korean government. The vast majority of students in Korean international schools apply to universities outside of Korea. In order to apply to universities in Korea, many of these students would have to go through the Korean GED process in addition to working towards the diploma granted by their international school. In 2014, sixteen of the largest international schools in Korea comprise the Korean-American Interscholastic Activities Conference, or KAIAC (KAIAC website, 2014).

These three international schools are identified as university preparatory, non-profit schools, offering International Baccalaureate and/or Advanced Placement program options. Students’ families pay tuition upwards of \$35,000

(USD) per year for students enrolled in the high school program. Although international schools are located throughout the Korean peninsula, most are located in the greater Seoul Metropolitan Area. One of the three schools in this study is located in the Seoul area. The second is located in a large suburb area approximately one hour outside of Seoul Metropolitan area. The third school is located in another large metropolitan city of approximately two million people southeast of Seoul.

All schools offer classroom instruction in English with a majority of their students matriculating to the United States or other English-speaking countries for university. The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) is the main accrediting institution for all the schools in this study. All of the three schools offer the International Baccalaureate Programme. Students can obtain college-level credit after completing coursework and final exams. One school offers a couple of Advanced Placement (AP) courses. AP courses, similarly to IB, prepare students by offering college-like coursework with the option of earning college-level credit upon completing an AP exam.

The student bodies in the three schools are diverse. Although each school enrolls Korean students, the admission requirements for each vary. The percentage of students carrying Korean passports differs within each school. The school with the lowest percentage of Korean passport holders has approximately 10%. The highest percentage of Korean passport holders for every school is 30%. Although the percentage of Korean passport holders is fairly low in each of these schools, much of the student body is ethnically Korean; the student is Korean but holds a

passport from a country other than Korea. In this study, only students and families who are “ethnically Korean” may participate.

Two of the three schools have small boarding programs. Students who board live with “dorm parents” and resident hall assistants (RAs). All three schools are faith-based and reference Christianity on the schools’ websites and in school mission statements. It is not a requirement that the students are Christian; however, all staff members are identified as Christian on the schools’ websites.

Each school employs one or more school counselors. The school counselor works with students and their families to plan for post-secondary education opportunities throughout the world. American-certified counselors are employed at all three schools. Enrollment in each of the senior classes is approximately 75 to 100 students.

Definition of Key Terms

College Choice Model. The factors that influence and the stages students go through when deciding on a college to attend. For the purpose of this dissertation, these models will be referred to as “University Choice Models”.

Education Fever. “An amalgam of intensified social disposition, orientation, expectation, and activity that highlights, reinforces, and to extent exaggerates the value and pursuit of higher academic attainment among families and students across socioeconomic levels” (Lee & Shouse, 2008, p. 118).

First generation university students. Those students, in their immediate family, who are the first to attend college

Faith-based school. School founded by missionaries and/or with an underlying faith embedded into the curriculum.

Hakwon/hagwon. A Korean word used to describe education and training outside of the traditional school day. A form of shadow education

International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme. An internationally accepted two- year program that incorporates a rigorous curriculum, a service/action/creativity component, an extended essay and culminating exams

International School. A private school independent of a country's traditional educational system

Korean. A student or parent who holds a Korean passport

Korean (ethnically Korean). A student or parent who is Korean and who holds a passport other than one from Korea

Korean "Paradox". The contradictory idea that suggests although Korean students score very well on international tests, parents are still dissatisfied with the Korean education system, particularly Korean teachers. (Kim, Kim, & Han, 2009)

Post-secondary education. Any education and training beyond high school. This would include both traditional college and university institutions as well as apprenticeship programs, short-term schooling, and on-the-job training.

Post-secondary plan. A written plan that a student composes related to the plans of study or work after high school.

Push Factors (as related to college choice). Those factors that "operate within the source country and initiate a student's decision to undertake international study" (Marrazol & Soutar, 2002, p. 82).

Pull Factors (as related to college choice). Those factors that “operate within a host country to make that country relatively attractive to international students” (Marrazol & Soutar, 2002, p.82).

Shadow education. “Shadow education closely follows the curricula of the main public school system and includes homework support, test preparation, and cramming schools, and is usually offered by individual tutors” (Auriri & Davies, 2004, p. 425).

University. Term used typically for higher education institutions that contain both undergraduate and graduate programs. In Korea, the term “university” is used synonymously with “college” regardless of whether or not the institution has a graduate program.

Summary

This chapter highlights the critical issues surrounding university application choice from a Korean cultural context. The importance of choosing an appropriate university is extremely important for Korean parents and students alike. Korean parents begin planning for higher education at a young age, possibly before the child is born (Lee, 2002). Kang (2004) suggests that Korean parents and students are invested in the university search process because entrance into a prestigious program or institution can provide students with strong alumni networks and other life-long benefits.

In order to compete with their peers, Korean students often enter private supplemental tutoring that takes place outside of the school day. At these

institutions, students work on increasing test scores and learning “tips” to help them gain entrance into their university of choice. Stress, anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation can result when the pressure to compete becomes too intense.

The Model of Student College Choice serves as main framework in this study. This study is important in understanding university application choice decisions from a Korean cultural context for several reasons. Little research has been conducted to identify the factors that affect students’ and parents’ university application choice decisions. Additionally, the research that has been performed has not focused on Korean students or their parents. Korean families are located throughout the world and students are attending higher education institutions internationally. The pressures to gain entrance into a prestigious university often affect Korean high school students, particularly seniors. It is extremely important for the educators working with Korean families to have a better understanding of the factors that influence Korean students and parents during the university application and choice processes.

CHAPTER II: Literature Review

Introduction

The following chapter is a review of essential categories of literature critical to understanding student university application choice decisions in a Korean cultural context. To understand fully why individuals make the choices they do related to university applications it is important to first address why individuals make choices. Therefore the first section of this literature review provides background on Rational Choice Theory. Next, a review of the literature specific to university choice is addressed. The Model of Student College Choice serves as the primary theoretical framework for this study.

The second section of the literature review focuses on critical issues in Korean education. Critical issues are separated into three main categories relevant to this study. The first critical issue addressed in this section is academic competition, particularly related to prestigious university admission. Secondly, the business of and investment in shadow education are detailed. Thirdly, as this study focuses on both parents and students, parental involvement in education is discussed.

Rational Choice Theory

In order to understand the factors that influence students' and parents' university application choices, it is important to understand the broad concept of "choice". One theory of choice is Rational Choice Theory. Ostrom(1991) states that Rational Choice Theory is "a "theory of advice" that informs individuals, or potentially, collectivities of individuals, about how best to achieve objectives

whatever these may be” (p. 238). Rational Choice Theory has influenced the fields of economics, sociology, and psychology. Satz and Ferejohn (1994) assert rational choice theory is “taken to be psychological theory in that it explains a person’s actions in terms of her mental states” (p. 71). Alternatively, Sugden (1991) suggests, “The theory of rational choice has a central place in modern economics” (p. 751). Sugden (1991) explains, “in mainstream economics, explanations are regarded as ‘economic’ to the extent that they explain the relevant phenomena in terms of the rational choices of individual economic agents” (p. 751).

Before outlining the elements identified in Rational Choice Theory it is important to define what is a rational choice and what is rationality. Satz and Ferejohn (1994) assert that “a rational choice or action is one in which the agent takes the best available action given her preferences and beliefs” (p.71). Sugden (1991) suggests another definition of rational choice. Sugden (1991) asserts, “in terms of the theory, choices are rational to the extent that they lead to the satisfaction of the chooser’s preferences” (p. 752). In addition, Sugden (1991) declares “rationality, they say, equals consistency: a person is rational to the extent that his or her choices are consistent with one another” (p. 751).

Six common elements are found in models of rational choice (Simon, 1955). The first element is the set of behavior alternatives that the individual must decide on or choose. The subset of the alternatives that the individual is considering is the second element of rational choice models. Simon suggests that the outcome of what individuals choose is the third element. Individuals place a value of utility on each outcome. The “pay-off function” of each outcome is the fourth element in the

models of rational choice. The fifth element is characterized by the information (whether complete or incomplete) as to which outcomes will actually occur if an individual chooses one alternative over the other. Finally, the last element relates to information detailing the probability that a particular outcome will happen if a particular alternative is chosen (Simon, 1955).

Rational Choice Theory has been met with criticism. Masatiliouglu and Ok (2003) suggest that Rational Choice Theory must be reevaluated to include status quo bias. Masatiliouglu and Ok contend that if the status quo is at least as desirable as all feasible alternatives then individuals may see keeping the status quo as a viable choice.

Hechter and Kanazawa (1997) identify two criticisms of the model of rational choice. First of all, "its models contain assumptions about individual cognitive capacities and values, among other things" (p. 193). Hechter (1994) proposes a refined theory of rational choice. In this revision, the role values play in one's rational choice is examined. Hechter (1994) recommends that researchers look at individual and institutional values as well as role conflicts when examining individual and group rational choice. The second criticism asserts Hechter and Kanazawa (1997), is that "rational choice theorists regard both individual values and structural elements as equally important determinants of outcomes, but for methodological reasons their empirical applications typically place greater emphasis on social structural determinants" (p. 193).

Simon (1955) suggests the classical theory doesn't allow for partial ordering of pay-offs in a behavioral model of rational choice. Simon asserts that classic

models do not address the “incomparability of oranges and apples.” In addition, “in human decision-making alternatives are often examined sequentially” (Simon, 1955, p. 110). In classic models of rational choice, all alternatives are examined and then decisions are made.

Finally, Sugden (1991) proposes that at times an irrational choice may be more satisfactory. If an individual makes a choice based solely on rational choice theory, the outcome may not be what was expected and an irrational choice may have been a more suitable decision. When families are making decisions related to university application choice, they evaluate many alternatives. Students and parents choose post-secondary outcomes that they feel provide the greatest long-term payoff.

Overview of University Choice Models

Students’ choices to attend higher education can be described using both sociological and economic approaches to university choice. The sociological approach to university choice is sometimes referred to as the sociological status attainment approach (Perna, 2006). The sociological approach to university choice suggests a student’s academic ability paired with his or her family socioeconomic status affects his or her aspirations to go to university (Hossler & Stage, 1989; Perna, 2006).

Economic approaches to university choice are based off of human capital theory. St. John, Paulsen, and Starkey (1996) assert “Human capital theorists view college-going behavior as a form of investment in the acquisition of human capital” (p. 179). The economic approach to university choice suggests a student chooses to

attend university because they feel that the benefits of higher education outweigh the costs (Perna, 2006). Researchers using the economic approach view university choice from a marketing perspective (Hossler & Stage, 1989). The student and parents are the consumers. Families decide whether the costs of university (student loans, tuition, books, housing, etc.) are worth the time and money of a higher education degree. In addition to the decision to attend or not attend university, students and parents analyze the costs and benefits of particular university in deciding to apply to or attend one university over the other (St. John, Paulsen, & Starkey, 1996).

Sociological and economic approaches to university choice are combined in many current models of university choice. In many of the combined models, researchers identify stages the students go through in the university planning process (Hossler & Stage, 1989). These models are advantageous in that one can identify the stage a student or parent is currently in the process (Hossler & Stage, 1989).

St. John, Paulsen, and Starkey (1996) propose a three-stage model of university choice. In the first stage students form aspirations related to post-secondary education. In the second stage, "search and application", students begin gathering information on universities of interest. This stage ends when a student has decided where to apply. After students are admitted to universities, they enter the final stage where they must select and attend their chosen college or university (St. John, Paulsen, & Starkey, 1996).

Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) and Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) suggest a

similar process of university choice that occurs in three stages. In the first stage, Predispositions, students develop their occupational and educational aspirations. Won, Yamamura, and Yang (1977) assert that simple parental encouragement of university matriculation will increase a student's likelihood to plan for higher education. In the second stage, Search, students begin to develop their short list of universities. Students in this stage, according to Cabrera and La Nasa (2000), gather the information necessary to begin to make choices related to university application decisions. Students research and develop perceptions and expectations of the quality of the university, campus life, and programs. In the final stage, Choice, students choose the university where they will matriculate. In this stage, Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) assert students' and parents' decisions may be influenced by both sociological and economic factors. Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) suggest that students apply to more universities the stronger the student's academic profile is and the higher the student's family's socio-economic status.

DesJardins, Dundar, and Hendel (1999) propose a similar three-stage sequence model for the university selection process. In the first stage, similar to Casa and La Nasa's Predisposition stage, students form aspirations towards higher education. In the second stage students identify, select, and apply to universities of interest. In the third and final stage students gain admittance, enroll, and attend a university.

R. Chapman (1986) suggests a five-stage model of university choice behavior. Contrary to the three-stage models, R. Chapman (1986) proposes that a behavioral model of university choice has five distinct "components": pre-search behavior,

search behavior, application decision, choice decision, and matriculation decision. In the Pre-search behavior stage, students recognize a desire to go to university and students identify the costs and benefits of a university education. In the Search stage, the student consults with “knowledgeable others” and acquires information needed to formulate a university application list. In this stage, suggests R. Chapman (1986), students are determining the “right” attributes to consider when making a decision to apply to a particular institution. In the Application Decision stage, a student will take the university application list and determine what universities they will apply to while recognizing that some institutions will have a better chance for acceptance. In the fourth stage, the Choice Decision Stage, students evaluate all institutions that accepted them. At this stage, R. Chapman proposes that all students have identified relevant attributes needed to make the decision. A student may also choose to not attend university or defer their enrollment to the following year. The final stage is the Matriculation Decision. In this stage students eventually enroll and attend a university (R. Chapman, 1986).

An alternative model of student university choice of particular interest for those working with international students focuses on push and pull factors that affect international students’ university decisions. Marrazol and Soutar (2002) assert that the demand for education, particularly for those students who choose to study abroad, is a reflection of the perception that a student’s social and economic status will rise upon graduation. In choosing to study abroad, many push and pull factors affect a student’s decision to seek higher education in a country other than where they are currently residing.

Marrazol and Soutar (2002) propose “push factors” are those that “operate within the source country and initiate a student’s decision to undertake international study” (p. 82). Push factors include educational attainment, lack of career opportunities in their current country, and dissatisfaction with the country’s politics (Maringe, 2006).

Alternatively, pull factors “operate within a host country to make that country relatively attractive to international students” (Marrazol & Soutar, 2002, p. 82). Prospective employment, safe political and educational environments, and seemingly high educational standards all may serve as factors that “pull” students to study in particular countries (Maringe, 2006).

D.W. Chapman (1981) also attempted to identify factors that were important for students completing the university application process. D.W. Chapman’s College Choice Model aimed at providing assistance to those directly involved in the offices of admission that are in charge of prospective student recruitment. D.W. Chapman (1981) suggests that “to understand a student’s choice of college to attend, it is necessary to take into account both background and current characteristics of the student, the student’s family, and the characteristics of the college” (p. 492). D.W. Chapman (1981) proposes that three external forces – significant persons, fixed characteristics of university (location, cost, major), and university efforts to communicate to potential students (college fairs, proximity of student to college) – in combination with student’s personal characteristics affect a student’s university choice. Personal characteristics, according to D.W. Chapman (1981), include the student’s socioeconomic status, the student’s aptitude (as depicted on tests such as

the SAT), high school performance (student's grade point average), and student's level of aspiration and expectation related to university.

In response to the Model of Student College Choice proposed by D.W. Chapman (1981), Litten (1982) proposes limitations to the Model of Student College Choice. Litten (1982) suggests that Chapman's model is limited in that it generalizes and draws only on basic student influences of university attendance and selection. Secondly, states Litten (1982), an understanding of the university process itself must be addressed for the model to be comprehensive. Litten(1982) recommends a Student College Choice Model that is a "more elaborated and specified model of college choice" (p. 400).

Although general models of university choice exist, no model specifically addresses Korean students' and parents' experiences in making university application choices. In order to fully understand why Korean parents and students make the university application choice decisions they do, one must examine the critical issues in Korean education.

Critical Issues in Education in the Republic of Korea

Educational Competition in Korea

Korean educational policies in the 1950s and 1960s fueled competition among students seeking prestigious university admission (Kim & Lee, 2004). Modernization and industrialization throughout the Korean peninsula after the Korean War found many individuals seeking post-secondary education. At the same time, the Korean government placed regulations and sanctions on higher education institutions (Kim & Lee, 2004). The Korean government controlled general

enrollments and initiated quotas for university departments. These regulations continued until 1995 and fueled competition among students applying to popular universities and programs (Kim & Lee, 2004). Although Korean universities are now more autonomous, limited spaces for competitive programs continues to cause stress for the high school students applying for entrance.

Today many universities accept students based upon scores on competitive entrance exams. Kim and Lee (2006) suggest, "Over the years, all higher-learning institutions in Korea have been allowed to choose students through competitive entrance examinations" (p. 565). Every Korean citizen who applies to a Korean university must take the Korean university entry examination, the Korean College Scholastic Ability Test (commonly referred to as the "Korean SAT"). Students sit for the exam at the end of their final year in high school (Lee, 2000). The time of preparation leading up to the exam day is sometimes called "Examination Hell" or "Examination War" by Korean students and their families (Sorensen, 1994; Lee & Larson, 2000; Lee, 2003). When the scores are released, the most prestigious universities admit students with the highest scores. This competitive process has fueled the creation of a hierarchy of universities in Korea with the most prestigious universities located in the South Korean capital, Seoul (Kim & Lee, 2004).

Entrance exams in both Korean middle and high schools are extremely important as they put students on track for entrance into well-regarded high schools and prestigious universities (Sorensen, 1994). Korean families are well aware of which middle and high schools have the best reputation for getting students into the top universities.

The majority of prestigious universities are located in the Seoul Metropolitan Area (Kim & Lee, 2004). Seoul National University, Korea University and Yonsei University are all identified as prestigious universities and are collectively nicknamed “SKY” by the Korean people. Moreover, suggest Lee and Brinton (1996), attaining a degree from a prestigious university in Seoul helps many graduates earn placements in the country’s top companies.

Many Korean students aspire to attend a university within Korea; however, many students attend universities abroad. Similarly to the aspirations of those remaining in Korea, Korean students and their families wishing to complete higher education outside of Korea seek the most prestigious universities worldwide. Many students and their families target the Ivy League schools in the United States. According to Kim (1993), some Korean parents have been known to name their children after prestigious universities such as Yale, Princeton, and Harvard to showcase the goals for their children early in life.

In addition to increasing a student’s chances of attaining a better job upon graduation, attending a prestigious university also places graduates in the most coveted social circles. Lee and Brinton (1996) suggest, “There is no doubt that university prestige and human capital are highly correlated in South Korea” (p. 189). The Korean society is one that is based on inter-connectedness and social networks. Thus matriculation to a highly regarded university has great implications for a student’s success monetarily, occupationally, and socially. As students and their parents attempt to get ahead of other students during the university

application process, many will turn to private supplemental education (“shadow tutoring”) in hopes of gaining an edge on the competition.

Shadow Education

Students and families worldwide use private tutoring services. Bray (2006) asserts, “Tutoring is a huge industry in much of Asia and is growing fast elsewhere, particularly in Africa, Europe and North America” (p.515). Private tutoring services are used to boost test scores, strengthen weak academic areas, and supplement traditional classroom lessons. Dang and Rogers (2008) assert, “in many countries, private tutoring has arisen as a parallel education sector that provides supplementary instruction to students enrolled in the public school system” (p. 161).

