

**UNDERSTANDING DECISION MAKING CRITERIA  
ON STUDENTS' CHOICE OF UNIVERSITY:  
THE CASE OF THE NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY  
(MAFIKENG CAMPUS)**

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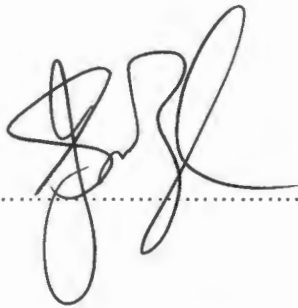
**Mini-Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree Masters in Business Administration at the Mafikeng  
Campus of the North-West University**

**Supervisor: Prof J.A. Meyer**

**November 2015**

## DECLARATION

I, S.I. van Zyl, declare that "Understanding decision making criteria on students' choice of university: The case of the North West University (Mafikeng campus)" is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke at the end, positioned above a horizontal dotted line.

SIGNATURE (S.I. VAN ZYL)

A handwritten date in black ink, "25/11/2015", positioned above a horizontal dotted line.

DATE

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## **ABSTRACT**

History has proved that institutions of higher education occupy a key role in providing education to the employees in the business sector. Due to various factors causing rapid and vibrant changes, including globalisation and an expansion of various alternatives to tertiary studies in South Africa, the need to identify factors and decision-making influences on prospective students is becoming essential in the acquisition of suitable students for universities. One factor that contributed to the changes in higher education is mergers, such as the merger of the then Bophuthatswana University and the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, now known as the North-West University consisting of three campuses in two provinces. The tertiary education market is rapidly expanding amidst a more demanding economy. In order to understand the latest attractions and influences on which prospective students base their decisions, it is imperative that universities recognise and address these issues. This study focuses on the North-West University's Mafikeng Campus and the decision-making criteria that influence students to study here. Key factors and influences that were identified as prominent contributors to a prospective student's decision to enrol at the NWU Mafikeng campus were the influence of family and friends, the availability of programmes and accommodation, as well as the academic standard of the university. The research also indicates that the prior knowledge students had about the NWU and the Mafikeng Campus was one of the three main reasons they chose the campus, thus marketing endeavours such as open-days are vital in attracting prospective students. By knowing which factors influence prospective students' university choice and who the main influences on these students are, the NWU Mafikeng Campus could utilise well-informed, updated brochures as well as easy to navigate websites to provide on the spot information to prospective students. This study is a first attempt to explore the arena of the NWU Mafikeng Campus scene, particularly from the viewpoint of its primary clients, the students.

## **KEY TERMS**

University choice, decision-making, influences, bursary, accommodation, family, friends, media.

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## **CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

### **1.1 Introduction**

History has proved that institutions of higher education play an important part in providing education to the employees in the business sector. To ensure that appropriate teaching is provided to the business sector, the need to ascertain that proper students as well as the best applicants that will complete their studies seem to be more and more important in the light of rising costs, diminishing bursaries and funds as well as a rising unemployment rate in South Africa (Wiese, van Heerden, Jordaan, & North, 2009).

Due to globalisation and a growing competitive market, a larger entry to university studies has become significant in South African universities (Lubbe & Petzer, 2013). This could also be contributed to the fall of the apartheid-era which resulted in a higher number of previous disadvantaged students seeking entry to universities. Government initiatives further add to the expansion of this particular market by aiding in access to universities, improvement of academic standards, broader participation by social classes as well as provision of bursaries and funding, even in terms of alternative funding and bursary schemes.

Another result that can be directly attributed to the globalisation effect was the entry of new competition to this market (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010). With the entry of various international institutions to the local market, such as Monash South Africa, a range of qualifications with several alternative delivery modes compared to the full-time studies offered by public universities are now available to prospective students. Some of the private higher education institutions are Damelin and Midrand Graduate Institute as well as institutions that provide advanced certificates and diplomas such as Boston Business School, Lyceum College and City Varsity which offer alternatives to students (Fish, 2011). They therefore compete directly with public universities.

Another factor that contributed to the changes in higher education are mergers, such as the merger of the then Bophuthatswana University (known later as the University of the North West) with the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education. In this instance the final result was the establishment of the North-West University consisting of three campuses in two provinces.

In the light of the above, South African universities face various new challenges due to this transformation, while still competing at international standards, even after more than twenty years of democracy. The university market thus became much more competitive and to reduce early termination rates and proper usage of funding, the attraction of quality students became a major concern at South African universities (Bonnema & van der Waldt, 2008).

