

How do students select universities?

There are three things in life that are certain: death, taxes and change. Change is unavoidable, even in higher education institutions. Higher education institutions in all parts of the world are facing challenges within a changing environment. The higher education landscape is changing due to a decrease in government funds, mergers between higher education institutions, an increase in competition between institutions, a drive to attract quality students as well as global trends of internationalisation. These changes have led many higher education institutions to reassess their recruitment and marketing strategies. It is up to higher education institutions to not only keep up with changes in the environment, but to adjust with these changes.

As a result of the ever-changing environment, higher education institutions are left competing in order to add more value to their target market. This requires an understanding of the market and the desire to be highly relevant. So how does a higher education institution offer more value? One way of doing this is to attempt to understand the target market and the choice factors that new applicants consider when enrolling at a specific higher education institution.

Post compulsory education is characterised by two decision-making situations for prospective students, namely, first, the choice between higher education and employment, and second, the choice of a field of study and a higher education institution from several alternatives. Everything in life comes down to a choice and this is no different when submitting applications to different higher education institutions. Prospective students are said to look at certain university characteristics known as choice factors. There are a number of different choice factors that are considered by prospective students such as fees, location of university and social life on campus.

A study was undertaken by [Prof Yolanda Jordaan](#) and [Dr Melanie Wiese](#) (staff members in the [Department of Marketing Management](#)) to identify the choice factors that students consider when selecting a higher education institution, with a focus on the differences between ethnic student groups. The results of the study indicate that the multi-cultural nature of an institution and the opportunities for a social life on campus were the two most powerful discriminators between the two ethnic groups (black and white), with black students selecting a university based on the multi-cultural nature of the institution, and white students considering social life on campus as being important.

The results add value to university administrators and planners in developing effective marketing and recruitment strategies to attract students from different ethnic groups.

The full reference for this study is:

[Jordaan, Y.](#) & [Wiese, M.](#) 2010. The role of ethnicity in the higher education institution selection process. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 24(4):538-554 – also available via [UP Space](#).