The term “shadow tutoring” is commonly used to describe private supplemental education that takes place outside of the traditional school day. Bray (2006) suggests shadow tutoring has three diverse features. First off, class sizes can vary from individual tutoring to mass lectures halls. Secondly, the tutors often times have varied qualifications. In some countries shadow education professionals are licensed teachers and other countries ban the use of licensed professionals in shadow tutoring roles. Finally, the subjects and resources available vary (Bray, 2006). Shadow tutoring is different throughout the world and therefore is difficult to define. However, Auriri and Davies (2004) propose, “shadow education closely follows the curricula of the main public school system and includes homework support, test preparation, and cramming schools, and is usually offered by individual tutors” (p. 425).

Bray (2006) suggests four reasons for the term “shadow education”. The first reason is that shadow education “only exists because the mainstream education exists” (p. 515). Secondly, shadow education is designed to imitate mainstream education. Because of this, when mainstream education changes aspects of shadow education must also change. Bray suggests the third reason for the term “shadow” is that in “almost all societies more attention is paid to the mainstream education” (p. 515). Lastly, “the features of shadow education are much less distinct than those of mainstream” (p. 515).

There are several potential areas of concern with shadow tutoring. One of the main features of shadow tutoring is that the tutoring takes place outside of the traditional school day. Students worldwide are in school-like settings for longer periods of time; and therefore, spending less time in unstructured free activities. Using TIMMS data, Baker, Akiba, LeTendre, and Wiseman (2001) assert “the cross-national average suggests that more than a third of all seventh-and eighth-graders weekly participated in tutoring sessions, cram schools or other forms of shadow education activities” (p. 6).

Secondly, accessibility and affordability of services are issues in shadow education. Higher income families are able to afford not only more services, but also better quality tutoring for their children. In addition, shadow tutoring is more readily found in metropolitan areas; rural areas have fewer shadow tutoring resources (Bray, 2006).

Lastly, shadow tutoring is another way a high achieving student can gain a competitive edge. Instead of lower achieving students receiving remediation

services when necessary, shadow tutoring has become an industry that benefits already high achieving students (Bray, 2006).

Governments worldwide have attempted to address the issues surrounding shadow tutoring and the country of Korea is no different. Lee and Shouse (2008) suggest private supplemental education is one of the most critical issues in Korean K-12 education. The Korean government has attempted to control the use of shadow tutoring over the past thirty years to encourage educational equality.

Shadow Education in Korea

In the 1980s, the Korean government banned shadow education services. This ruling was overturned in the 1990s when the ban of shadow education was deemed unconstitutional (Lee & Kim, 2004; Kwak, 2005). The Korean government currently permits two types of private tutoring services.

The first permissible type of shadow education is the private educational institute commonly referred to in Korean *Hangul* as *hagwons/hakwons* (학원). Rix and Twining (2007) define *hakwons* as “independent cram schools in South Korea, which children will commonly attend after their general school day” (p. 339). *Hakwon* teachers are typically university-educated individuals who may or may not be licensed educators.

The second form of government-approved shadow education in Korea is tutoring provided by university students to K-12 students. This type of shadow educational experience is less formal than the service found in a *hakwon* setting (Kang, 2007). *Hakwons* typically offer instruction within a classroom setting.

University tutors provide assistance to students on various subjects usually in an informal setting such as a university library or coffee shop.

A majority of parents enroll their students in some type of shadow tutoring (Kwak, 2004). Lee and Kim (2004) suggest the use of shadow tutoring in Korea resulted from four potential factors. First, an increase in household income due to economic growth in Korea led to more families being able to afford shadow education. Due to the fact that the Korean government controls public education, as families' incomes increased many turned to shadow educational services not controlled by the government to gain an academic edge.

Korean students' desire to compete academically against their peers is the second reason parents and students turn to supplemental education services (Lee & Kim, 2004). In other countries, private tutors are used for remediation services; in Korea many of the highest achieving students use private tutors. In Korea, the goal of private tutoring is to gain a competitive edge versus enhance skills.

Kim and Lee (2004) suggest the third factor contributing to Koreans' use of shadow tutoring services is the perceived inadequacy of the public school system. Kang (2007) suggests that the money spent on private tutoring is Korean parents' response to such a rigid public education system in South Korea.

Kim and Lee (2004), argue "the rampant private tutoring in Korea is a natural market response to the increase in educational demands that is not satisfied by the uniform public provision of schooling" (p. 4). Schools recognized by the Korean government are standardized. In order for students to put themselves at an advantage during the university application process, many seek extra educational

resources to supplement a uniform public education system. Kang (2007) asserts that an increase of shadow tutoring has occurred in Korea because “virtually no private secondary schools are independent of the government’s control” (p. 9).

The fourth factor affecting the use of shadow educational services in Korea is students’ desire for admission to the most prestigious universities in Korea and abroad (Lee & Kim, 2004). It is the hope of parents and students that well-known shadow education services will provide them with valuable information and the secrets students need to gain admission into selective universities. Teranishi, Ceja, Lising Antonio, Allen, and McDonough (2004) suggest a review of the data has shown that a student who attends *hakwon* is more likely to attend a university that is more selective.

Although there appears to be benefits for those utilizing shadow education in Korea, the availability of services is not equal for all families. Lee (2007) asserts, “Private tutoring often serves high-achieving students for enrichment or college preparation” (p. 1208). The affordability of shadow tutoring differs from family to family (Lee, 2007; Rix & Twining, 2007). Consequently, the inequity caused by those who can and cannot afford private tutoring negatively impacts the government’s goal of equity in educational opportunities for all Korean students (Lee, 2007).

One of the disadvantages to the growing popularity of shadow education is that for many Korean families it is an economic hardship. According to a report released by Statistics Korea (kostat.go.kr), Koreans spend approximately 15.1% of their average monthly consumption expenditure (per household) on education (Statistics Korea, 2010). Lee and Kim (2004) state that “private tutoring is a

relatively expensive way to provide educational service”, furthermore, “it is only available to households who are willing and able to pay for it.” *Hakwon* tuition fees and university tutors range in cost. As of 2003 in South Korea the “total expense for private lessons amounted to 13 trillion 648.5 billion won” (Kwak, 2005). This is approximately 13 billion American dollars. In a more recent article from *Korea Times*, this number rose to 21.6 trillion won in 2009 (Na, 2010).

Kwak (2005) highlights four reasons why the investment in shadow education has increased in Korea. Firstly, asserts Kwak, Korean educational institutions stress high stakes testing and not quality in instruction. Many private education institutes (*hakwon*) specialize in teaching test taking skills.

Secondly, Kwak (2005) proposes that investing in education, like shadow education, is the safest way to move socially upward in Korea. Lee and Brinton (1996) further suggest that entrance into a prestigious university helps build social capital. By obtaining higher education from a respected institution, one can climb the social and career work ladder more readily and efficiently. Shadow education supports students planning for university admission by providing students additional information and resources pertinent to selective university admission.

The third reason for the increase in shadow tutoring according to Kwak (2005) is that Koreans, through Buddhist and Confucian influences, have traditionally valued education. Kim and Park (2006) state Korean students and their parents, in keeping with Confucian values “view education as an important life goal and persistent effort and discipline as the means to the goal” (p. 448).

Lastly, high-income middle class parents who prefer choices in their child’s

education have increased the business of shadow education (Kwak, 2005).

In South Korea, the government strives for education equality for all; however, there is not much leverage for parents, even those who can afford it, to place their child at an advantage in the traditional Korean educational system. For many parents, shadow tutoring is one of the only 'choices' they have to enhance their child's education.

Although the debate continues regarding the investment and commitment to shadow education in Korea, many cite the positive aspects of the Korean education system, including the country's use of private education. Teranishi, Ceja, Lising Antonio, Allen, and & McDonough (2004) argue, "Korean students' use of for-profit resources is a significant and positive predictor of attending a selective college" (p. 544). Furthermore, according to McGaw (2005), "by the measure of PISA, Korean education is clearly among the very best in the OECD and that is something with which Korea can be very well pleased" (p. 13). McGaw cites Korea's impressive investment in education (including shadow tutoring institutions) as a potential reason for the country's educational success on international tests. Additionally, Dang and Rogers (2008) suggest "private tutoring can provide more individualized instruction than is possible in public schools, using a more flexible delivery mechanism" (p. 163). Moreover, Dang and Rogers assert (2008), shadow education is "differentiated from the private school sector in that its existence depends on the mainstream education system; it does not stand alone as an independent educational activity" (p. 163).

Although McGaw suggests investment in shadow tutoring is admirable, he also argues that the “extraordinary amounts of time” invested in private tutoring affects Korean youth’s ability to have and maintain a childhood (McGaw, 2005). Park and Kim (2006) propose that many Korean high school students study upwards of 14-16 hours per day. Lee (2003) states the Korean phrase “Pass with four. Fail with five.” Suggests Korean students should sleep only four hours a night in order to pass the university entrance exam; those who choose to sleep for five hours will fail. McGaw (2005) further states, “there is no country in which 15-year-olds spend so much time each week in school” (p. 19). Because children, even very young children, spend so much time in educational settings in Korea very few children have time for play. According to Card (2005), “in 2003, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child deemed the hyper educational environment in South Korea violated children’s “rights to play”” (p. 4). In addition to providing financial support for shadow education Korean parents, particularly mothers, are invested in other areas of their child’s education and development.

Korean Parents’ Involvement and Influence in Education

Parents are the biggest influence on students’ university aspirations (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). The best predictors of children’s educational aspirations are the support and encouragement that they receive from their parents (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). “Parents play a key role in providing emotional, information, and financial support to ensure that their children succeed in school” (Park & Kim, 2006, p. 440).

Korean society's collectivistic nature holds even greater implications for education and familial roles. In a collectivistic society one's own opinions are less important than the opinions of the group (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). In the Korean family, the younger members are responsible for taking care of the old. Ishii-Kuntz (1997) suggests Koreans are more likely than Japanese and Chinese to take care and support elderly family members. In part, this may be because Koreans are still influenced by traditional cultural values that suggest the young should take care of the old (Ishii-Kuntz, 1997).

Children raised in collectivistic societies learn to think of their entire family and are socialized to think in terms of "we" (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). When children think in terms of "we" they learn to think that their life decisions will ultimately affect their family. Korean children feel a sense of guilt that they will never be able to return the care and love that their parents' have shown them. In Korean families, this guilt becomes academic motivation and brings the family closer together (Park & Kim, 2006).

The relationship between children and their parents in Korean families is strong. Kim and Choi (1994) suggest the relationship between mother, father, and child in Korean families is a triadic one. In this model, the mother and child share a psychological bond, the father and mother a bond of interdependence, and the father and child a bond of physical dependence (Kim & Choi, 1994). According to Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010), investment in a child in a collectivistic family, means investment in a quality shared future once the child graduates.

Because children feel a sense of responsibility towards their parents, Korean children who do not meet parents' expectations feel a strong sense of frustration and their guilt may become a major psychological burden (Kim, 1993). In order to provide for their family, young Koreans turn to education.

As Korean children feel a sense of obligation to their parents, Korean parents feel a sense of obligation to their children. Many Korean parents, particularly mothers, are incredibly involved in their child's education and overall development. Lee (2003) suggests that Korean mothers feel a sense of responsibility in their child's education and show their support of a child's preparation for high stakes exams by supervising their daily schedules. Korean mothers are incredibly visible in their children's schools and commute their children to after-school activities, including shadow tutoring, at the end of the school day. Because Korean mothers are so involved in their children's educations, many mothers are quick to evaluate the Korean education system. Many parents, particularly mothers, are very dissatisfied with the Korean education system despite Korean students' extremely high test scores on international tests (Kim, Kim, & Han, 2009). This phenomenon, known as the "Korean Paradox", addresses the desire for Korean parents to have the best education possible for their children even when test scores would suggest quality education might already be taking place via the current system. Kim and Choi (1994) argue that Korean mothers essentially desire to become "one" with their children as they develop. Korean mothers try to satisfy all their children's emotional and physical needs even if doing so means they must make extraordinary

sacrifices (Park & Kim, 2006). In South Korea, parents truly are partners with their children throughout the university application choice process.

Summary

Korean students and their parents place high priority on planning for and attending higher education. Critical issues such as the expense and time spent on shadow education, educational competition, and parents' and students' prestige orientation are well documented in the literature. Additionally, literature exists that explains the importance of Korean students attending well reputable institutions in order to gain entrance into the country's top companies (Lee & Brinton, 1996). It is well documented in the literature the importance both students and parents place on the reputation of the university to which they are applying. Few researchers have identified the extent that factors such as private tutoring or prestige orientation influence parents' and students' decisions in the university application planning process.

The Model of College (University) Choice serves as the main theoretical framework for this study. The current models of university choice mainly are a combination of traditional economic (market) and sociological approaches to university choice. Current stage models suggest the university choice process is one completed in three to five distinct stages. In most of the literature regarding stage models of university choice, the first stage involves students' aspirations towards higher education. In the middle stages, students gather information needed to apply to a group of universities or colleges. In the final stage of most university choice models, the students decide on a university to attend.

Models focusing on the push and pull factors influencing students' university choice decisions are different than the stage-like models. These models suggest factors exist that pull students to study at particular institutions. Conversely, push factors repel students away from institutions.

The literature surrounding college choice models is limited. It is extremely general and is not specific to varying student populations. Although most models, particularly those identified as using a sociological approach, account for students demographics; a more exclusive model for specific student populations is not addressed in the literature. In addition, no current university choice models address specifically the factors influencing Korean student and parent populations.

Lastly, very little literature addresses the factors that influence parents as they plan for their children's post-secondary educations. Parents provide financial and emotional support for their children as they go through the university choice and planning process. The factors that influence their decisions to encourage their children to apply to particular universities are important to address. In most cases, Korean parents highly influence their children throughout the university planning process. Therefore, in addition to understanding the factors that influence a Korean student during the university application choice process, an understanding of the influences dominating Korean parents' application choices in the process is also critical.

CHAPTER III: Methodology and Methods

Study Methodology and Rationale

This study methodology is both quantitative and qualitative. Creswell (2009) asserts that qualitative methodology is “a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). Conversely quantitative methodology is a “means for testing objective theories by examining the relationships among variables” (Creswell, 2009, p. 4).

Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies have advantages in research design. One benefit of quantitative research is that the methodology is relatively unbiased and objective. Creswell (2009) proposes quantitative studies can be used to describe trends, compare groups, or identify relationships among variables. In quantitative research, data are collected from a large number of individuals and are quantifiable (Creswell, 2008). The intent of quantitative research is for the researcher to be able to generalize results. Thus, the larger number of participants in the study, the stronger the case that results will generalize to a larger number of individuals (Creswell, 2008).

Unlike quantitative methodologies, Creswell (2009) suggests using qualitative methodologies occasionally results in biased and reflexive results. Qualitative methodologies are general, broad, and based on participants' experiences. In this particular study, in-depth qualitative interviews provide specific data related to participants' experiences throughout the university application choice process. Creswell (2008) asserts qualitative data are gathered

using words or images and typically are collected from a smaller number of individuals or sites. With characteristically smaller sample sizes, results from qualitative methodologies are difficult to generalize to other populations.

A major issue of many qualitative methodologies is qualitative validity. For a study to be qualitatively valid the researcher must employ strategies such as triangulation and “member checking” to ensure the data are accurate (Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2009) states that the researcher “triangulates different data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using it to be build a coherent justification for themes” (p. 190). For this study, both parents and students are asked provide information regarding the university application process. Moreover, both surveys and in-depth interviews are used as methods for collecting data. By collecting data using multiple methods, and additionally, using two different participant groups, the chance of issues related to qualitative validity are reduced.

Although disadvantages exist when researchers use both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, a design that incorporates both methodologies is an appropriate option for this particular study. Surveys are used as the quantitative method and in-depth interviews, the qualitative method. The quantitative surveys provide a base for discovering key factors that affect students’ and parents’ university application choices. The qualitative interviews, which include family and student experiences, provide anecdotal data and assist the researcher in developing a deeper level of understanding of the factors that affect university application choice decisions of Korean families.

Overview of Research Methods and Rationale

The research design for this study is mixed methods. Mixed method design draws on several forms of data to draw on multiple possibilities (Creswell, 2009). Responses from a quantitative survey are checked against in-depth interview responses of selected participants. Mixed methods design is used to explain in more detail the data gathered through the surveys by asking open-ended and more specific questions to select interview participants.

Every study participant completed an Internet-based or paper survey in English or Korean. Parents completed the surveys in their preferred language, English or Korean. All students filled out English surveys. The purpose of using a survey as a method of design, according to Creswell (2009), is “to generalize from a sample to a population so that inferences can be made” (p. 146). The purpose of using a survey in this study is to gather demographic and other quantitative data that are analyzed to provide further implications for educators and families working through the university application process with Korean international high school seniors and their families. One of the main advantages of using a survey, such the one in this particular study, is that “descriptive surveys chiefly tell us how many (what proportion of) members of a population have a certain opinion or characteristic or how often certain events occur together” (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 12). Variables being examined are those that impact the university application choice decisions of Korean families. Data gathered in the survey are analyzed to determine what factors (tuition, university reputation, location, etc.) are important to the highest proportion of study participants.

Although there are many reasons to use surveys in research design, some disadvantages do exist when utilizing surveys in research. Oppenheim (1992) explains several disadvantages of survey design often described by experimentalist researchers. Oppenheim asserts, “experimentalists are critical of surveys because of their reduced ability to control or manipulate important variables, for following events rather than making them happen and for their inability to prove causal relationships” (p. 12).

Data gathered in the in-depth interviews provide further explanation of the forced choice responses participants provided in the surveys. The questions addressed in the in-depth interviews are intended to give opportunities for the study participants to identify factors related to university application choice decisions that are not addressed in the survey. The questions also are designed to allow participants to elaborate on their answers from the brief survey. Creswell (2008) asserts one-on-one interviews, such as those used for this study, are the most costly and time-consuming ways to gather data. Each of the 19 interviews in this study was approximately 30-60 minutes in length.

Factors Influencing Study Design

The following section addresses the individual and institutional factors addressed in this study. The reasons why particular factors are chosen are illustrated in the following section.

Individual Factors

International and/or public school attendance. Public school education in Korea is free and available to nearly all students throughout the country. Fifteen

of the largest international schools are located throughout the peninsula. Most of the international schools are in Seoul and other large cities such as Suwon, Daejeon, and Busan. All international schools charge substantial tuition and fees upwards of approximately 35,000 US Dollars. The Korean government also mandates that international schools enroll students who have lived and studied outside of Korea for a designated period of time or carry non-Korean passports.

Peer influence. Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) assert that students who have friends planning on going to university also look at university as an important option upon high school graduation. Although peers influence students positively they are also students' greatest observable competition. Students compete with other students in terms of standardized test scores, grade point average, class rank, and extracurricular leadership when applying to university.

Siblings. For this particular study, students are asked if they have older siblings that influenced them during the university application process. Korea has an extremely low fertility rate with 1.15 children per woman in 2009 (OECD website, 2012). Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) suggest that students who have siblings who are attending or have attended university are more likely to have university aspirations.

Objective Admission Factors (Standardized test scores; student transcript). Chapman (1981) asserts "colleges encourage the practice of publishing the test scores and class rank of their entering class and, sometimes, by directly discouraging applications from students with low-test scores or with poor high school records" (p. 493).

Standardized test scores of student. Standardized tests scores such as the SAT(Scholastic Ability Test) and the ACT (American College Test), and the Korean SAT will be self-reported by parents and students. Students and families, many of whom will work with school counselors or college advisers, may use standardized test data in order to compile a list of safety, target, and reach schools for their college application list.