In order to succeed in this new dynamic environment and still attract and retain quality students, universities need to better understand how their target markets base their decisions for further education (Lubbe & Petzer, 2013). This insight is crucial for universities in order to offer more value than the competitors in the same market arena (Jordaan & Wiese, 2010). More effective marketing efforts could be established in the light of understanding the prospective students' decision-making process, with emphasis on the influences and sources of information which they utilise (Moogan, Baron & Bainbridge, 2001).

It is thus significant to understand what and who determines the choice of university by students. This could enable South African universities to develop marketing strategies to capture this increasingly important market segment due to differences in culture, social and economic environments. From a university or business perspective, understanding the conditions that affect a students' choice of universities in South Africa is related to attracting more students. It is therefore essential that universities understand the factors that contribute to the choice of university in order to implement relevant policies at the specific university. This would benefit both students and universities alike in the end. As the competition among universities to attract students has intensified, not only are institutions concerned about the number of students they can enrol, but are interested in outstanding students for the contribution to the university's reputation.

Selecting a university is a decision-making process, which could be seen as the start of a career decision-making. In essence this is a process undertaken by an individual, who is considering career alternatives, comparing and then selecting a best solution according to the individual's means. The choices of university and of career paths are thus closely related to each other.

Together with numerous other decisions that could result in long-term consequences on the career of an individual, this decision is influenced by a number of factors. It is assumed that different motivation factors could exist which will then influence the decision-making process regarding university selection. The decision-making process is also affected by various influential persons and/or institutions whose opinions could be of importance to the prospective student.

The prospective student's consideration of these factors along with other limiting factors could then play a role in the student's choice of accepting or rejecting a certain university. The understanding of these influential factors, persons and or institutions could steer universities towards better marketing strategies to attract more of the university's specific target-market based on the qualifications offered as well as the type of student demanded.



For this research some internal and external factors are taken as independent variables while the decision to take such a decision is taken as a dependent variable. Internal factors include family, friends, knowledge of the university, advertising and word of mouth. External factors include location, cost, bursaries, courses offered, accommodation, research opportunities, facilities, employment opportunities and sport or extramural activities. As Briggs (2006), and also Simões and Soares (2010) mention, the choice of university is a decision of high importance and can be influenced by cost, information, access, academic achievement, life and school experience to name but a few.

This study will thus attempt to provide an understanding of the criteria affecting prospective South African students' decision-making on the choice of university as found at the North-West University's Mafikeng Campus.

## **1.2 The research problem**

Kinzie, Palmer, Hayek, Hossler, Jacob and Cummings (2004) refer to students as the essence of universities and student characteristics often define the uniqueness of individual campuses. At the NWU Mafikeng Campus, a significant dropout rate of students during their first year of study can be observed. This in turn leads to a break in studies for a longer period than stipulated by the university, causing students to return after the approved period had lapsed, in many cases constraining students in obtaining a degree due to curriculum as well as programme changes. Another observation includes many transfers to sister campuses during the students' course of study.

These casual observations at the Mafikeng campus regarding the variety of students that might apply to the university constitutes the motivation for this research. Taking into account the competitiveness in this sector, together with the mounting pressure on the economy and resources it is difficult to ensure an influx of quality students. Because a synergistic framework does not yet exist at the Mafikeng campus, admission staff as well as marketers of the university does not fully understand the underlying principles that guide students in their choice of the university. This leads to difficulty in the selection of, and the development of a consistent framework of students' selection.

Measurement systems such as the final year Grade 12 results are currently used at the university, but in the framework of internal and external decision factors of the student, the university seem to lag in addressing these issues. Based on this limited understanding of students' decision-making process and the link with influencing factors, student recruitment and selection is not consistent throughout the university.

### **1.3 Research questions**

The focus of this research is based on these main research questions.

1. What are the internal and external factors impacting on a prospective student's consideration in the selection of a university?
2. How do information sources contribute to the selection of a university?
3. By what is a prospective student's choice of university influenced?

### **1.4 Research objectives**

In order to focus the research, the following primary aims of the research are to:

1. Determine the internal and external factors impacting on a prospective student's selection of a university.
2. Determine the importance of information sources contributing to a student's selection of a university.
3. Determine by what a prospective student's choice of university is influenced.

### **1.5 General design and methodology of the research**

This descriptive and exploratory research focuses on decision-making factors of prospective students of the North-West University's Mafikeng Campus. The research was executed by means of a self-administered questionnaire and thereafter the link between decisions and influences and choice of university were tested. Further details on the research design are discussed in chapter 3, but at present, the following summary is provided.

### **1.5.1 Length of the questionnaire**

The structured questionnaire consists of a total of fifteen questions. The questionnaire is attached as Appendix A for reference.