Years family lived abroad. Some international schools in Korea require both the student and their family to live abroad before allowing them to apply or enroll in their primary or secondary school. Korean companies such as LG, Samsung, Kia, and Hyundai have plants and employees worldwide.

Parental influence. Studies have shown that parents seem to have the most influence over the university application process before their student enters high school (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). Once students reach high school, their sources related to the university search are teachers, school counselors, and university print and web material and personnel affiliated with particular colleges and universities.

Parents' educational background and occupation. Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) propose students with well-educated parents are more confused about the university application process than their peers. However, researchers suggest that this is healthy confusion related to students feeling as though they have more alternatives for education because of a potentially more involved exploration process.

Institutional Variables

University ranking. Several international ranking systems exist that rank universities and colleges worldwide on a variety of factors including, but not limited to: retention, standardized test scores of incoming freshmen classes, faculty: student ratio, selectivity, and number of students' attending graduate school upon completion of college. Some of the most popular ranking systems worldwide include *US News and World Report*, the *Princeton Review*, *Academic Ranking of World Universities*, and the *Shanghai Jiao Tong University Rankings*.

Location of university. Both international and public school students matriculate to universities in Korea and abroad. Marringe (2006) suggests that pull and push factors operate to attract students to particular universities, or consequently, repel them to study elsewhere.

Perceived safety of campus. Perceived safety of campus may be a subjective factor based on the individual experiences and research of the student and their parents. Some universities, including all accredited universities in the United States, must annually report incidences on campus to students and the public. Students and parents may also research the safety of the city or town where the university is located.

Cost of attendance. Korean public universities charge minimal tuition and fees for Korean citizens. Conversely, universities elsewhere worldwide, including those in the United Kingdom and the United States can charge upwards of 60,000 US Dollars per year in tuition alone. Cost of attendance typically is calculated by adding the total cost of attending a university for one year including, but not limited to:

tuition and fees, books, housing, transportation, and additional expenses.

Study Participants

The study participants are Korean 18-year-old students in their senior years of high school (at an international school) or Korean parents who have senior students at one of the three international schools chosen for this study. Salant and Dillman (1994) suggest there are three steps one must take to appropriately sample any given population. First, one must identify the target population. In this case, the target population is Korean international high school students in their senior year of high school and their parents. The second step in appropriate sampling is creating a list of the target population. Each of the three international schools researched has this demographic information for all their Korean students and parents. The third step in the sampling process is to select the sample. For this study, the entire population who fit the definition of an 18-year-old Korean student in their senior year or a Korean parent of a senior are asked to participate in the survey portion of this study.

The set of possible participants is limited based on the age of the students. Only students ages 18 and above are eligible to participate. Due to a potentially small sample size for students, all 18-year-old seniors are asked to participate. This sample; therefore, is one of convenience. Convenience samples are comprised of naturally formed groups or volunteers (Creswell, 2009). The number of students surveyed in this study is 30 and the number of parents is 15. When sampling from a self-selected group of individuals, researchers run the risk of getting responses from those who hold a strong opinion about the study topic (Utts & Heckard, 2006).

Nine parents and ten students are chosen for the in-depth interviews. Francis (2010) suggests data saturation may occur after interviewing more than ten individuals. Data saturation occurs when after interviewing a set number of participants no new themes emerge even if the researcher interviewed additional participants. Francis (2010), after analyzing other data saturation studies of Glasser and Guest, determined data saturation occurs after interviewing 10-13 participants. Francis named this criterion 10+3. Interview participants are selected in one of two ways. Students and parents who provided unique responses on the survey are asked to interview. These students and parents are identified using their student ID numbers. However, many students at these schools are boarding students and their parents live far away from the school. Some parents and students are selected based on convenience and their availability to come to the school during the researcher's visit.

Data Collection

The researcher worked with the school counselor(s) assigned to the 12th grade class to identify Korean students and parents who attend their schools. International students and parents attending the three schools, who were not identified as Korean, were asked to not participate in the study. Both students and parents completed the surveys online. Five participants filled out paper surveys. Using the web-based survey builder tool, Survey Monkey, the researcher emailed the survey link to all study participants. Counselors were asked to encourage all students and parents who were emailed the survey link to participate. In these

international schools, students each have their own personal laptop. Computer labs are also on site and Internet is readily available.

Not all study participants speak a common language. All students in the three international schools are instructed in English and speak and write English fluently. Their parents; however speak Korean and/or English. Survey and interview questions were translated into both Korean and English. Back translating documents helps to ensure that word choices are accurate. Educators working in one international school in Korea provided back translation services. An interpreter associated with the University of Minnesota translated the initial survey.

Data from the surveys and in-depth interviews were collected simultaneously. Creswell (2009) asserts when data are collected concurrently, the “both quantitative and qualitative data are gathered at the same time and the implementation is simultaneous” (p. 206). The researcher spent one to two days at each of the three participating schools. Student and parent interviews took place on both days. In-depth interviews were recorded using an audio recorder at the time of the interview. Students and parents gave consent to the taping prior to the interview. A Korean translator was present at every interview that needed Korean-English translation. Many parent interviewees were more comfortable speaking entirely in Korean. Once data were collected, in-depth interview responses were coded.

Several advantages and disadvantages result from gathering the data from the surveys and interviews simultaneously. The first advantage to collecting data simultaneously is that data can be gathered more promptly. Working within the

constraints of a school calendar, data in this study needed to be gathered quickly and efficiently. Collecting data from the interviews and surveys simultaneously helped to decrease the time needed to research and the cost associated with international travel.

A second advantage to gathering data using a concurrent approach is that the research provides a more comprehensive look. Detailed anecdotes and further explanation are often missed when researchers use one quantitative study method. A short survey may limit the robustness of the answers participants provide. Creswell (2009) proposes that when a researcher gathers data from two sources, such as interviews and surveys, concurrently the result is that data can be analyzed at a different level of analysis.

There are disadvantages to using a concurrent approach in data collection. Creswell(2009) suggests that when researchers gather data concurrently, it is difficult to give equal priority to both methods. According to Creswell (2009), “Because the two methods are unequal in their priority, this approach also results in unequal evidence within a study, which may be a disadvantage when interpreting the final results” (p. 215).

Data Analysis

Analysis of Qualitative Data

Upon completion of the in-depth interviews, the data are coded and categorized by theme. According to Basit (2003), there are two ways of coding qualitative data. The first is based in grounded theory and occurs when researchers choose to not pre-code data prior to collecting participants’ responses. The latter,

and the method used in this study, occurs when a researcher creates a provisional “start-list” of codes. This provisional list is created using the theoretical framework or construct, a list of research questions, hypotheses, identified problem areas, or key variables (Basit, 2003).

A conceptually clustered matrix is used to organize this list. Students and parents’ names are listed in each row and a theme or concept is listed in each column. The themes in each column are chosen deductively. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) suggest that when this is done deductively, “the analyst may have some a priori ideas about key concepts, themes, or theories that will be explored in the study” (p. 173). The provisional list for this study contained themes and concepts commonly found in the college (university) choice theory literature.

Analysis of Quantitative Data

Using a frequency analysis, data from the quantitative surveys are analyzed. A frequency analysis is the most appropriate way to analyze the data from this study. The purpose of the study is to determine those factors that most strongly influence Korean parents’ and students’ university application choice decisions. By performing a frequency analysis, the most important university application choice factors, as determined by parents and students, are identified.

Factors are identified in two different ways. On the survey, parents and students are asked to identify the three most important institutional and individual factors and provide a rank of 1, 2, or 3 for those factors. The first frequency analysis is used to determine whether or not a factor is listed at all regardless of whether it is

ranked 1, 2, or 3. Next, the factors that are given a rank of #1 most frequently are identified. A frequency analysis provides the answer to both research questions.

Summary

This chapter describes the methodology and methods chosen for this study. Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies are used. One of the main advantages to a quantitative methodology is the ability to generalize results. Qualitative methodologies are more general and subjective.

Surveys serve as one of the methods of study. All participating seniors and parents completed an Internet-based survey. Nineteen in-depth interviews took place simultaneously at each school. Participants were asked to describe their or their students' experiences completing university applications. Data are thematically coded for both the surveys and interviews. Survey data are analyzed using a frequency analysis. Interview data are analyzed using a conceptually coded matrix. Major themes are categorized and data that did not fit into a particular category are identified as "other". The data collected are analyzed to uncover the important factors in the university application process of Korean families.

Chapter IV: Results

This chapter contains the results of the current study. The first section is a discussion of the findings of the quantitative surveys completed by 30 Korean international students and 15 Korean parents. In the second section the results of nine parent and 10 student interviews are examined. The results of both the surveys and interviews provide answers to the following two research questions:

1. What factors influence Korean international students' university application choice decisions?
2. What factors influence Korean parents' university application choice decisions?

The term "university" is used throughout this chapter. As previously mentioned, for the purposes of this study "university" is used instead of the term "college". In Korea, most students and parents refer to higher education or college as "university." In the United States, colleges are defined as having undergraduate programs while universities contain graduate as well as undergraduate programs. For this study, the common term used by most Koreans "university" is used.

Part One: Surveys

In total, 30 students from three international schools completed an online or paper survey. Twelve are female and eighteen are male. Seven parents completed the survey in English and eight parents completed the survey in Korean. Two fathers completed the survey. The survey results are used to confirm or contradict interview responses. The frequency to which parents and students identified particular institutional factors and individuals as influential in the university

application choice decision is analyzed. The following section provides background information on each of the 30 students who participated in this study. All of these students received a diploma from their international school in Spring 2013. Only one student also completed the Korean “GED” while attending his international school. Generally speaking, students who attend international schools in Korea choose to apply to universities outside of Korea. Those students who choose to apply to universities in Korea and Japan (other than international universities that may accept an international school diploma) also take all the necessary exams and fulfill all requirements to obtain a Korean diploma. In addition, students applying to Korean universities take the “Korean SAT” exam.

Table 1. International Student Profiles of all Participants

| Gender | Universities to which student applied | SAT/ACT Score | Lived outside of Korea? | Number of years attending international school |
|---------------|--|-----------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Female | Parsons the New School for Design, USA; School of Visual Arts, USA; Moore College of Art & Design, USA; California College of the Arts, USA; University of Hawaii at Manoa, USA | SAT 1600 (2400 scale) | Yes, 6 months | 14 years |
| Female | Emory University, USA; Boston College, USA; University of Southern California, USA; Bryn Mawr, USA; Drexel University, USA; Tufts University, USA; New York University, USA; Northeastern University, USA; University of | SAT 2190 (2400 Scale) | No | 13 years |
| Female | Emory University, USA; Boston College, USA; University of Southern | SAT 2190 (2400 Scale) | No | 13 years |

| | | | | |
|--------|--|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------|
| Female | Middlebury College, USA; Bard College, USA; Boston College, USA; Bowdoin College, USA; Colby College, USA; Connecticut College, USA; Haverford College, USA; Tufts University, USA; University of Southern California, USA; Wesleyan University, USA | SAT 2220 (2400 scale) | Yes, 8 years | 10 years |
| Female | University of Illinois, USA; University of Washington, USA; New York University (New York, USA; Abu Dabi, UAE; Shanghai, China), Carnegie Mellon University, USA; Emory University, USA; George Washington University, USA; Tufts University, USA; Boston College, USA; Boston University, USA; University of California (Los Angeles, San Diego, Davis, Santa Barbara, Irvine), USA | SAT 2010 (2400 scale) | Yes, 3 ½ years | 3 ½ years |
| Male | University of Pennsylvania, USA; Harvard College, USA; Columbia University, USA; Duke University, USA; Dartmouth College, USA; Johns Hopkins University, USA; Northwestern University, USA; Washington University in St. Louis, USA; Carnegie Mellon University, USA | SAT 2170 (2400 scale) | No | 8 years |
| Male | United States Naval Academy – Annapolis, USA; United States Air | SAT 2030 (2400 scale) | Yes, 7 years | 7 years |

| | | | | |
|------|---|-----------------------|----------------|---------|
| Male | Northeastern, USA; University of California, USA; Imperial College London, United Kingdom (UK); University College London, UK; King's College London, UK; Drexel University, USA | SAT 1430 (1600 scale) | Yes, 1 year | 7 years |
| Male | Emory University, USA; Cornell, USA; Case Western, USA; Northeastern, USA; University of Rochester, USA; Rutgers, USA; University of California (Irvine, Berkeley, San Diego, Los Angeles), USA | SAT 1980 (2400 scale) | Yes, 2-3 years | 5 years |
| Male | Pratt Institute, USA | N/A | Yes, 10 years | 4 years |
| Male | University of California, (Los Angeles, Berkeley, San Diego, Irvine), USA; University of Virginia, USA; Carnegie Mellon University, USA; New York University, USA; Boston College, USA; Washington University in St. Louis, USA; Emory University, USA George Washington University, USA; Boston University, USA; Tufts University, USA | SAT 2000 (2400 scale) | Yes, 7 years | 8 years |
| Male | Princeton University, USA; Harvard College, USA; Yale University, USA; University of Pennsylvania, USA; Columbia University, USA; University of Chicago, USA; Brown University, USA; Northwestern University, USA; | SAT 2270 (2400 scale) | Yes, 5 years | 6 years |
| Male | Princeton University, USA; Harvard College, USA; Yale University, | SAT 2270 (2400 scale) | Yes, 5 years | 6 years |

| | | | | |
|--------|---|-----------------------|----------------|---------|
| Male | State University of New York Binghamton, USA; Drexel University, USA; University of Colorado, Boulder, USA; Illinois Institute of Technology, USA; University of Cincinnati, USA; University of California (Davis, Irvine, Santa Cruz, Santa Barbara, Riverside) | SAT 1710 (2400 scale) | Yes, 4 years | 3 years |
| Female | Brown University-Providence, USA; Case Western Reserve University, USA; Cornell University, USA; Emory University, USA; Northwestern University, USA; University of Rochester, USA; University of Southern California at Los Angeles, USA; Stanford University, USA; Tufts University, USA; University of Washington, USA | SAT 2130 (2400 scale) | Yes, 4 years | 3 years |
| Female | Bowdoin College, USA; Carleton College, USA; Case Western Reserve, USA; Colby College, USA; Davidson College, USA; Grinnell College, USA; Vassar College, USA; Whitworth University, USA; Williams College, USA | SAT 1980 (2400 scale) | Yes, 1 ½ years | 5 years |
| Female | Yale, USA; Cooper Union, USA; School of Visual Arts, USA; California College of Art, USA; School of the Art Institute of Chicago, USA; | SAT 1850 (2400 scale) | No | 7 years |
| Female | Yale, USA; Cooper Union, USA; School of Visual Arts, USA; California | SAT 1850 (2400 scale) | No | 7 years |

| | | | | |
|--------|---|-----------------------------|---------------------|----------|
| Male | Rice University, USA | SAT 2100 (2400 scale) | Yes, 4 years | 6 years |
| Female | Baylor University, USA; University of California (Davis, Irvine, San Diego), USA; Emory University, USA; University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA; University of Iowa, USA; University of Minnesota - Twin Cities, USA; Temple University, USA; Texas A&M University, USA; Vanderbilt University, USA; Washington University in St Louis, USA; University of Washington, USA | SAT 1870 (2400 scale) | Yes, 7 years | 2 years |
| Female | School of Art Institute of Chicago, USA; California Institute of the Arts, USA; California College of the Arts, USA; Pratt, USA; Savannah College of Art and Design, USA | SAT 1600 (2400 scale) | No | 13 years |
| Female | Boston College, USA; Davidson College, USA; Meredith College, USA; North Carolina State University, USA; University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA; Vanderbilt, USA; Wake Forest University, USA | SAT 1960 (2400 scale) | Yes, 13 years | 4 years |
| Male | University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, USA; Virginia Tech, USA; Binghamton, USA; Lehigh University, USA; Georgia Institute of Technology, USA | SAT 1840 (2400 scale) | Yes, no response | 2 years |
| Male | Art schools | SAT 1790 | Yes, 4 | 4 years |
| Male | Art schools (the only response given) | SAT 1790 (2400 scale) | Yes, 4 years | 4 years |

| | | | | |
|--------|--|--------------------------|--------------|----------|
| Male | Georgia Institute of Technology, USA; Purdue University, USA; University of Wisconsin at Madison, USA; University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA; Bristol University, UK; Imperial College London, UK | SAT 2140 (2400 scale) | Yes, ½ year | 6 years |
| Male | University of Michigan, USA; University of Washington, USA; Rice University, USA; Emory University, USA; University of California, USA | SAT 2090 (2400 scale) | Yes, 1 year | N/A |
| Male | Pennsylvania State University, USA | SAT 1780 (2400 scale) | Yes, ½ year | 5 years |
| Female | New York University - Tisch School of the Arts, USA | SAT 2100 (2400 scale) | Yes, 8 years | 13 years |
| Female | Biola University, USA; Crown College, USA; Toccoa Falls College, USA | SAT 1030 (1600 scale) | Yes, 8 years | 2 years |
| Male | Amherst College, USA; Boston University, USA; University of California (Berkeley, Los Angeles, San Diego), USA; Columbia University, USA; Cornell University, USA; Dartmouth College, USA; Duke University, USA; Emory University, USA; Harvard College, USA; Northwestern University, USA; University of Pennsylvania, USA; University of Southern California, USA; Stanford | SAT 2220 (2400 scale) | Yes, 2 years | 5 years |
| Male | Amherst College, USA; Boston University, USA; University of California | SAT 2220 (2400 scale) | Yes, 2 years | 5 years |

| | | | | |
|------|--|-----------------------|--------------|---------|
| Male | Purdue University, USA; University of Illinois, USA; University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, USA; University of Michigan, USA; Pepperdine, USA; University of California (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Irvine), USA; Boston University, USA; New York University, USA; Carnegie Mellon University, USA; University of Southern California, USA | SAT 1900 (2400 Scale) | No | 3 years |
| Male | Emory, USA; Duke, USA; Boston College, USA; Boston University, USA; University of Virginia, USA; University of Notre Dame, USA; George Washington University, USA; University of Washington, USA; Washington University in St. Louis, USA; Brown, USA; Northwestern, USA | SAT 1470 (1600 scale) | Yes, 8 years | 6 years |
| Male | School of the Arts Institute of Chicago, USA; School of Visual Arts, USA; Otis School of Design, USA, University of Illinois, USA; Rochester Institute of Technology, USA; Pratt Institute, USA; Rhode Island School of Design, USA; Savannah School of Art and Design, USA; University of the Arts, USA | SAT 1600 (2400 scale) | Yes, 5 years | 2 years |

Research Question #1: What factors influence international Korean students' university application choice decisions?

The factors that influenced students' university application choice decisions are organized into two categories, institutional factors and individuals. In order to determine the frequency to which students identified certain individuals as most influential in their university application choice process the responses to the questions that address individuals' influences are explored. The data show that students who filled out the survey felt that parents had the most influence on their university application choice decisions. Twenty-seven of the 30 students chose this answer. Students also selected "sibling" when asked who influenced their application decisions. Nearly half of the students surveyed (14 of 30 students) selected "sibling" as an influential individual. *Figure 1* is a frequency distribution of the three individuals most frequently cited as influential by student participants. Students were asked to provide a rank of 1, 2, or 3 for the individuals who most influenced their university application choice decisions.