### **1.5.2 Rating scale**

Likert type rating scales were used in various questions ranging from the lowest rating which is "Strongly disagree" to the highest rating which is "Strongly agree". Other criteria could be used in the description of the responses, i.e. "Never" to "Always", as well as basic "Yes" and "No" responses.

### **1.5.3 Quantitative and qualitative data**

This study is mainly qualitative with quantitative results from the questionnaire that provided the necessary data. Responses to the questions in the questionnaire were captured, using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly disagree" to the highest rating which is "Strongly agree", or similar type selections, e.g. "Very important" to "Not important", with the option to add data in an open field at the end of the questionnaire, so that the questionnaire then will generate both quantitative and qualitative data. In some cases "yes" or "no" responses may be present as well as written data from the respondents.

### **1.5.4 Data capturing and processing**

Data capturing was done through a statistical software application (SPSS) which facilitates processing. SPSS is an integrated statistical software application, used by NWU, which allows for electronic surveying and statistical analysis.

### **1.5.5 Instrument validity and reliability**

Validation of the research instrument was established through Cronbach's Alpha in SPSS and discussed briefly in Chapter 3.

The aim was to do an exploratory study, to form the foundation for a more sophisticated research study aimed at developing a predictive model which will be able to predict the effect of decision-making and influences. Face validity was tested with the Mafikeng Campus group as this is the only form of validity which the research design allows. For the purposes of this study, only the items which indicate decision and influence behaviour factors were used.

### **1.5.6 Biographical variables analysis**

Specific discrete variables such as geographical locality of the respondents, age and gender were examined to determine the representation of the research data obtained.

### **1.5.7 Size and composition of the research target population**

The size of the target population is 406 first-year students enrolled for the four-year degree programmes in the Commerce Faculty at North-West University's Mafikeng Campus.

### **1.5.8 Ethical issues**

Respondents have a guarantee of anonymity, there are no threatening questions contained in the questionnaire, the questionnaire contained clear guidelines on how to complete it and what to rate. Care was taken to keep the questionnaire as short as possible, but the response rate could still have been influenced by other obstacles.

## **1.6 Definitions or Key to Abbreviations**

NWU – North-West University (referring to the Mafikeng Campus)

SPSS – The Statistical Package for Social Science software

Four-year degree students from the Commerce Faculty students studying an extended Bachelors' degree programme where an additional one-year foundation study at university level is required to qualify for a degree.

## **1.7 Outline of the remainder of the thesis**

The structure of this mini-dissertation is as follows:

Chapter 2 presents a literature review on decision-making theories as well as influences affecting prospective student choices, in order to provide a background to the decision-making criteria on a student's choice of university.

Chapter 3 outlines the research design and methodology followed to identify decision making factors and influences of students, to determine the correlation between the concepts of influence and decision making within the university environment.

Chapter 4 presents the research results by decision and influence variables. Thereafter, the results of the analysis and comments on each of the responses were made by drawing conclusions from the literature data to prove or disprove a student's selection criteria.

Chapter 5 interprets the results in terms of the decisions and influences found relevant to the case. Gaps in the data are pointed out which may trigger further research. The significance of the research findings are addressed in light of the study at hand.

## **1.8 Summary**

This study is then a first step towards finding what causes a student to choose NWU-Mafikeng Campus, as well as the influences affecting the student, and if leveraged correctly, will give the NWU-Mafikeng Campus a competitive edge in the university market and contribute toward student sustainability in this environment of fierce competitiveness.

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## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the context of increasing competition for students, most universities realise that they need to market themselves to ensure adequate enrolment figures. With tighter budgets and increased competition in the South African university environment, the need to understand the motivation of students to pursue higher education and the key factors involved in their choice is becoming increasingly important. A better understanding of why and how students make choices will help universities to develop successful and reliable recruitment strategies. However, understanding the process of student decision making is not an easy task. Decision-making processes are complex and subject to various influences that not only interact with each other, but may also change over time.

### **2.1 Background**

Several South Africa's universities are internationally acclaimed academic institutions in various arenas, including recognised research facilities. South Africa's universities offer a wide range of study opportunities to local and international students. After the fall of apartheid, South Africa began restructuring its higher education system in 2003 to expand access to tertiary education (Le Grange 2011). To keep up and in pace with the globalisation effect, universities, together with government initiatives, ensured that the higher education market makes provision for a broader student market through various funding schemes as well as bursary alternatives.