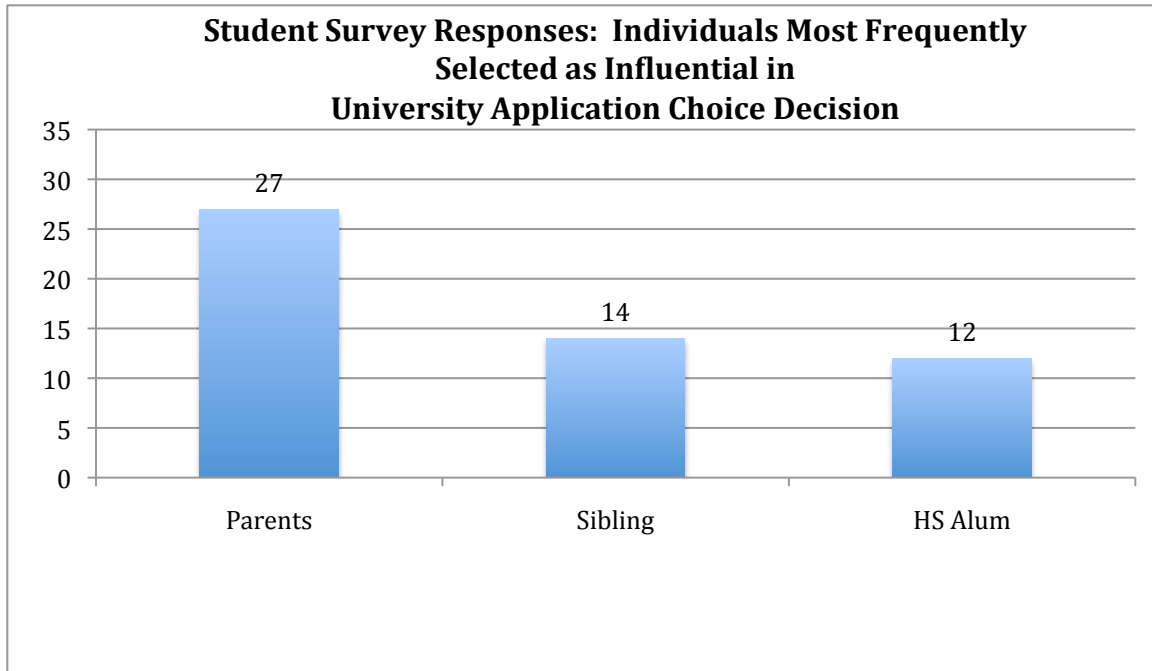


Figure 1. Student survey responses: individuals most frequently selected as influential in university application choice decision. This graph indicates the top three individuals students identified as influential in the students' university application choice decisions. Students ranked individuals as #1, 2, or 3 (or no rank) depending upon how much they believed that particular individual influenced their university application choice decisions.

Infrequently cited by students were coaches, other university representatives and club advisors. These individuals appear to have the least amount of influence during students' application choice decision processes. From the students' responses, it appears that family members and peers may have the most influence during Korean international students' university application choice decisions. A majority of the students (21/30 students or 70%) ranked their parents as the most influential individual during the university application choice decisions.

Figure 2 depicts the frequency to which students ranked certain individuals as #1, or the most influential individual, during their application choice decision process.

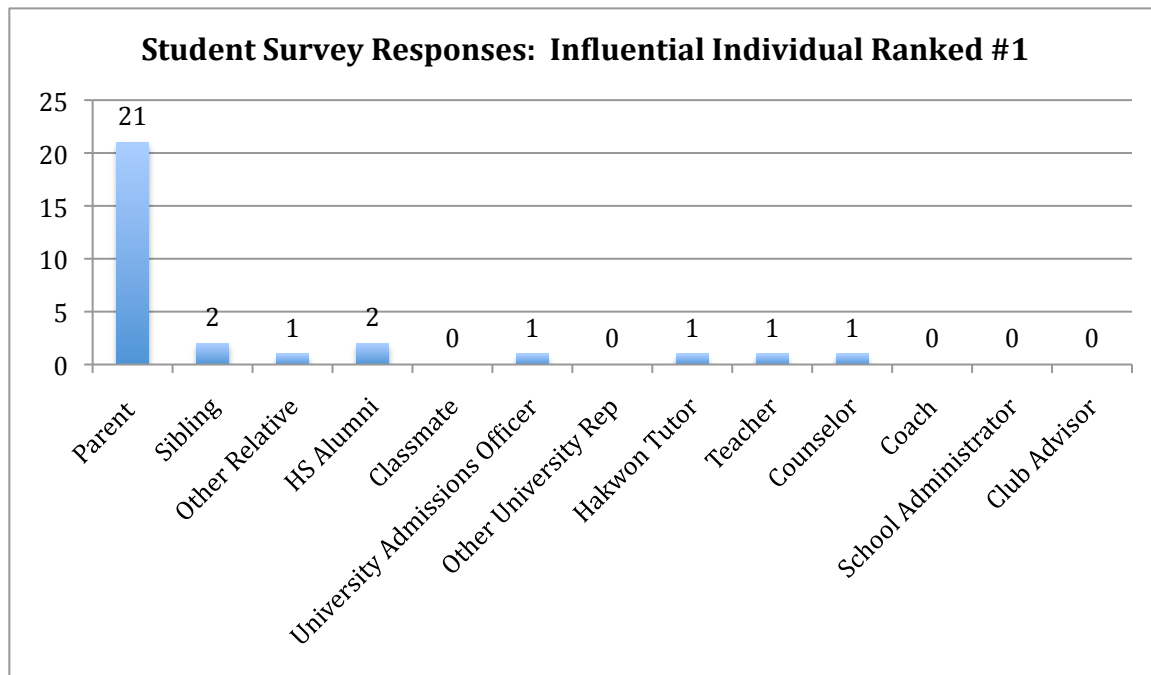


Figure 2. Student survey responses: Influential individuals ranked #1. This graph states the frequency to which students ($n = 30$) identified specific individuals as the most influential in their university application decisions. Students ranked individuals as #1, 2, or 3 (or no rank) depending upon how much they believed that individual influenced their university application choice decisions.

Students were also asked in the survey to identify the institutional factors, such as availability of financial aid or university reputation, which most greatly influenced their university application choice decisions. Twenty-seven of the 31 (87%) students selected “reputation” as the institutional factor that was most important in their application choice decisions. Geographic location was also a

frequently cited response with 16 of the 30 (53%) students selecting that factor.

Figure 3 is a graphic that represents the three most frequently cited institutional factors identified by the student participants. *Figure 4* depicts the institutional factor that students' ranked #1, or most influential, in their university application choice decisions.

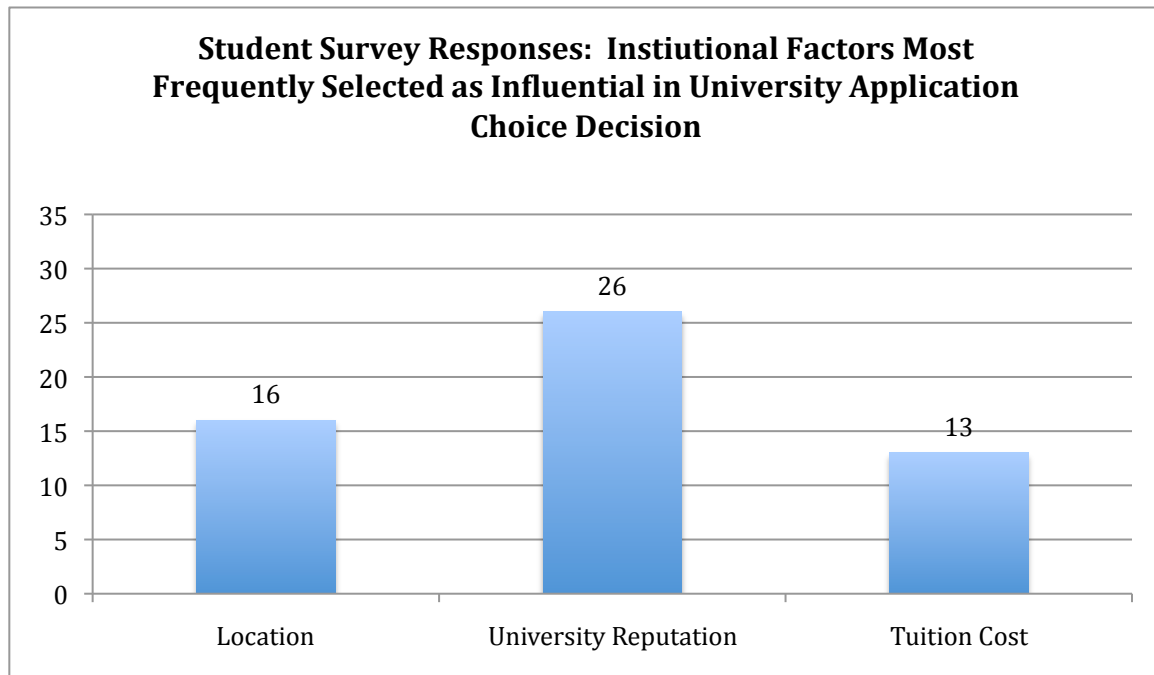


Figure 3. Student survey responses: Institutional factors most frequently selected as a influential in university application choice decision. This bar graph illustrates the top three institutional factors identified by students as having influenced their university application choice decisions. Students ranked institutional factors #1, 2, or 3 (or no rank) depending upon how much they believed that factor influenced their university application choice decisions.

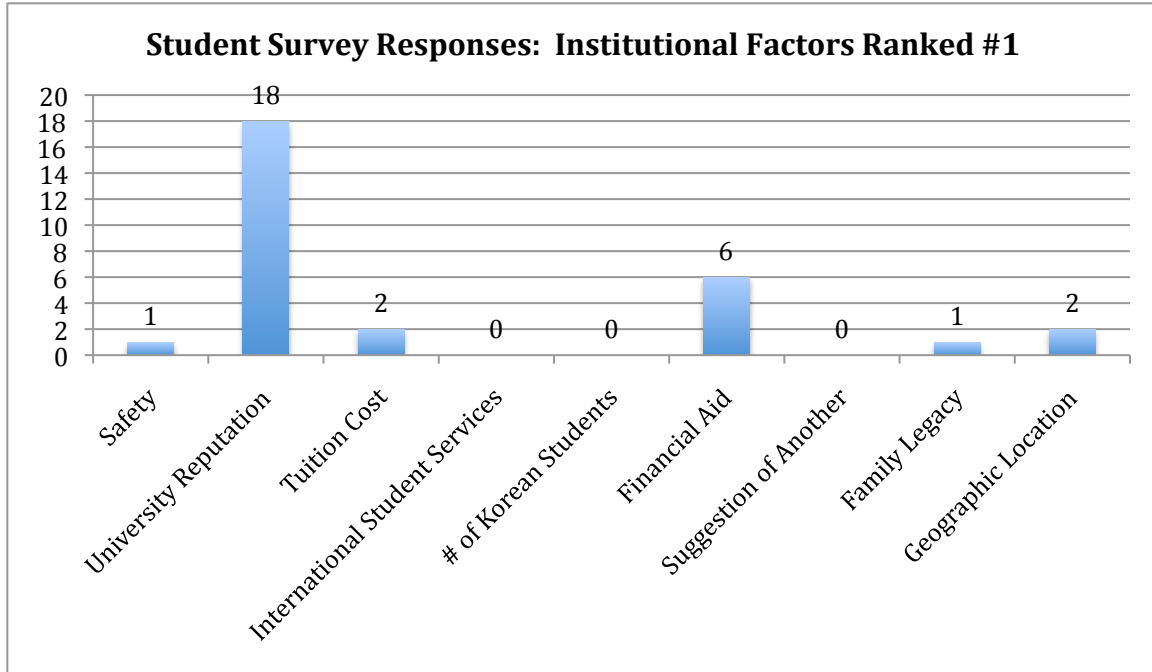


Figure 4. Student survey responses: Institutional factors ranked #1. This graph states the frequency to which students (n= 30) identified specific institutional factors as the most influential in their university application choice decisions. Students ranked factors #1, 2, or 3 (or no rank) depending upon how much they believed that factor influenced their university application choice decisions.

Research Question #2: What factors influence Korean parents' university application choice decisions?

Fifteen parents completed online or paper surveys. Eight parents completed the survey translated into Korean. Seven parents chose to complete the survey in English. Both survey versions were available to all parents. Similarly to the students, parents were asked to select which individuals and institutional factors most influenced their university application choice decisions.

Every parent surveyed (n=15) selected “parents”, or themselves, as an influential person when deciding what universities to recommend to their child. “School counselor” and “siblings” were also frequently selected with 10 of the 15 parents choosing “school counselor” and seven of the 15 parents selecting “sibling”. *Figure 5* is a representation of the top three individuals parents selected as the most influential during their university application choice decisions. *Figure 6*, the graph immediately following *Figure 5*, depicts a frequency distribution showcasing the influential individuals parents ranked as #1, or the most influential individual, during the university application choice process.

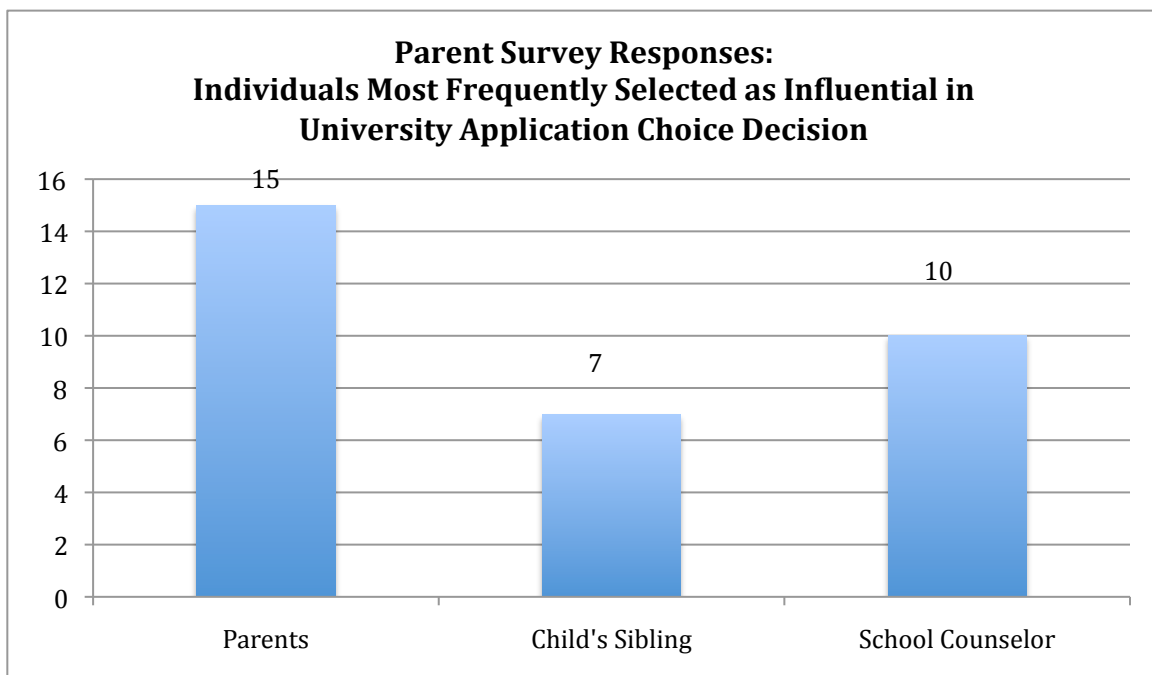


Figure 5. Parent Survey Responses: Individuals Most Frequently Selected as Influential in University Application Choice Decision. This graph displays the three individuals parents identified as having influenced their university application choice decisions. Parents ranked individuals as #1, 2, or 3 (or no

rank) depending upon how much they believed that factor influenced their university application choice decisions.

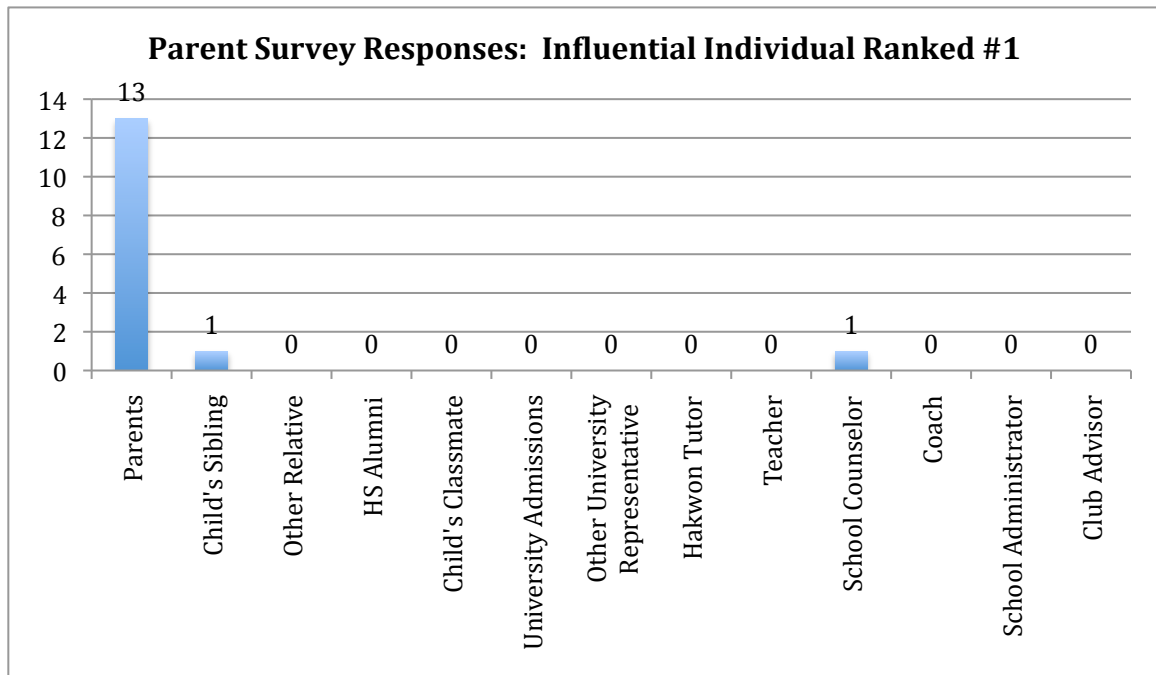


Figure 6. Parent survey responses: Influential individuals ranked #1. This graph states the frequency to which parents (n= 15) identified specific individuals as the most influential in their university application decisions. Parents ranked individuals #1, 2, or 3 (or no rank) depending upon how much they believed that individual influenced their university application choice decisions.

Parents were also asked to identify the institutional factors that may or may not have influenced their university application choice decisions. Every parent surveyed selected “university reputation” as the most important factor when determining what universities they recommended to their children. Location was

also a response selected by many parents (66%). *Figure 7* showcases the top four institutional factors parents identified as having the most influence on their university application choice decisions.

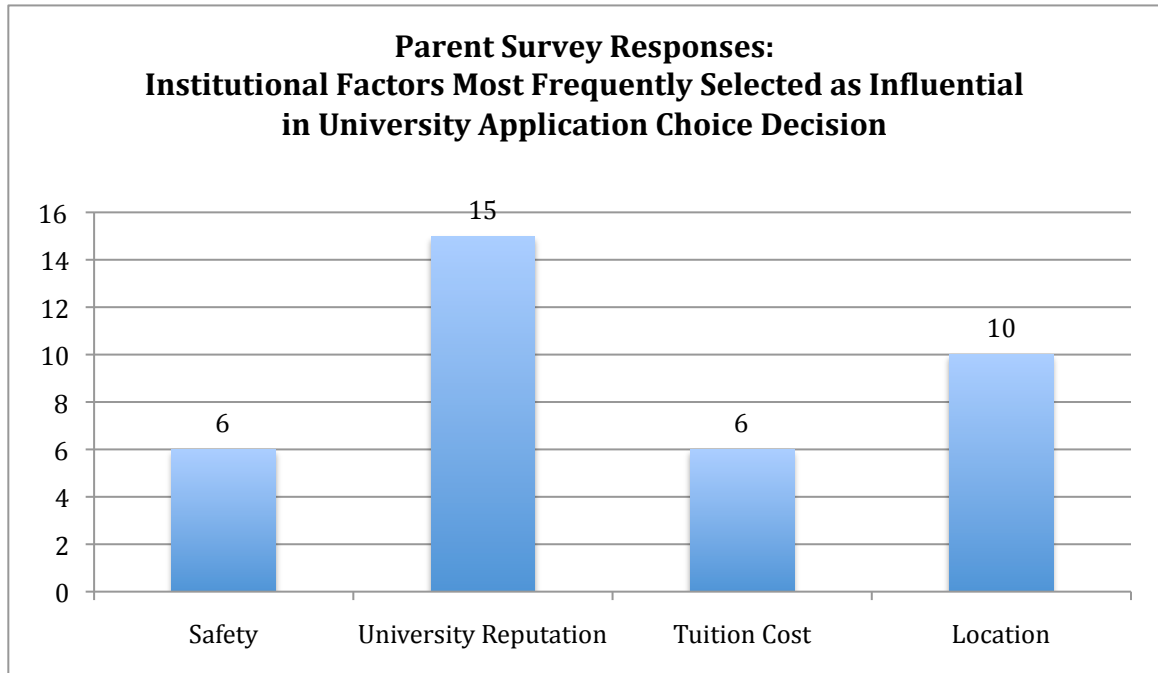


Figure 7. Parent survey responses: Institutional factors most frequently selected as influential in university application choice decision. This bar graph illustrates the top four institutional factors parents identified as having influenced their university application choices. Parents ranked institutional factors #1, 2, or 3 (or no rank) depending upon how much they believed that factor influenced their university application choice decisions.

Most of the parents (13/15) ranked “university reputation” as the important factor in determining which universities their child would apply. Only two parents selected another factor as #1. In both instances, the parents selected tuition cost as the most important institutional factor in influencing their university application

choice decision. *Figure 8* depicts the institutional factors parents identified as the most important based on their ranking that factor #1.

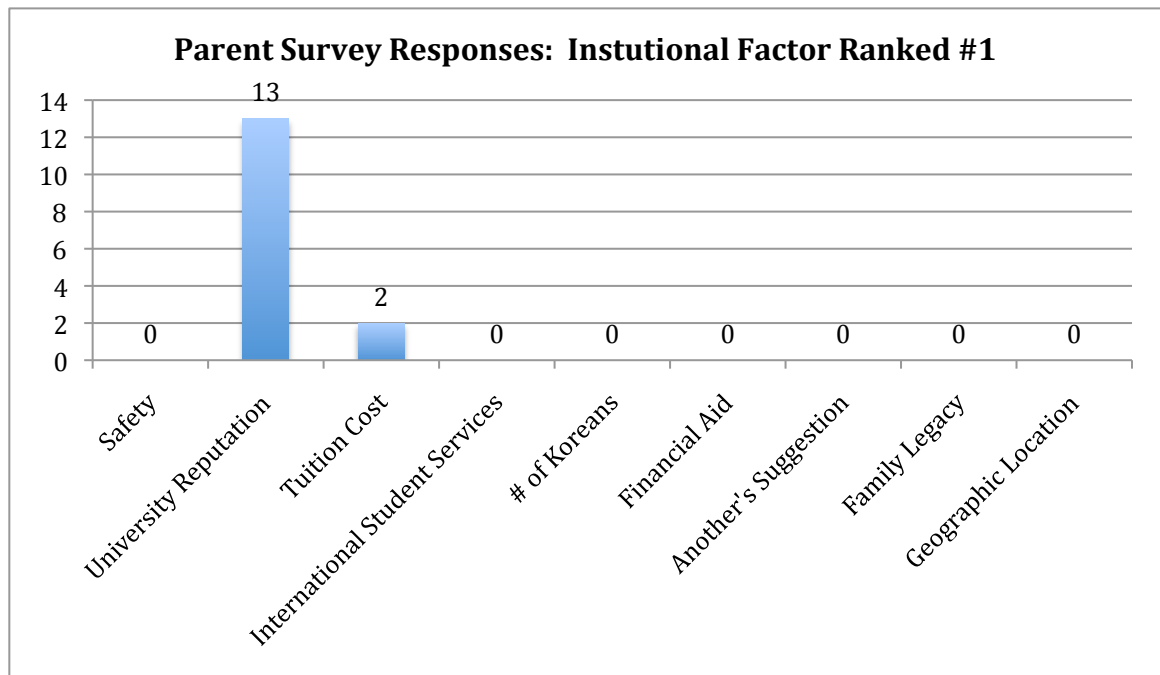


Figure 8. Parent survey responses: Institutional factors ranked #1. This graph states the frequency to which parents (n= 15) identified specific institutional factors as the most influential in their university application choice decisions. Parents ranked factors #1, 2, or 3 (or no rank) depending upon how much they believed that factor influenced their university application choice decisions.

Although reputation and university ranking were often selected, application type, diversity of the student body, and percentage of Korean students appeared to have little influence on most parents' application choice decisions.

Surveys of Interviewed Participants

All students and parents selected to interview completed the survey prior to their interview. Students' and parents' answers to interview questions were checked against their answers to the online or paper survey. In particular participants' interview answers were compared to their answers on two specific survey questions. These two questions asked participants to rank (1, 2, and 3) institutional and individual factors that most greatly influenced their university application choice decisions. Participants' surveys and interviews were connected using the student's school identification number (Student ID). No conflicting answers were found when comparing the factors that students and parents deemed important in the interviews and surveys.

Although no extreme inconsistencies were found, participants' answers did vary slightly. Six students identified "university reputation" as the most influential institutional factor affecting their college application decisions. In the interviews, students' answers varied, as they were able to better elaborate on what influenced their university application decisions. In addition, students were able to list factors such as "familiarity with the university" that were not provided as options in the survey. Students almost unanimously identified parents as influential individuals in the interviews. Again, students were able to provide more detail in their interview responses, at times listing solely their mothers as the having the greatest influence. Students also listed themselves (the student) in the interviews, an answer that was not an option on the survey.

Parents survey answers also varied slightly from their interview responses. This, too, could be attributed to being able to provide a more comprehensive response in an in-depth interview. Seven of the nine parents also listed themselves (along with their husbands) as being the most influential person during their child's application process. Again, parents almost collectively chose "university reputation" as the most important factor in determining their students' university application decisions.

Part Two: The Interviews

Overview of Interviewed Participants

Nine Korean mothers and ten Korean high school seniors representing three international schools in Korea were interviewed. The researcher identified parents and students to interview based on their survey responses. School ID numbers identified students and their parents at every school. Since two of the three international schools are also boarding schools, not every parent the researcher selected was available for a face-to-face interview. For this reason, some parents and students were selected based on their availability to come to the school to interview.

Both mothers and fathers were asked to participate in both the survey and interview process. Two fathers completed surveys; no fathers were selected for interviews. Although it would have been beneficial to interview the fathers, none were available on the day of the interviews. Two mothers noted their husbands worked long hours and held a different role in the child's application process. These mothers' comments may have provided one reason for a lower survey response rate

among the Korean fathers. Korean mothers take a highly proactive and direct role in their child's education and it was no surprise that Korean mothers completed the most surveys and were selected for the interview process. Ellinger and Beckham (1997) assert, "In Korea, there is no question about who assumes responsibility for a child's education. The mother is clearly in charge" (p. 625).

Length of interview times varied; the longest interview lasted one hour and the shortest 20 minutes. Interview participants completed an online or paper survey prior to the interview. The majority of interviews were conducted in English. Four parents requested Korean translation. School staff employed by the counseling department provided translation services. Interview participants were asked four questions:

1. Tell me about the process you took when deciding where you (or your child) would apply to college.
2. Which individuals most influenced your college application decisions?
3. (Now we will talk about parents' role in the college application process)
What were the factors that your family members agreed were most important during the college application process? What did you disagree on, if any?
4. Of all the factors that were important in choosing where to apply to college, what was the most important factor? Why was it so important?

The purpose of these questions was threefold: 1. To identify the general process families took when applying to university, 2. To identify the institutional

factors and individuals that influenced parents' and students' university application decisions and 3. To note any family conflicts or disagreements and to confirm the factors that family members agreed were important during the university application process. 4. To determine factors influencing family university application decisions.

Student and parent profiles

If an interviewed student also had a parent who interviewed, the parent is listed before student in the section below. SAT scores, unless otherwise noted, are based on the 2400 scale, ACT scores are scaled 1-36.

"Jisu" (Student)

Jisu identified herself as being in the top 10% of her graduating class with a 3.62 GPA and an SAT score of 2010 (ACT score of 30). She applied to several US American universities including: University of Illinois, University of Washington at Seattle, New York University (NYC, Abu Dhabi, and Shanghai campuses), Emory University, George Washington University, Tufts, Boston College, Boston University and several University of California schools. Jisu lived in the United States for three and a half years, but hasn't been to the United States in about ten years. Jisu applied as an international student and also asked to receive financial aid.

She is attending George Washington University (Washington DC, USA).

"Hyemi" (Sungjin's Mother)

Hyemi's son is Sungjin. Sungjin's brother is currently attending graduate school in Japan. Sungjin applied to art colleges in the United States, universities in Korea, and

one dental program in Japan. Hyemi has her master's degree. On her survey, Hyemi identified her current occupation as homemaker. Her husband is a medical doctor.

“Sungjin” (Hyemi’s Son)

Sungjin planned to apply to universities in the United States, Korea, and Japan. The US-American universities to which Sungjin applied were: School of the Art Institute of Chicago, School of Visual Arts, Otis, University of Illinois, Rochester Institute of Technology, Pratt, Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), Savannah College of Art and Design. After receiving acceptance to his first choice school, RISD, Sungjin decided not to pursue higher education in Asia. However, because he was in an international school, Sungjin still wanted to prepare for applying to Asian colleges if he wished to go with his “Plan B”. To prepare for a dental school application to Japan, Sungjin needed to complete the Korean middle and high school GED exams as well as apply to three Korean universities. Sungjin identified himself as being in the top 25% of his graduating class (SAT = 1600, GPA = 2.5). Sungjin lived outside of Korea for five years and has been attending his current international school for two years. Sungjin did not apply for institutional aid when he submitted his application. He is attending the Rhode Island School of Design (Providence, Rhode Island, USA) .

“Eun Bi” (Minji’s mother)

Eun Bi is an art teacher at an international school in Korea. Her husband is an investment banker. Both hold master's degrees. Eun Bi has one older daughter and one younger daughter. Her oldest daughter is studying art at Parsons. Her middle child, the current senior, is also planning on studying art. She hopes that her youngest daughter will also pursue an art degree at Parsons. She plans on bringing

her youngest to Parsons every year to visit her sisters and become acquainted with the Parsons admission staff.

“Minji” (Eun Bi’s daughter)

Minji is the second child to apply and attend universities in the United States. Minji’s older sister currently attends Parsons School of Design in New York. Her mother also attended Parsons and currently is an art teacher at an international school. In addition to also applying to Parsons, Minji applied to: School of Visual Arts, Moore College of Art & Design, California College of Art, and the University of Hawaii at Manoa (where she was born). Minji only lived outside of Korea for a couple of months and has attended the same international school for all of her K-12 education. Minji did not list her GPA, but stated she received a 1600 on her SAT I (2400 scale). At the time of her application, Minji did apply for financial aid. She is attending the Parsons School of Design (New York City, NY, USA).

“Soo Young” (Sungjae’s mother)

Soo Young has one older son completing his graduate work in engineering at the University of Pennsylvania. She holds a master’s degree and her husband, a doctorate. Soo Young works as a freelance artist in Seoul. Her husband is a business manager. Soo Young and her husband decided to move back to Korea when the boys were very young. She stated in the interview that she regrets moving back to Korea and wishes for her sons to find jobs in the United States after graduating from college.

“Sungjae” (Soo Young’s Son)

Sungjae identified as being in the top 5% of his graduating class (GPA = 4.13, SAT = 2270). He applied to many Ivy League schools including: Princeton, Harvard, Yale, University of Pennsylvania, Columbia, and Brown. Other schools Sungjae applied to included: University of Chicago, Northwestern University, Carnegie Mellon, and University of Michigan. Sungjae’s older brother attended the University of Pennsylvania; Sungjae attended a summer institute at Penn the summer before his senior year. Sungjae lived outside of Korea for five years and has attended his current international school for the past six years. During the application process, Sungjae did request financial aid.

He is attending Princeton University (Princeton, New Jersey, USA).

“Da Yoon” (Yuri’s mother)

Da Yoon is a homemaker and her husband is a banker. Da Yoon received her bachelor’s degree. Her husband holds a master’s degree. Their oldest daughter currently attends a private school in California. While researching colleges for her oldest daughter, the family took a road trip across the United States. As with her younger daughter, a current high school senior, they searched for small, private liberal arts colleges. Both children accompanied them on the college tour. Da Yoon described feeling empowered and informed by websites such as that provided by the College Board. By reading the literature, she said she recognized the importance of allowing her daughter to do most of the work during the college application process.

“Yuri” (Da Yoon’s daughter)

Yuri applied “undecided” to all her colleges. Yuri applied almost exclusively to liberal arts colleges: Middlebury, Bard, Annandale-on-Hudson, Bowdoin, Colby, Connecticut College, Haverford, and Wesleyan. Yuri did not state her class rank, but did indicate she had a GPA of 3.94 and an SAT I score of 2220. Yuri, who is not a Korean citizen, lived outside of Korea for eight years and did not apply for financial aid. She has attended the same international school for the past 10 years.

Yuri is attending Middlebury College (Middlebury, Vermont, USA).

“Shin Ae” (Ji Eun’s mother)

Shin Ae currently has one daughter attending the University of California – San Diego. When her daughters were young, the family lived in North Carolina and California. Her oldest daughter is a California resident. Her family lived in the United States while her husband attended Graduate School.

“Ji Eun” (Shin Ae’s daughter)

Ji Eun applied to the biology program at most of the universities in hopes of one day getting a veterinary or animal science degree in Graduate School. Ji Eun indicated she was in the top 5% of her graduating class with a GPA of 4.18 and had an SAT score of 2130. Ji Eun applied to a range of universities including: Brown, Case Western Reserve, Cornell, Emory, Northwestern University, University of Rochester, University of Southern California, Stanford, Tufts, and University of Washington – Seattle. Ji Eun’s older sister attends the University of California at San Diego. Her family lived in North Carolina and California over the course of four years. Ji Eun did

not apply as an international student and sought financial aid from the colleges to which she applied.

She is attending the University of Southern California (Los Angeles, California, USA).

“Ji Yeon” (Jin Nam’s mother)

Ji Yeon and her husband both have master’s degrees. Her son wants to continue on working in the science field just like his parents. She works in agricultural science. Her husband also works in agriculture. He currently is a professor at a Korean university.

“Jin Nam” (Ji Yeon’s son)

Jin Nam was interested in studying biology. He identified himself as being in the top 20% of his graduating class with a gpa of 3.7 and an SAT score of 1980. Jin Nam applied to Emory University, Cornell, Case Western, Northeastern, University of Rochester, Rutgers, and many UC universities including San Diego, Berkeley, and UCLA. He did not apply for financial aid for his first year. Jin Nam and his family were hoping to apply for institutional aid in his second year. Their rationale for this decision was to increase the possibility he would get accepted into a more prestigious school. Jin Nam lived outside of Korea for two to three years and has attended his current school for five years.

He is attending Emory University (Atlanta, Georgia, USA).

“Ji Sung”

Ji Sung applied to one school using the Early Decision application plan: Rice University and was admitted. Ji Sung lived in Texas when he was a young boy. He lived outside of Korea for four years. He attended the same international school for

six years. Ji Sung identified as being in the top 10% of his graduating class with a GPA of 4.04 and a SAT score of 2100. Ji Sung, an American citizen, applied for financial aid at Rice.

He is attending Rice University (Houston, Texas, USA).

“Ha Young” (Min Ho’s mother)

Ha Young works in the admissions office at a Korean international school. Ha Young does marketing for the school. Her oldest daughter attends Mount Holyoke. Ha Young holds a master’s degree; Her husband has a doctorate. He currently is a patent attorney. Ha Young attended university in the United States and much of her family still resides on the East Coast.

“Min Ho” (Ha Young’s son)

Min Ho’s sister is currently attending Mt Holyoke. Much of his mother’s family lives in the United States on the East Coast. He researched universities in the United States, United Kingdom, Japan, China, and Hong Kong. He applied to schools in the United States and the United Kingdom. Min Ho stated he was in the top 50% of his graduating class, but did not give his GPA. He only stated it was about a B average. Min Ho was interested in studying business or finance while at university. He applied to Northeastern, Boston University, UC colleges, Imperial College of London, King’s College (UK), and Drexel. As a dual citizen, Min Ho lived outside of Korea for about one year. He did apply for financial aid during the application process. He is attending Drexel University (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA).

“Sunhwa” (Hyun Joong’s mother)

Sunhwa works in the early childhood education department at an international school in Korea. Her oldest son attends Emory University. Sunhwa’s husband and family friends attended university in the United States. Sunhwa’s husband holds his Doctorate; she has a Bachelors degree.

“Hyun Joong” (Sunhwa’s son)

Hyun Joong has one older brother studying at Emory. He applied to a variety of universities: Emory, Duke, Boston College, Boston University, University of Virginia, George Washington University, Washington University in St. Louis, University of Washington, Northwestern, and Brown. Hyun Joong identified his GPA as 3.87 with a SAT score (1600 scale) of 1470. Hyung Joong lived outside of Korea for eight years and did apply to receive financial aid. He has attended his current international school for six years.

Hyun Joong is attending Emory University (Atlanta, Georgia, USA).

“Shin Mi” (Parent)

Shin Mi’s daughter applied to both art colleges and large universities that had fashion merchandising as a major. Shin Mi stated that she was mainly involved in the college application process beginning in grade 10. Her husband worked many hours and it was difficult for him to be involved in the process. He ultimately approved the choices that Shin mi and her daughter chose. Shin Mi has a bachelor’s degree. Her current occupation is homemaker. Her husband has a master’s degree.