North-West University was formed soon after, in 2004, with the merger of the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education and the University of the North-West, formerly the University of Bophuthatswana. It is one of South Africa's largest universities, with about 65 000 fulltime and distance students. It has three campuses in two provinces: the Mafikeng and Potchefstroom Campuses are in the North West Province, while the Vaal Triangle Campus is in Gauteng.

Globalisation led to the entry of new rivalry to the market (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2010). International institutions, such as Monash South Africa, entered the local market and offer a range of programmes and qualifications with unusual delivery modes compared to the full-time study mode of traditional universities (Lubbe & Petzer, 2013). They are therefore directly contending with the traditional, public universities. Damelin and Midrand Graduate Institute together with institutions that provide advanced certificates and diplomas, such as Boston Business School, Lyceum College and City Varsity, are some of the private tertiary education institutions otherwise accessible to students (Fish, 2011). The attractiveness of "Further Educational Training" colleges also poses a danger to public universities as basic qualifications can be obtained in a relative short time at a lesser cost.

For the bulk of students choosing a university is an important issue in the consideration of a career, yet it still remains a dilemma (Briggs & Wilson, 2007; Ming, 2010). Universities require an insight to selection criteria in order to offer more value than competitors in the same market arena (Jordaan & Wiese, 2010). Therefore university marketing becomes vital to directing the choice decision toward reason as a prospective student becomes better informed (Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 2001). Moogan, Baron and Bainbridge (2001) claim that this could result in more effective marketing efforts being established in light of understanding the prospective students' decision-making process highlighting the influences and sources of information which prospective students exploit. Most South African universities offer relative comparable degree programmes at undergraduate level. It is increasingly becoming crucial for university management to understand who and what influence students' choice of higher education (Lubbe & Petzer, 2013). This could provide universities with first-hand information for developing effective strategies for attracting and retaining local and international students (Briggs & Wilson, 2007).

Much of the research on university choice factors has been conducted in developed countries (Nurnberg, Schapiro, & Zimmerman, 2012; Liu, 2005; Vrontis, Thrassou, & Melanthiou, 2007; Wilkins, Shams & Huisman, 2013). Liu (2005) further witnessed that studies on university choice were mostly done in the United States, Australia and Europe.

Research on factors of student choice related to university selection is limited in developing countries and, more precisely, in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ming, 2010; Sidin, Hussin, & Soon, 2003; Bin Khairani & Razak, 2013). To overcome this limited understanding, more research is necessary to identify factors of students' choice of universities. Ming (2010) found diverse factors that influence a student's behaviour in selecting a university. He found two broad factors that he calls "Fixed Characteristics" and "Efforts to Communicate with Students". In "Fixed Characteristics" Ming (2010) identified location, academic programmes, college reputation, facilities, cost, availability of financial aid, and employment opportunities as the central factors. In the second factor he identified advertising and campus visits as the central influential factors.

Mudholkar (2012) found several choice factors for university selection namely placement, image or reputation, infrastructure, specialisation, faculty, peer advice, fees structure, alumni base, location, accreditation, hostel facilities, financial aid, industry links, research activities and partnership with foreign institutes that plays a role in a student's selection method. Shahid, Shafique and Bodla (2012) correspondingly found that students consider the reputation of an institute, word of mouth and marketing communication in the choice of university. Maringe (2006) adds to this view by stating that staff quality, quality of teaching, variety of education and flexibility (combination of studies and work) are significant features for students to choose a university.

This chapter will attempt to provide an understanding of the criteria affecting prospective students' decision-making on the choice of university through previous literature findings by looking at some of the most prominent identified factors.

## 2.2 Student behaviour

It is internationally agreed that student choice is subject to various influences and a growing need to understand the most influential factors in selecting a university is required (Kinzie *et al.*, 2004). It is therefore critical for prospective students to make educated decisions to gain the full benefits of higher education (Connor, Pearson, Pollard, Tyers & Willison, 2001). Choice can be seen as a repetitive action which is a complex and multi-faceted process through many facets in life.

Choice is not necessarily a rational process, but rather a combination of external situations in which an individual finds themselves (Barros, 2010). He further indicates that choice can then be defined as an expression at a particular moment in the decision-making cycle of a prospective student and in simple terms be seen as the problem-solving process undertaken by prospective students.

Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) allege that current prospective students are better informed to make decisions about various options available, thus they tend to become more critical and analytical when choosing a university. Kotler and Armstrong (2008) describe student choice as "consumer buyer behaviour", which studies how individuals, groups and organisations select, buy, use or dispose of goods or services to satisfy their needs and desires considering the factors that affect this behaviour. Understanding consumer behaviour could therefore aid in targeting the most appropriate students. Briggs (2006) proposes that if universities are able to forecast where applicants will come from, limited resources can be focused on marketing areas that will give the highest return. White (2007) also used the term "student choice" in consumer behaviour, but focus on sociological and educational perspectives. Vrontis *et al.* (2007) focus more on socio-economic areas.