Table 2. Student Interviewees' Application Profiles.

| Student | GPA | SAT/ACT score | University Application List | Attending University |
|-------------------|------------|---------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| "Jisu" | 3.62 | SAT 2010 (2400 scale) ACT 30 | University of Illinois, University of Washington – Seattle, New York University (New York City, Abu Dhabi, Shanghai), Emory, George Washington, Tufts, Boston College, Boston University, University of California | George Washington University |
| "Sung Jin" | 2.5 | 1600 (2400 scale) | Rhode Island School of Design, Savannah College of Art and Design, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Otis, University of Illinois, Rochester Institute of Technology, Pratt | Rhode Island School of Design |
| "Minji" | NA | 1600 (2400 scale) | School of Visual Arts, Moore College of Art and Design, California College of Art, University of Hawaii, Parsons | Parsons |
| "Sungjae" | 4.13 | 2270 (2400 scale) | Princeton, Harvard, Yale, University of Pennsylvania, University of Chicago, Northwestern, Carnegie Mellon, University of Michigan | Princeton |
| "Yuri" | 3.94 | 2220 (2400 scale) | Middlebury, Bard, Annandale-on-Hudson, Bowdoin, Colby, Connecticut | Middlebury |

| | | | | |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| | | | College, Haverford, Wesleyan | |
| “Ji Eun” | 4.18 | 2130 (2400 scale) | University of Southern California, Stanford, Brown, Case Western, Cornell, Emory, Northwestern, University of Rochester, Tufts, University of Washington | University of Southern California |
| “Jin Nam” | 3.7 | 1980 (2400 scale) | Emory, Cornell, Case Western, Northwestern, University of Rochester, Rutgers, University of California (San Diego, Los Angeles, Berkeley) | Emory |
| “Ji Sung” | 4.04 | 2100 (2400 scale) | Rice University | Rice University |
| “Min Ho” | “B” average | NA | Northwestern, Boston University, University of California, Imperial College of London, King’s College (UK), Drexel | Drexel |
| “Hyun Joong” | 3.87 | 1470 (1600 scale) | Emory, Duke, Boston College, Boston University, University of Virginia, George Washington, Washington University – St. Louis, University of Washington, Northwestern, Brown | Emory |

Identifying Themes

A conceptually clustered matrix was used initially to summarize and organize research themes and subtopics. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) assert, “A conceptually clustered matrix has its rows and columns arranged to bring together major roles, research subtopics, variables, concepts, and/or themes together for at-a-glance summative documentation and analysis” (p. 173).

Conceptually clustered matrices “are most helpful when some clear concepts or themes have emerged from the initial analysis” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014, p. 174). Columns were identified using the topics addressed in the interview questions: general university application process, factors that influenced university application choices, and differences and similarities between parents’ and students’ university application choice decisions. Each row represented an interview participant. A conceptually clustered matrix was chosen to use for data analysis when several key themes immediately appeared in a majority of the parent and student interviews.

Identifying Factors Important to Interviewed Students and Parents

The two research questions guided the identification of themes and factors deemed most important for students and their parents during data analysis. The following section addresses what factors students identified as most important during their university application process, the factors deemed important by the parents, and those factors that both groups identified as having influenced their university application decisions.

Research Question 1: What factors influence international Korean students' university application choice decisions?

Even though parents and students agreed on many factors, differences were also identified. Interviewed students more frequently named themselves as one of the most influential people during their university application choice process. This was true for Ji Sung who said, "For me it was mainly my own choice." And Hyung Joong, who when asked who influenced his applications the most, replied, "Myself first. I was self-influenced. Um... then it would be in the order of family, siblings, friends, and alumni."

Students also repeatedly identified their mothers as having a greater influence on their university application decisions. Even when students identified their parents as a major influence many elaborated on their mother's influence specifically. Min Ho explained that his mother was the first person in his family concerned with his university applications. She created a list of 40-50 universities based on what she knew of his interests and possible majors. Yuri referred to her mother as a "databank", endlessly researching colleges and reading "every page of every book."

Peers were also a major influence identified by students. Only one parent identified their child's peers as influencing their college application recommendations. Students identified peers as influencing them in a variety of ways. Jisu looked to her friend and high school alum at George Washington when she didn't get into her dream school. Jisu explained that she got confused and looked to her former high school classmate and peers for direction as to where to

apply to university. Ji Eun also talked with a friend and current student at the University of Southern California, when she was deciding where she would attend university. Ji Sung looked to his peers to share their opinions of his university application choices. For students, peers were seen as competition and another source of information when they were deciding where to apply and eventually where to attend.

Research Question #2: What factors influence Korean parents' university application choice decisions?

Different themes arose from the parent interviews. Two common emotions resonated throughout the parents' interviews: stress and guilt. At the end of the interview, both parents and students were asked if they wanted to share anything else with the interviewer. Some parents took this opportunity to express their opinions of parents' role in Korean education. Some expressed their frustration and the stress that accompanies the educational competition or "fever" on the Korean peninsula.

One emotion expressed by parents was stress. Parents expressed stress and anxiety over not doing enough for their children in terms of preparing their university applications and a fear of sending their children to a university abroad and in an unfamiliar country. Shin Ae identified this stress when she said, "... you know the US is not my country. I cannot control about all of my daughters. That's why I was very upset and right now I'm very upset. Nervous. About that." Da Yoon further explained,

“Actually me and my husband know American colleges and we know but some...a lot of Korean parents they don't know anything about American universities or college and they are sending their kids there and (it's) a lot harder. And they only know big names.”

Da Yoon also expressed another common emotion, guilt.

“I think that is how we were raised. Our culture is like that. So I try to change. So when I was doing survey you know it was hard for me to accept what was important and there was rank. I didn't want to check it but I had to because it is so true. Everybody knows it's not good and good for the children. And it doesn't really mean anything but at the moment of the college application it's the most important thing.”

Some parents felt very guilty for pushing their students to apply to the best universities and study hard. Soo Young, in an attempt at full disclosure about what was important to her stated, “And being honest... I did look at the rankings too. It did matter.” Later she laughed nervously and said, “I sound like a Korean mom, huh?” Eun Bi commented on behalf of all Korean parents,

“They all want their kids to go to Harvard, Yale, Columbia. But not everybody can get there. And then when students, their kids cannot get in they are so disappointed. They have such strong demand on their kids in Korea.”

Although some mothers chose to talk about educational fever during the actual interview, many chose to discuss their opinions on educational competition and the demand on students at the very end of the interview when trust had been established between the interviewer and the interviewee.

Common Factors Between Students and Parents

Students and parents identified similar factors when discussing what or who influenced their university application decisions. Both recognized the importance of university reputation and ranking in finalizing their college application lists. A university's rank and reputation were considered very important for the student's future job. Ranking and reputation served as indicators for strong academics when families were not familiar with American universities. Students and parents both differentiated between a university's reputation and rank. Reputation was further broken down to reputation in the United States and reputation in Korea (for the students who were planning on returning to Korea for work). One student (Jisu), relied on common ranking systems, like *US News and World Report*, to identify what she deemed well-reputed schools.

Getting a job after graduation was on the minds of both parents and students. Nearly all of the parents and four students expressed this concern during the interviews. Students and parents acknowledged university reputation, ranking, and location as perceived predictors for future job opportunities. A university's reputation in Korea was very important. Parents stated that going to a "brand name" university was critical if a student wanted to come back to Korea to get a job.

Family members were also an important influence on students' and parents' university application decisions. Although family influence was a commonly identified factor, the rationale and ways family members influenced decisions varied. Older siblings were the most frequently named family members. In families where an older sibling was currently attending a university, the location of that

university greatly influenced the student's university list. Students and parents chose to either apply to that specific university or that region. Mothers felt a sense of comfort that their children would be together and that the older child would look after the younger sibling. Two parents stated financial benefits to having their children close to one another. Older siblings also influenced the general university application process in many families. Parents with older children tended to be more "hands off" than the parents who were experiencing the university application process with their children for the first time. Students who had older siblings also mentioned watching their older siblings go through the university application process and participated on university visits during their sibling's search. The following section addresses frequently cited themes and topics found in the interviews: university ranking, reputation, job outlook, educational consultants/*hakwon*, safety, location, and significant individuals.

University Ranking

A commonly cited factor influencing both parents' and students' university application choices was university ranking. Seven of the nine parents interviewed directly stated a university's ranking was considered when their child was creating their university application list. Four parents stated the ranking of the university was the MOST important factor in choosing which universities to recommend to their child. Five of the ten students interviewed also said that a university's rank was important in determining their university application list. Only one student stated that a university's rank was the MOST important factor in determining where they would apply. When parents and students were asked to elaborate on their

reasons for choosing universities based on ranking, many associated a university's higher ranking with future job opportunities. The following statements by parents and students reflect this rationale:

Hyemi (Parent) "(My son) is a boy so he need to... it is very important for him to get a job after graduating."

Sooyoung (Parent): "I felt like it mattered after graduation to get a job."

Sunhwa (Parent): "In the future he has to get a job and get the money."

Jin Nam (Student): "In Korea the ranking and the name of the school is really important." (Jin Nam expressed this idea when discussing his desire to come back to Korea to look for a job after university.)

Similarly to Jin Nam, several students and parents discussed the importance of gaining admission into a "brand name" university:

Ji Sung (Student): "Prestige is a way to express "pride" for Korean families. (When discussing why students in Korea want to go to famous or "prestigious" schools.

Eun Bi (Parent): "Especially in Korea brand name is very important. In general for Korean parents (um) they only like famous schools like the Ivy League schools. They all want their kids to go to Harvard, Yale, and Columbia."

Lastly, both parents and students stated that when a university had a higher rank, they made several positive assumptions about the institution:

Jiyeon (Parent) assumed that universities with a higher ranking had better professors, faculty, and labs.

Sungjae (Student) felt that higher ranked universities may provide more intellectually challenging academics.

Yuri (Student) also shared that she assumed better academics in schools with a higher ranking.

Most parents and students stated that they looked *to US News and World Report* for college and university rankings. Other ranking systems were also identified such as the *Academic Ranking of World Universities*. A couple of the students mentioned using university search engines such as those found on the College Board website and Naviance. These students stated that they looked for universities listed in the “most selective” or “selective” admission category and assumed the university had a higher rank.

Reputation versus Ranking

Several students and parents elaborated on the difference (in their minds) between a university’s formal ranking and a school’s “reputation”. Many who participated in the interviews wished to explain that when they stated “reputation” as a factor in determining university application choices, it was different than merely a school’s rank.

Hyun Joong (student) suggested that the reputation of the particular major or program was important to him. He expanded this further to faculty and students being well recruited with a solid alumni network to help him find a job after

graduating. He wasn't looking for a particularly "high rank" school but one that was well respected and well connected.

Other students, like Ji Eun, were very specific as to WHERE the school had a good reputation. One of the main reasons for choosing the University of Southern California was its reputation in California and Korea - both places Ji Eun would look for employment once her degree is completed.

Jisu, a student who applied mainly to liberal arts colleges, felt that the term "reputation" was more encompassing than "rank". She shared that reputation, in her opinion, covers many things - the city, educational system, programs, dorm, and much more. However, when asked how she identified schools with good reputations, she said through conversations, reading articles, and looking at a school's rank according to *US News and World Report*.

Parents also described the importance of reputation in choosing where their child would apply to university. Ha Young (Parent) looked at schools that she assumed were respected in Korea by looking at the partnerships and projects American universities were involved in with Korean universities.

Shin Ae (Parent) was very clear in her statement that "reputation, not ranking, matters." In her mind, it was more important that her daughter go to a school that will prepare her well for graduate school than to go to a higher ranked school at that point in her educational career. In Shin Ae's mind these were two very different factors. A higher ranked graduate school, for Shin Ae, more greatly influenced her daughter's ability to get a good job.

Connection to Job Market (United States and Korea)

When discussing the reputation or rank of a university, both parents and students suggested that a higher rank or well-reputed school would provide the students with increased job opportunities in Korea and the United States. It is most simply stated by Eun Bi (parent), “you have to go to a good school to get a good job.”

Of the nine parents interviewed, eight expressed the importance of getting a good job after graduating from university. Four of the ten students mentioned the importance of finding employment after completing their studies.

Consulting Companies and *Hakwon*

Parents and students both admitted to using “consulting companies” when creating their university application list. Both parents and students identified these consultants as taking on a different role than the “*hakwon* teachers” depicted in the literature. *Hakwon* is a Korean term that is used to define private, for-profit tutoring centers that students attend after their traditional school day. According to one parent, these “consultants” were experts in university matriculation. Consultants assisted families by providing them with lists of universities, assisting with university essays, and helping students prepare applications. In Jiyeon’s (parent) case, the consultant was contacted when her family couldn’t come to a decision about where her son would apply. According to Jiyeon, her son knew what major he was interested in and concerned with the ranking of the university. Other factors did not seem to make significant difference.

Safety

Students and parents both named issues regarding safety when discussing the factors that were most important in their university application choice decisions. Some of these concerns related to the overall perceived safety of the region, as described by Jisu (student) when she stated she believed the East Coast, in particular Washington DC and Boston, was safer than other regions in the United States. Other interviewees, such as Sooyoung (parent), identified schools such as the University of Chicago that, in her opinion, were in an unsafe neighborhood. It was unclear as to where students and parents received information regarding a university or region's safety. There appeared to be many misperceptions with regard to this factor. For example, Washington DC is one of the least safe places in the United States, but Jisu was under the impression it was one of the safest.

Location

Some parents and students connected the location of the university with its perceived safety. The location of a university was an important factor described by students and parents. The interviewees identified location in two different ways. Several students and parents listed either the East or West Coasts as more desirable than the Midwest or Southern regions of the United States. Four parents and three students suggested that they researched schools mainly located on the East Coast. These students and parents identified schools in Boston, Washington DC, New Jersey, and New York as institutions to which they applied. They cited reasons such as the desire to live in the city and the perceived quality of education as reasons for picking the East Coast. One parent and two students admitted to looking at schools

on the West Coast, mainly California, due to the number of Koreans living in California and its proximity to home (Korea). One parent, Da Yoon, discussed the reason she didn't recommend her daughter attend a school in the Midwest by recalling her family's American university road trip to Ohio and Chicago:

"All we saw was corn fields. It kind of scared me."

The second way students and parents discussed the importance of location was related to the proximity of the university to their family members residing in the United States. Six students and five parents stated that a university was considered more desirable if it was close to family members. Eight interviewees specifically identified being close to an older sibling as a desirable factor. Although almost half of the interviewees mentioned the influence of an older sibling, the proximity of the student to the student's sibling in university ranged. Some parents were very happy when their children accepted admission offers at the same university as their older sibling; most wanted siblings to be in the same state or region. Parents and students identified several factors that contributed to this idea: cost of travelling to see multiple children in multiple cities or states, the older sibling can look after the younger, the parents anxiety about having both children in the US while the parents stayed in Korea and so on.

Significant Others

Siblings were not the only significant others that were frequently mentioned in the interview process. Parents were consistently named as the person(s) who influenced the student the most during the university application process. Six of the

nine parents interviewed stated that they were a major influence in deciding where their child would apply. Several mothers suggested they were the ones who actually created their child's initial university application list. Shin mi (parent) expressed that it was difficult for her husband to be involved in the initial process; he worked long hours as many Korean fathers do. Shim mi was responsible for detailing the tasks her daughter needed to complete in grades 9, 10, 11, and 12. She studied university guidebooks and websites to become a competent resource for her child. She also received information from consulting companies specializing in university matriculations and *hakwon*.

Several parents and students discussed using consultants and *hakwon* teachers to help with developing their university application list. Several, such as Sungjin (student) suggested *hakwon* teachers and consults were used because families did not feel well prepared to attend US-American universities.

Sungjin explains: "Our family has never sent someone to art school before and they really don't have a lot of experience in it so they seeked out a lot of help around for me."

Often, this "help" came in the form of private, and possibly very expensive, tutoring and consulting services. Seeking paid help appeared to be a reaction to anxiety and stress. Anxiety caused by the feeling that the student would miss applying to university that they should have applied to by not consulting private companies.

Prompted by a feeling that the student applied to a university that was "too low" for

them. Anxiety that results from the thought the student would not do well on a standardized test without the help of a paid, private tutor.

Half of the interviewed students identified themselves, the student, as one of the most influential people in the college application choice process. Three parents also agreed. These students said that the university application choice decisions were mainly their own and that their parents, family, and friends respected the decisions they made about their university application process.

Both parents and students identified family members, specifically older siblings, as being influential individuals in the university application choice process. Several parents highly recommended their child attend the same university as their older sibling or a university in the region. One parent, Shin Ae, described an environment close to family and friends as a “familiar” environment. When interviewed, her daughter used the same terminology.

For students, peers proved to be influential individuals. Seven of the ten students interviewed stated that they consulted with their friends regarding their application lists. They would “compare” their university lists and ask for advice from their friends. Jin Nam (student) asked for his peers’ opinions on the “prestige” of his Early Decision university. Although students relied on peers for support, advice, and recommendations, parents did not rely heavily on their child’s peers for information. Only one parent identified her older son’s peers as influential to her university application recommendations. With students, it appeared, their peers influenced them to apply to more and prestigious universities. Students identified Korean students as being very “competitive” with their classmates.

Very few students and parents mentioned school educators as influential others in their process during their interviews. Two parents and two students, at two different schools, identified the school counselor as being an important person in their university application choice process. According to the interviewees, the school counselors had valuable information that was passed on to their parents not only about university recommendations, but also the general application process at their school. For one parent and one student in particular, the school counselor was incredibly close to the student.

Summary

The current chapter provides results to the study of factors that influence Korean students' and parents' university application choices. The chapter is organized in three separate sections: in-depth interview discussion, survey responses of those interviewed, and general survey findings. The interviews of selected parent and student participants are discussed. Significant factors are determined by identifying themes using a conceptually clustered matrix (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Several themes, or factors, are identified in the interviews. Parents and students both deem factors such as university reputation, ranking, safety, and location as important. In terms of significant individuals, both parents and students identify themselves as having the most control, or influence, in the university application process. High school alumni, classmates, and school counselors are also identified. Students named "classmates" more frequently than parents. The online and paper surveys confirm the interview findings. Parents and university reputation are the most important factors as determined by both parents

and students. An interpretation of these findings as well as implications for future research and study are found in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V: Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

The results of the current study suggest that Korean students and parents look to influential individuals and institutional factors in determining their university application choice lists. These findings appear to be consistent with previous university choice theories (Chapman, 1981; Hosseler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). In addition, cultural expectations appear to influence Korean students and parents during the university application process. The following chapter is an analysis of the results of this study with regard to implications for theory, leadership, policy and practice. Limitations of this study and suggestions for future areas of research are also discussed.

Theoretical Implications

Rationale Choice Theory

In addition to understanding why Korean students and parents choose to apply to the universities to which they do it is also important to determine the rationality of those choice decisions. Satz and Ferejohn (1994) suggest a choice or action is rational when the individual chooses the best action given her preferences or beliefs.

There are several ways the university application choice decisions of these study participants can be analyzed in terms of rationality. First, many of these students acknowledged the fact that Korean students stereotypically apply to many universities. One student suggested she knew of a person who had applied to as many as 25 universities. Two of the three international school administrations

created a policy to limit the number of university applications the students could submit. The students who were interviewed suggested that Korean students apply to many schools because they are anxious that they would not get into the top, or most prestigious, universities to which they had applied. Whether or not that choice was rational is difficult to determine based on the results of the current study. Further research must occur in order to determine whether or not students who apply to more universities have a better “chance” of gaining admittance to the universities they desire.

Another choice Korean students and families make that should be examined in terms of rationality is the belief that attending a prestigious university leads to greater future employment opportunities. Students attend *hakwon*, study more hours than they sleep, and apply to numerous schools in hopes that they gain admittance into a prestigious university. Further investigation should occur in order to determine whether or not the “prestige” of a university affects a student’s likelihood of obtaining employment at a good company in Korea or worldwide. In addition, does the student’s and parent’s partaking in “education fever” – related activities (*hakwon*, long hours of studying) increase the chances of the student getting into a prestigious university?

Chapman’s Theory of College Choice

Chapman’s 1981 theory of college choice serves as the theoretical framework for the current study. Chapman (1981) asserts that students’ university choices are dependent upon two variables: student characteristics and external influences. Student characteristics include student’s level of educational aspiration, high school

performance, socioeconomic status (SES), and aptitude (Chapman, 1981). External influences include significant persons; fixed college characteristics such as cost, location, academic program; and efforts of the college admission staff to communicate with the prospective student.

Analysis of the data of current study reveals that both external influences and student characteristics appear to influence Korean international students' and parents' university application choice decisions. Chapman (1981) suggests that a student's family's SES positively correlates to student's educational aspirations. All student participants in this study attend private, tuition-based schools. The schools in this study are considered college preparatory schools and a majority of their students have aspirations to attend university. Moreover, none of the students who participated in the study are first generation students. At least one of their parents attended university and many have an older sibling who is attending or had attended university. The fact that nearly all parents had university degrees, many holding doctoral and master's degrees, may contribute to the fact that all students have aspirations to attend university after high school.

In Chapman's theory, a student's academic performance also contributes to their final university decision. The findings of the current exploratory study are inconsistent with what is proposed by Chapman. Korean students in this study appear to have a variety of schools (highly selective, selective, open admission) to which they applied. Regardless of low GPA, several students chose to apply to the most selective institutions. Several interviewed parents and students suggested that the ultimate goal was for the student to matriculate to the best, and most

prestigious, university a student could attend regardless of whether or not it was a good fit. Reputation and rank are critical factors to these students and their parents. This finding potentially contradicts Chapman's theory by which it is assumed that a student with a better academic profile would choose more selective universities. In this study, it was observed that students with a broad range of test scores and GPAs still applied to selective universities. In this exploratory study, the culture of competition in Korea appears to play a greater role in Korean students' application decisions, even more so than their individual academic profile.

Chapman (1981) suggests that student university choice is "influenced by a set of student characteristics in combination with a series of external influences" (p. 492). External influences are grouped into three categories: the influence of significant persons, the fixed characteristics of the institution, and the institution's own efforts to communicate with the prospective student. The results of the current study appear to confirm significant individuals did influence Korean students' and parents' application choices. Korean students and parents both identified the importance of parents, particularly mothers, on the students' application decisions. Siblings of students also influenced both students' and parents' university application choices. Several of the student participants had older siblings. Korean families are typically very small and may only consist of the parents and one child. The fact that many of the participants have older siblings may be an anomaly found in this particular study.

University admissions and other representatives were rarely named as significant influences by Korean parents and students. Only five students and three

parents identified these individuals as having significant influence on their university application decisions. Students more frequently named parents, siblings, high school alumni, and peers as having major influence over their decisions. International students and families may not visit the university to which the student is applying or visit due to geographic distance. It may also be a financial hardship for some families to travel around the world visiting potential universities. Suggestions for university admission staff to consider in regards to their communication and outreach to international students are discussed later in this chapter.

Fixed university characteristics include cost, location, and academic programs (Chapman, 1981). These factors, although identified by Korean parents and students as important, are not acknowledged as the most important factors in determining the university to which a student applies. A university's reputation and rank are named as the most important factors by both parents and students.

Signaling Theory

When students and parents were interviewed, many suggested attending a prestigious university was perceived to increase the student's chances of getting a good job after graduation. This perception is similar to the ideas described in Michael Spence's Signaling Theory. Spence (2002) describes, "the idea behind the job market signaling model is that there are attributes of potential employees that the employer cannot observe and that affect the individual's subsequent productivity and, hence, value to the employer on the job" (p. 436). Spence (1973) suggests that employers are essentially playing the lottery when hiring an

employee. An employer looks to find personal data on a prospective employee “in the form of observable characteristics and attributes of the individual, and it is these that must ultimately determine his assessment of the lottery he is buying” (Spence, 1973, p. 357). Characteristics individuals can control are signals and those uncontrollable attributes, such as race or ethnicity, are referred to as indices (Spence, 1973).

It is up to the individual to weigh the costs and benefits of investing in certain areas that may make them more desirable to a future employer. Spence (2002) proposes that employers hold certain beliefs about the relationship between a signal and the employee’s productivity. These perceptions are based on employee opinion and incoming data from the market. The Korean students and parents in this study seemed to adhere to the belief that every employer views education at a prestigious school as a benefit to obtaining employment. Spence would suggest that not all employers hold this same belief. With more education, employees are more expensive hires. Through analysis of the results of the interviews, it is apparent that parents and students both worry about getting a job after graduation. Although most parents interviewed stated their child would seek employment in Korea after graduation, some parents and students desired employment in the United States. If Spence’s Signaling Theory is an accurate representation of what happens in the global marketplace, some parents and students may find that a degree from a prestigious university is not the only ticket to future employment.

Marrazol and Soutar's Push-Pull Model of International Student College Choice

Korean students and parents are “pulled” towards applying to universities in the United States and the United Kingdom because of their perceived positive reputation and prestige in global higher education. Marrazol and Soutar's (2002) Push-Pull Model of College Choice directly addresses factors that “push” an international student away from studying in their home country and “pull” a student to study in a host country.

Much of Marrazol and Soutar's work has been identifying the reasons students leave developing countries to study overseas. This is indicated by the factors that they identify as “push factors”. Push factors include any of the following: lack of access to higher education, home country's wealth, priority the government places on education, and economic links between the host and home countries (Marrazol & Soutar, 2002).

Korea is not a developing country; Korea is currently the world's 12th largest economy (CIA World Factbook, 2013). Many of Marrazol and Soutar's “push” factors did not translate to the Korean students and parents in this study. However, the current study's participants did identify “push” factors that influenced their decision to seek higher education outside of Korea. There is not a lack of access to higher education in Korea. There are 40 public universities and 400 private universities in Korea. By 2016, there will be more university places than Korean high school graduates (McNeill, 2011). Of these more than 400 Korean universities, there are three assumed to be the most prestigious: Seoul National University, Korea University, and Yonsei University. Thus, it is not the lack of access to higher

education, but the competition to gain entrance into the most prestigious universities that push Korean students to study abroad. In the current study, one of the most commonly cited factors that influenced parents' and students' application decisions was university ranking. A university ranking is perceived as impacting future job opportunities in Korea and throughout the world. Study participants looked at worldwide rankings *and US News and World Report* when creating their university application lists.

Another "push" factor identified by Korean families in this study was proximity to family members living outside of Korea. Six students and five parents (over half of the interviewed participants) stated that a university is more desirable if it was close to family members. These individuals already have family living and attending universities outside of Korea. The awareness of institutions outside of Korea and the perceived prestige of these institutions may have "pushed" these international students to find higher education outside of the Korean peninsula.

Recommendations for Educators Working with Korean Students

Suggestions for University Admission Staff

Recruiting international students is important to admissions offices for several reasons. Bolsmann and Miller (2008) assert that international students are an economic benefit to universities as well as mark a university's international status in the world of higher education. In most countries, international students pay higher tuition fees than domestic students. For these reasons, the international recruitment strategies used by admission offices are extremely important.

Students are influenced by the marketing materials universities use in their recruitment efforts (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). Additionally, students' and parents' awareness of the university impacts their application decisions. Using the results of this study, universities may consider addressing issues important to Korean families in their recruitment literature such as: reputation, academic programs, safety, and job opportunities after graduation.

Universities admission staff could also think about performing market research on prospective freshmen specific to their university. Martin (1996), in a study of international recruitment at a South Australian university, addresses the importance of institutional market research in defining what influences international student college choice. Although some generalizations for specific populations can be made, Martin suggests the factors that determine whether or not an international student will apply to a university are multivariate. In the current exploratory study, most of the Korean parents and students stated the importance of university reputation, academic programs, and family members recommendations as impacting their university application lists. Regardless of these broad generalizations of what Korean families are looking for in a university, Martin (1996) suggests universities should determine their strengths and weaknesses by surveying targeted countries and their prospective freshmen applicant pool.

The importance of communicating with students and families the most accurate information about universities cannot be overstated. Several misperceptions of universities and international cities were identified in the student

and parent interviews in this study. For example, one student stated she applied to schools in Washington DC because DC was a safe place to live. In actuality, DC is one of the least safe places to live in the entire United States. Korean students and families often relied on hearsay to get information about university safety, student satisfaction, and reputation in Korea. University admission officers may want to analyze where students and families are getting their university information from if they are living abroad. Universities and colleges staff members who currently do not use Skype, Go-To Meeting or virtual colleges fairs may want to consider doing so in order that families overseas get accurate information.

Suggestions for School Counselors

Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) propose that high school counselors and teachers play a larger role in students' university choice processes in grade 12 than in any other grade. Although many counselors desire to have more influence in the lower grades, their strongest influence in students' decisions about what to do after high school is in the last year (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). With that knowledge, increasing the number of counselors in grade 12 working with Korean students may be the most impactful staffing decision for administrators.

Each of the international schools in the current study has one or two counselors working with seniors on university applications. Every school has family nights for parents of students in grades k-12 and specific university preparation nights for grade 11 and 12 students and parents. In grades 11 and 12, students and families must learn how to use resources to research for colleges and university programs in the most comprehensive way possible. Counselors may want to

consider ways in which students and families are examining the quality and reputation of an academic program and university. Counselors may want to caution families to not rely solely on information from relatives or by reading university-ranking publications. Counselors may need to make a sincere attempt to communicate the many ways a university can be evaluated. Students should understand how to research the quality of tenured professors, the reputation of specific majors, the current research being performed, and internationalization of the universities to which they want to submit an application. The student's school counselors can directly impact that learning. Through large family nights, in-class counseling lessons, and individual counseling (i.e. a student's senior interview) students and families can acquire the necessary tools they need to explore universities in a more comprehensive way.

Counselors may want to consider the ways students and families obtain accurate information about the universities and countries to which they are applying. One way to do this is connect students and families with university admission and recruitment advisors overseas and in Korea. Virtual university visits using web-based tools such as Skype and Go-to Meeting allow students and families the opportunity to ask questions about academic programming, job opportunities, and student resources to admission representatives abroad.

It is recommended that counselors also use the in-country resources to provide information to students and families living in Korea and applying to universities abroad. Several countries have university advisors and educational consultants located in Korea. Australian universities have university "agents"

located in several countries to provide students with accurate and up-to-date information about their institutions. EducationUSA is a service offered by the US Department of State that works with students in 170 countries, including South Korea. This organization works with international students seeking education in the United States to provide students with “accurate, comprehensive, and current information about how to apply to accredited U.S. colleges and universities.”

(EducationUSA webpage, 2013). Although most of the services from EducationUSA are located in Seoul, advising centers are also located in Busan, Daegu, and Gwangju and other parts of the world. United Kingdom advisors that assist with the UCAS application (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service), the common application for UK colleges and universities, are also located in Korea and provide frequent virtual “Q & A” sessions about completing the UCAS application. Counselors can encourage and promote opportunities for Korean students and families to get the most accurate and current information about international universities. This will decrease misperceptions and the need to consult informally with family and friends that may provide inaccurate information.

Parent nights can provide comprehensive information about the international university application process and systems at their school. Parent nights may also inform families of the resources available to them and some common misperceptions families have when applying to universities overseas. Counselors may want to take advantage of the junior and senior interviews and family university information nights to encourage students to research universities and their programs thoroughly. If the reputation and rank of a university continues

to hold importance in Korea, counselors may choose to acknowledge this early on in the university application process and provide ways families can further research this characteristic of a university. Students and families should be encouraged to look beyond a university's rank in *US News and World Report* or the *Academic Ranking or World Universities*. Families can be taught the ways to research a university's reputation in regards to a particular program, the quality of the faculty, retention rate, and job and graduate school placement. This teaching can occur early in high school. Hossler, Schmit and Vesper (1999) assert that students begin to explore the factors that they identify as important in their university search in 10th grade. During the student's senior year, this lesson can be reiterated during a family night or individual counseling sessions. As Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) suggest, "Counselors and teachers may want to play larger roles earlier in the process, but they should not ignore the importance of their roles when students reach twelfth grade" (pg. 110). There are many ways that counselors can influence the way Korean students and parents get information about the universities to which they are applying. It may be beneficial to begin counseling families to research universities early and provide opportunities for families to learn the many ways in which a university can be evaluated.

Leadership Implications

Korean Public Policy

Over the past 60 years, Korean educational policies have focused on the equity and access of all Korean students to formal education. This has been a direct response to the amount of time and money Korean families invest in private, for-

profit educational services, more commonly known as shadow education. These private tutors assist students with university applications, university admission test preparation, learning English, as well as many other areas. Over the past decade, the Korean government has transitioned from a top-down to a bottom-up approach to educational reform (Jo, 2013). The government has attempted to regulate; and consequently reduce, the public's demand for shadow education as well as limit the autonomy of Korean private schools.

Kim and Lee (2010) assert, "Private tutoring has been one of the most contentious issues regarding Korean education policy" (p. 261). Secondary students attend private tutoring for assistance with university applications, to boost SAT and ACT scores, and learn English. The Korean government has increased the amount spent per student and tried various public policy measures in attempt to decrease the practice and reliance on private tutoring (Kim & Lee, 2010). "In Korea, the central government in 2010 subsidized 70.9% of local education" (Jo, 2013, p. 77). Even with this investment, public spending may not be sufficient to decrease the reliance on private tutoring in South Korea.

Kim and Lee (2010) assert there are several reasons private tutoring is still a common practice despite the Korean government's intervention to stop this practice. First, the success of Korea in the world's economy has raised the demand for education. Secondly, the Korean government has established regulations for both private and public schools in Korea. Parents and students have to search outside of the formal school day to get an apparent edge over their fellow peers. With these government regulations, namely the equalization policy, classroom

teachers have had to differentiate in the classroom more than ever before. There is no opportunity for students to take accelerated coursework or to be tracked into an advanced path during the formal school day. Finally, Korean parents are thought to view formal education as inadequate, imperfect, and incomplete; and therefore, enroll their students in private tutoring to supplement the formal education controlled by the government (Kim & Lee, 2010).

The equalization policy has not only increased the demand for private tutoring, but it has also placed regulations on the private schools in Korea. Kim and Lee (2003) assert, "South Korea adopted an equalization policy that replaced competitive entrance examinations with random assignments of students for all (private as well as public) secondary schools" (p. 2).

These sanctions not only impact the Korean private schools. For the country's approximately 15 international schools, the government's control of who may attend international schools has become even more rigid. For those schools categorized as "foreign" schools in Korea, 70% of their students must be foreign nationals and students must also meet criteria such as time the student lived outside of Korea and the passport country of at least one of their parents. International schools do not have a limit on the number of Korean nationals the schools can admit (Korea4Expats website, 2013). The government frequently audits international schools to ensure Korean and foreign students are meeting the requirements.

Although the purpose of the equalization policy was to promote equality in education for the wealthy and the poor, for the urban and rural student, disparity still exists in Korea. Kim and Lee (2010) assert, "households with a higher demand

for education are likely to seek private tutoring” and further “rich households spend substantially more than poor households” on private tutoring (p. 262).

Recommendations for Policymakers The Korean government’s attempt to provide equal education for all students is commendable. Nevertheless, educational competition has resulted from the government’s top-down approach to educational policy in Korea. Jo (2013) refers to this type of control-led policy approach as an outside-in initiative. For most of the past 60 years, as Korea has advanced economically and educationally, policymakers have focused their attention on equity initiatives. This has been observed through the government’s attempt on decreasing the demand for shadow education to the requirements placed upon private and international schools.

Parents have little control over the choices their students have in Korean formal education. In order for students to advance educationally, families turn to private, informal education. For the Korean government to begin to break this “education fever”, families must regain some control of their student’s formal education options. Jo (2013) and Kim and Lee (2010) suggest several policy recommendations that address this issue.

Kim and Lee (2010) propose the government research student tracking options and revise the equalization policy to allow for more student and parent choice in formal education. Part of the catalyst for education fever, Kim and Lee suggest, is the differentiation that is occurring in the classroom. Students who want to challenge themselves through accelerated coursework cannot do so while the government attempts to make all classrooms throughout Korea equal. Secondly,

Kim and Lee state that the government must re-evaluate the current equalization policy to include room for student choice through the creation and expansion of diverse types of schools. Currently, most students can choose between private or public and vocational or traditional. The students who qualify can attend an international school if admitted.

Jo (2013) suggests the current top-down approach by the Korean government has recently encountered challenges from courts and citizens who have begun to advocate for the constitutional rights to free choices of education. Furthermore, Jo (2013) argues that while the efforts of the government regulations were “viewed as worthy attempts to overcome the negative impacts of private education, they were not always successful because parents’ attitudes and motivation about private education were less amenable to policy intervention” (p. 89). The current movement in Korean educational policy has changed direction. Policymakers have now focused on teacher accountability and school improvement. With the trend moving towards school-based decisions rather than top-down government interventions. It is a mixture of top-down and bottom-up approaches that will lead to positive policy changes. Jo (2013) suggests “excellence and equity are not necessarily incompatible when a government harmoniously adopts a mix of top-down and bottom-up tactics” (p. 90).

Jo (2013) and Kim and Lee (2010) suggest there are many ways Korean education policy is already changing. They also offer some relevant and realistic recommendations for further policy. The competition Korean students and families face in education is fierce. Without recognizing the current problems of the

equalization policy, Korean students will continue to face issues of anxiety, stress, and fear of failure.

The results of this study, although exploratory in nature, bring to light some of the unintended results of the equalization policy in Korea. Students and families will continue to search for ways to get ahead in an environment as competitive as South Korea. If students are not challenged through accelerated coursework and provided with varied educational opportunities, the students and the families will continue to look elsewhere to gain an edge in hopes of getting into prestigious universities. It may be beneficial for Korean school administrators to invest time and resources to provide multiple pathways and provide opportunities for students to take advanced coursework like those offered in Advanced Placement (USA) and the International Baccalaureate Programme. This would take some policy revisions by the central government. However by providing opportunities, and not through placing students in “tracks” as suggested by Kim and Lee (2010), schools would be allowed more flexibility in the student schedule and may be able to offer the educational options families desire in Korean schools. In order to offer diverse programming, the government would have to relinquish some control over the uniform national curriculum. They can allow schools to choose programming that benefits their prospective student body. The Korean government could reframe the goal of equality by thinking about equity in policy decisions. The government should continue to provide the tremendous economic support it has in the past, but trust in the schools to provide academic programming that meets the needs of their students and parents.

The students and parents in the current study observe many more freedoms than do students attending Korean public and private schools. They have the option of enrolling in Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate coursework. The international schools have freedom in the curricula that is taught. However, as communicated by many interviewed parents, they still live in Korea where the tendency to try to get ahead still finds its way into the international schools. Therefore, even with the government relinquishing some control, education fever may still persist. For that reason, as educational policy changes in Korea, so must the policies and procedures at the school-site level.

Suggestions for School Policy and Procedures

Two of the three schools in the current study limit the number of university applications students could submit. This policy was enacted to discourage students from submitting 25+ applications, a common contingency plan enacted by students and parents when they worried that the student wouldn't get into a "good university". Several interviewed students discussed the number of university applications submitted by themselves or their peers. They either discussed the school mandated university application limit or, at schools without a limit, the large number of applications their peers submitted. It was undetermined whether or not limiting the applications students submitted impacted their research of universities. The belief was that at the schools with application limits, students researched their universities more thoroughly because they felt they needed to be even more confident in their university application choices.

In addition to policies limiting the number of applications a student submits, students and families can be educated on the various research engines and resources available to help them pick the universities on their application list. These counseling lessons may begin with students in grades 9 and 10 and continue until senior year when the counselors have the greatest influence on students' application decisions. Counselors can also recognize the impact of the Korean culture, specifically the perceived competition to get jobs after graduation, when counseling with students and families. It is suggested that counselors should be aware of the anxiety that parents and students experience when they worry the student will not get into the "best" institution. Moreover, the pressure on parents, particularly mothers, to do all they can for their student in terms of applying to university should not be ignored. Counselors can meet regularly with mothers to address questions, worries, and misperceptions Korean mothers may have when working through the university application process with their child. Through educating Korean mothers some of the anxiety of the unknown may dwindle. Counselors may want to be proactive in their approach to meeting the needs of parents, particularly mothers. Lastly, it is recommended that counselors not assume that a university-educated parent has no misperceptions or misinformation about the current university application process.

Study Limitations

Several of the study limitations must be discussed. The low response rate and small sample size affect the ability to generalize this study to other populations. The student's response rate was approximately 19% (30 participants of the 156

eligible students). The parent's response rate was approximately 10% (15 participants of the 156 eligible). Only three international schools participated in the study. Gathering data from all fifteen of the large international schools in Korea would have increased the sample size. Informal conversations the researcher had with the Korean translators and interviewed parents suggest that parents were anxious when filling out the survey, and even more anxious, of interviewing. One parent stated she didn't want to sound like a "Korean mother". This implied she felt that the term "Korean mother" has a negative connotation. Staff members at the school inferred that parents didn't want to fill out the survey because they didn't want to be "discovered" as too hard on their children or fulfilling a stereotype. Both the staff at the Korean international schools and the researcher did not expect parents to react this way to the survey. It was an inaccurate assumption that Korean parents and students would take joy in talking about their university application processes.

Questions that were missing in the survey and interviews should also be addressed as limitations. Students filled out the survey in April or May of their senior year. Therefore, students should have been asked to provide admission responses for every school to which they applied. Parents' occupations and level of education were included in the survey. However, parents were not requested to supply their attending university in the survey. If this study was replicated in the future, further questions should have been asked during the parent interviews. For example, did parents who attended American universities have different factors they considered important when recommending universities to their children? Did

parents who attended more prestigious universities place greater emphasis on the rank and perceived reputation of the universities on their child's list?

Parents and students during the interviews alluded to a difference between reputation and ranking. Further analysis could have taken place if the researcher were to ask more detailed follow-up questions regarding this perceived difference. What did the students and parents mean by "reputation"? For example, did they mean the quality of academic programs, rank of those academic programs, word of mouth, quality of faculty, or published undergraduate research? Further investigation between the relationship of rank, reputation, and prestige should have occurred during the interviews.

Only two fathers completed the surveys and none were interviewed. The lack of participation among Korean fathers is a limitation of the study. Interviewed mothers suggested that the working hours of their husbands limited their involvement in their child's university application process. Fathers, as described by these mothers, were the final decision makers in the process. Research and preparing university application lists was a process that students completed with their mothers. Fathers were given the role of final decision maker once lists were created. Korean father's role in the university application process is one of many areas of future study.

Implications for Future Study

Analysis of the results of the current study reveals several areas for future research opportunities. Three suggestions for future study are offered: factors that influence Korean public school students in their university application decisions,

involvement of Korean fathers in the application process, and an analysis of the terms of “reputation” and “rank” for Korean students and families.

The current study highlights the university application processes of Korean international school students. Most of these students were applying to universities outside of Korea and had lived abroad. Although the families discussed the importance of Korean culture in their university application decisions, these families were multi-cultural. Many of the families had relatives already overseas. In order to generalize results to the Korean population, one must include results from Korean public school students who are applying to Korean universities.

The second area of suggested future research is the role of the Korean father in the university application process. Mothers and students acknowledged the importance of the father in giving a final say to university application decisions. One family even created a presentation for the student’s father to show how the student and mother created the student’s university application list. The father’s role was alluded to in both the survey and the interview responses. It would be important to identify the ways in which Korean fathers are involved in their child’s application decisions and where in the process Korean fathers become involved. Equally important is the amount of influence a Korean father has on his child’s final university choice.

A final consideration is further analysis and definition of the terms reputation and rank, specifically how they are defined in the Korean culture. Several students and parents suggested that “reputation” and not “rank” was the most important factor in determining to what universities they would apply. It is

imperative that reputation is further defined in order to truly understand its definition in the minds of Korean students and parents. Several students and parents suggested that international universities have a reputation within Korea. Is this reputation based on word of mouth, ranking in a publication, or another definition? Further analysis must happen in order to clarify the definition of “reputation” for Korean families. Additionally, research must be conducted see the actual effect a university’s reputation and rank have on employment opportunities in Korea. For example, does a company like Samsung or KIA hire more employees from higher ranked universities? Does the rank of an individual’s alma mater truly matter in the Korean and global marketplace?

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of the current study are consistent with the past theories on college (university) choice specifically the seminal work of Chapman (1981) and the significant, longitudinal work of Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999). The results of this study also suggest that students and families rely on influential individuals and institutional factors when determining where to apply to university. In this particular study, Korean parents and students based their university application choice decisions on the recommendations of parents and siblings and institutional factors such as university reputation, location, cost, and safety.

The results of the study suggest that cultural expectations and influences also impacted the students’ university application lists. Related to Spence’s signaling theory (1973), Korean families appear to believe that investing in a prestigious university will provide greater chances of employment after graduation. Korean

families perceive a university's rank and reputation to hold particular significance. The importance of rank and reputation appear to be far more important for Koreans than for other student populations. This conclusion was made because most theories do not emphasize rank and reputation as two institutional factors that have major significance on the development of students' university application lists or their final university choices. The connection between university rank and job employability must be investigated further to confirm whether or not Korean families' perceptions of higher ranked schools are accurate. Are Korean families' beliefs about the significance of a university's rank and reputation on future employment correct? If not substantiated, would the factors that influence Korean students' and parents' university choices change?

The outcomes of this study may provide valuable information to counselors, university admission officers, and educators working with Korean families. The results of this study highlight factors by which many Korean families base their university application choice decisions. The hope is that this study will provide a deeper cultural understanding for counselors and educators working with Korean families during their university application process. By understanding the Korean culture and the pressure on students to succeed, educators may be able to ease the anxiety that so often accompanies the university application choice process.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Student Survey – English

1. Name of high school
2. What colleges and universities have you applied to this year? Please also include the city and country where the university is located.
3. Please indicate your current cumulative grade point average.
4. Please indicate your high school rank.
 - a. Top 5%.
 - b. Top 10%
 - c. Top 15%
 - d. Top 20%
 - e. Top 25%
 - f. Top 50%.
 - g. Other.
5. Did you take any standardized admissions tests (SAT I, ACT)?
 - a. Yes.
 - b. No.
6. If you did take standardized admissions test, please provide your highest score on each test. If you did not take one of the tests, please write "NA" which means this part of the question does not apply to you.
 - a. ACT (1-36 scale)
 - b. SAT I (1600 scale – Critical Reading and Math only)
 - c. SAT I (2400)
7. Have you ever lived outside of Korea?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
8. If yes, how long did you live outside of Korea (in years)?
9. If you are applying to colleges in your passport country, will you be applying for financial aid?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
10. If you are applying to colleges as an international student, will you be applying for institutional financial aid available to international students?

- a. Yes
 - b. No
11. Please think about the list of colleges you applied to this year. Indicate to what level you agree that the following people influenced your decision to apply to the colleges on your list. (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)
- a. Parent
 - b. Sibling
 - c. Other relative
 - d. Graduate/Alumni of high school
 - e. University Admissions staff member
 - f. Other University representative (e.g. professor)
 - g. *Hakwon* tutor
 - h. Teacher
 - i. School Counselor
 - j. Coach
 - k. School Administrator
 - l. Club Advisor
 - m. Other (please specify)
12. Please rank the top three people who MOST influenced your college application decisions (1= most influential, 2= second, 3 = third). Please write 1, 2, and 3 in the spaces provided.
- a. Parents
 - b. Sibling
 - c. Other Relative
 - d. Graduate/Alumni of your high school
 - e. Classmate
 - f. University Admissions staff member
 - g. Other University representative
 - h. *Hakwon* tutor
 - i. Teacher
 - j. School Counselor
 - k. Coach
 - l. School Administrator
 - m. Club Advisor
13. Please indicate to what level you agree the following college institutional factors influenced your decision to apply to the colleges on your college application list. (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)
- a. Academic reputation
 - b. University ranking
 - c. Size of institution (small)
 - d. Size of institution (large)
 - e. Geographic location

- f. Programs and majors
- g. Perceived safety of campus
- h. Tuition cost
- i. Scholarships
- j. Climate/Weather
- k. Application plan (Early Decision, Regular, Rolling, etc.)
- l. Common application available
- m. Diversity of student body
- n. Percentage of Korean students (many Koreans)
- o. Percentage of Korean students (few Koreans)
- p. Entrance requirements
- q. Religious affiliation
- r. Athletic program
- s. Reputation of country's education system
- t. Job opportunities in the county where the university is located
- u. Other (please specify)

14. Please rank the top three factors in terms of their influence (1=most influence) on your college application decisions. Please write 1, 2, and 3 in the spaces provided.

- a. Safety
- b. University reputation
- c. Tuition cost
- d. International student services
- e. Number of Korean students
- f. Financial aid available
- g. Suggestion of another person
- h. Family legacy
- i. Geographic location

15. Student ID number (this will link a student to his/her parent.)

16. What is your gender?

- a. Female
- b. Male

17. Approximately how long (in years) have you attended this international school?

18. Are you applying to college as an international student?

- a. Yes
- b. No

19. Do you have a Korean passport?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Appendix B

Parent Survey – English

1. Name of the school your child currently attends.

2. Please think about the colleges your child applied to this year. Indicate to what level you agree that the following people influenced your decision to encourage your child to apply to a particular college or university. (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree)
 - a. Parent (you)
 - b. Your child's sibling
 - c. Other relative
 - d. Graduate/Alumni of your child's school
 - e. Child's classmate
 - f. University Admission staff member
 - g. Other University representative (e.g. professor)
 - h. *Hakwon* tutor
 - i. Teacher
 - j. School Counselor
 - k. Coach
 - l. School Administrator
 - m. Club Advisor
 - n. Other (please specify)

3. Please rank the top three people who most influenced the recommendations you made to your child regarding their college application list. (1= most influential, 2 = second, 3 = third). Please type 1, 2, and 3 in the spaces provided.
 - a. Parents (you)
 - b. Your child's sibling(s)
 - c. Other relative
 - d. Graduate/alumni of your child's high school
 - e. University Admissions staff member
 - f. Other University representative (example: professor)
 - g. *Hakwon* tutor
 - h. Teacher
 - i. School Counselor
 - j. Coach
 - k. School Administrator
 - l. Club Advisor

4. Please indicate to what level that you agree the following college institutional factors influenced the recommendations you made to your child regarding where to apply to college.
 - a. Academic reputation

- b. University ranking
 - c. Size of institution (small)
 - d. Size of institution (large)
 - e. Geographic location
 - f. Programs and majors
 - g. Perceived safety of campus
 - h. Tuition cost
 - i. Scholarships
 - j. Climate/Weather
 - k. Application plan (Early Decision, Regular, Rolling, etc.)
 - l. Common application available
 - m. Diversity of student body
 - n. Percentage of Korean students (many Koreans)
 - o. Percentage of Korean students (few Koreans)
 - p. Entrance requirements
 - q. Religious affiliation
 - r. Athletic program
 - s. Reputation of country's education system
 - t. Job opportunities in the county where the university is located
 - u. Other (please specify)
5. Please rank the top three factors in terms of their influence (1=most influential) on the recommendations you gave your child regarding where they should apply to college. Please type 1, 2, and 3 in the spaces provided.
- a. Safety
 - b. University reputation
 - c. Tuition cost
 - d. International student services
 - e. Number of Korean students
 - f. Financial Aid available
 - g. Suggestion of another person
 - h. Family legacy
 - i. Geographic location
6. Your child's Student ID number. (This will connect a student with their parent.)
7. What is your gender?
- a. Male
 - b. Female
8. Is English your first language?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
9. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- a. Elementary school
 - b. Middle school
 - c. High school
 - d. Some university
 - e. University Degree (Bachelor's)
 - f. Graduate Degree (Master's)
 - g. Graduate Degree (Doctorate)
10. If you are married, what is your husband/wife's highest level of education?
- a. Elementary school
 - b. Middle school
 - c. High school
 - d. Some university
 - e. University Degree (Bachelor's)
 - f. Graduate Degree (Master's)
 - g. Graduate Degree (Doctorate)
11. What is your occupation? (examples: accountant, teacher, doctor, computer programmer, homemaker)
12. If you are married, what is your husband/wife's occupation?

Appendix C

Parent Survey - Korean(translated by Cindy Kim)박사 논문 - 부모님 설문서

1. 여러분의 자녀가 올해 입학할 지원했던 대학들을 생각해 보십시오. 자녀에게 어느 특정 대학에 지원하도록 격려했던 부모님의 결정에 영향을 주었던 다음 사람들에게 본인은 어느 정도로 동의하는지 그 수준에 따라 표시해 주십시오.
- 매우 동의한다, 동의한다, 동의 안한다, 매우 동의 안한다
- a. 부모자신
 - b. 자녀의 형제나 자매
 - c. 다른 친척
 - d. 자녀학교의 동문이나 졸업생
 - e. 자녀의 학교 동급생
 - f. 대학의 입학 허가 담당부서 스탭
 - g. 대학의 다른 관계자 (예:교수)
 - h. 학원 강사
 - i. 교사
 - j. 학교 상담교사

- k. 코치
- l. 학교 행정관
- m. 클럽 카운슬러
- n. 다른사람 (구체적으로)

2. 자녀들이 어느 대학교들에 입학 원서를 낼지 그 목록을 정하는데 있어서 부모인 본인에게 가장 영향력을 끼쳤던 세사람을 다음중에 선택하여 등급에 따라 표시 하십시오. (1=가장 영향력이 있었다, 2=두 번째로 영향력이 있었다, 3=세번째)

- a. 부모본인
- b. 자녀의 형제들이나 자매들
- c. 다른 친척
- d. 자녀의 학교 졸업생이나 동문
- e. 자녀의 학교 동급생
- f. 대학의 입학허가 담당 부서 스태프
- g. 대학의 다른 관계자 (예:교수)
- h. 학원 강사
- i. 교사
- j. 학교 상담 교사
- k. 코치
- l. 학교 행정관
- m. 클럽 카운슬러

3. 다음과 같은 대학의 제도적 요인들이 부모님이 자녀에게 지원할 대학을 추천하는데 있어 얼마나 많은 영향을 미쳤는지 동의 하는 수준에 따라 표시하십시오.

매우 동의한다, 동의 한다, 동의하지 않는다, 매우 동의하지 않는다

- a. 학문적 명성
- b. 대학 순위
- c. 학교의 크기 (작다)
- d. 학교의 크기
- e. (크다)
- f. 지리적 위치
- g. 프로그램 및 전공 학과
- h. 인식된 캠퍼스의 안전

- i. 학비
- j. 장학금
- k. 기후/ 날씨
- l. 대학 입시 계획
- m. (조기결정, 정규결정, 롤링입학)
- n. Common 입학원서 양식 사용가능 여부
- o. 학생들의 다양성
- p. 한국 학생들의

4. 자녀들이 어느 대학에 입학할 지원해야 하는지를 부모가 추천 하는데 있어서 가장 영향력을 미쳤던 3가지의 요소들을 다음 중에서 선택하여 순위를 매기시오.
(1=가장 영향력이 강한 요소, 2=두번째로 강한요소, 3=세번째)

- a. 학교의 명성
- b. 학비
- c. 외국인 학생들에 대한 서비스
- d. 한국 학생들 숫자
- e. 재정 지원 가능
- f. 다른 사람의 추천
- g. 부모나 조부가 그 학교 출신임
- h. 지리적 위치

5. 자녀의 학생 신분증 번호.(이것은 학생과 부모를 연결시켜 줄것임)

6. 성별은 무엇입니까? 남자 여자

7. 영어가 본인의 모국어입니까? 예 아니오

8. 마치신 교육의 최고 수준은 어느 것입니까?

국민학교

중학교

고등학교

대학교 (중퇴) 또는 초급대학

대학부 (학사)

대학원 (석사)

대학원 (박사)

9. 결혼 하셨다면, 남편 / 아내의 최고 교육 수준은 어느 것입니까?

국민학교

중학교

고등학교

대학교 (중퇴) 또는 초급 대학

대학부 (학사)

대학원 (석사)

대학원 (박사)

10. 직업은 무엇입니까? (예: 회계사, 교사, 의사, 컴퓨터 프로그래머, 가정 주부등)

11. 결혼 하셨다면, 남편 / 아내의 직업은 무엇입니까?

Appendix D

Interview Guide – Student

Introduction:

Welcome and thanks for participating in the interview. I'm glad you are here. My name is Ms. Parslow. I am an American school counselor and doctoral candidate at the University of Minnesota in the United States. The topic of today's interview is choosing a university. I'm very interested in knowing why you chose the universities to which you are applying or have applied. What we discuss today will be written up and used for my final dissertation at the university. We also hope it will be helpful to educators working with Korean student and parents abroad. No real names will be provided in the report. You were selected for our group because you are currently a senior in high school. Before we begin, I'd like to talk about some of the guidelines we will have for our discussion today. We are planning on concluding our conversation in about 30 minutes. I can't notes fast enough to copy all the information discussed so we will use the recorder to help us. You may stop the interview at any time if you do not wish to continue. Do you have any questions before the interview begins?

School:

Student's First Name _____

Student's ID number _____ (to match survey)

1. Can you tell me about the process you went through when choosing where to apply to college?
 - a. Who influenced your college application decisions? How did they affect your application process?
 - b. When you were researching universities, what made a university more desirable? (if needed, give examples: financial aid, housing)
2. Now, we'll talk about your parents' involvement in the college application process.
 - a. What did you and your parents agree on during the college application process?
 - b. What were your disagreements?
 - c. How did you handle disagreements about applying to college with your parents?
3. What was the most important factor in determining what colleges you applied to?
 - a. Tell me more about why it was so important.
4. Please tell me anything else you'd like me to know about your process or anything that I may have forgotten to ask you.

Appendix E

Interview Guide – Parent

Introduction:

Welcome and thanks for participating in the interview. I'm glad you are here. My name is Ms. Parslow. I am an American school counselor and doctoral candidate at the University of Minnesota in the United States. The topic of today's interview is choosing a university. I'm very interested in knowing why your child and you chose the universities to which he or she is applying or has applied. What we discuss today will be written up and used for my final dissertation at the university. We also hope it will be helpful to educators working with Korean student and parents abroad. No real names will be provided in the report. You were selected for our group because you are currently a senior in high school. Before we begin, I'd like to talk about some of the guidelines we will have for our discussion today. We are planning on concluding our conversation in about 30 minutes. I can't notes fast enough to copy all the information discussed so we will use the recorder to help us. You may stop the interview at any time if you do not wish to continue. Do you have any questions before the interview begins?

School:

Student's First Name _____

Student's ID number _____ (to match survey)

1. Can you tell me about the process your family took when choosing where to apply to college?
 - a. What individuals did you find most influential when your child was applying to college?
 - b. When you were researching universities, what made a university more desirable to you as a parent? (if needed, give examples: financial aid, housing)
2. Now, we'll talk about how you and your child made college application decisions.
 - a. What did you and your child agree on during the college application process?
 - b. What were your disagreements?
 - c. How did you handle disagreements about applying to college with your child?
3. What was the most important factor that you considered during your child's application process?
 - a. Tell me more about why it was so important for you as a parent.
4. Please tell me anything else you'd like me to know about your family's application process or anything that I may have forgotten to ask you.