From literature various theories convey the same elements, but differ on the focus. Corwin and Tierney (2007), Roderick, Nagaoka, Coca, Moeller, Roddie, Gilliam and Patton (2008), and Muller (2009), for example, highlight the role of teachers and schools motivating students to pursue university entry. Kotler and Armstrong (2008) mention that the importance of own sources stems from the fact that it is the starting point for gathering information; then complements the personal information with non-personal sources.

Obtaining and processing information is an important part of decision-making. This processing, together with social and cultural elements, contributes to and defines the roles of parents, friends, and schools (Briggs, 2006; Vrontis *et al.*, 2007). According to Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) even students with access to quality information can find choices to be challenging.



Terenzini, Cabrera and Bernal (2001) indicated that low-income students, normally from family-related income, find it difficult to pay tuition fees and lack financial aid for registration in universities of their choice. Various literature findings state that factors such as tuition fees, availability of bursaries and future career opportunities, are valued by students (Bodycott & Lai, 2012; He & Banham, 2011; Park, 2010; Simpson & Tan, 2009; Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007; Wang, 2007).

Bojuwoye and Mbanjwa (2006) found that career choices of university students from previously disadvantaged schools are negatively impacted on by lack of finance, lack of career information, poor academic performance and insufficient career counselling services.

### 2.3 Decision influences

Choice of university is a choice influenced by various demographic, economic, social, political, and institutional factors (Moogan, 2011). Key factors referred to in literature that influence the choice of university includes advice of parents, academic, availability of the preferred programmes, availability of financial aid, affordable cost of attending and the location of the institution (Wiese *et al.*, 2009). Research by Bodycott and Lai (2012) suggests that the two primary drivers on the decision to choose a university are “influencers”, or people who provide advice and assistance to students; and institutional features that attract students to a certain type of university. These factors include institutional rankings, cost, safety, and career prospects (He & Banham, 2011; Park, 2010; Simpson & Tan, 2009).

The right fit between universities and students can be obtained by understanding financial impacts, career prospects and the involvement of influencers on students (He & Banham, 2011; Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007; Massey, Charles, Lundy & Fischer 2003; Prado, 2008; Bodycott & Lai, 2012). According to Light and Strayer (2000) roughly one third of students in the United States transferred to other universities due to improper fits.

Choices become more challenging when a range of factors have an influence on choices considered. Lubbe and Petzer (2013) state that South African students now have a wider range of choice of institutions, subjects and courses, partly because of government initiatives in terms of funding, as well as alternatives posing competition to the “traditional” universities. Maringe (2006) as well as Brown, Varley and Pal (2009) mention that traditional methods for recruitment were based on “a one size fits all concept” but due to the increasing diversity of the market this idea needs to give way to methods that recognise a greater involvement in the choice processes of prospective students due to the more competitive university environment of late.

According to Soutar and Turner (2002), academic reputation and the quality of faculties are often viewed as significant factors while other factors that prospective

students usually consider are based on location of the university and distance from home as noted by Moogan and Baron (2003).

Gray, Fam and Llanes (2003) identified that the choice of university is enforced by the educational environment (staff, facilities and resources), reputation (brand name, achievements and academic standard), career prospects (employment prospects, expected income and employers' opinions), geographic appearance (political stability, safety and hospitality) and cultural integration, including religious freedom and cultural diversity.

Dreher and Poutvaara (2005) argue that economic and cultural forces play an important role in determining student markets. Fill (2002) adds to this by stating that student characteristics in terms of race, income or resources, socioeconomic status, parents' educational level, culture, religion and gender form part of their influences. Foskett, Maringe and Roberts (2006) also argue that students consider economic factors, such as job opportunities to supplement incomes, accommodation costs and family home closeness more carefully. Similarly, He and Banham (2011) found that the economic background of students influences where they choose to study since education and learning are more important to middle class students. Safety, climate, city size, and the type of institution are of lesser value to these middle class students.

### **2.3.1 Location**

Foskett *et al.* (2006) found that students would consider economic factors more carefully in times of distress and financial strain. Factors that are considered more during these times include additional income through alternative job opportunities, cost of accommodation, as well as closeness to their family homes. Niu and Tienda (2008) also found that geographical placement does constrain university choice, thus closeness to family home does play a role in the choice of university. Simões and Soares (2010) also attribute family home vicinity as one of the most important elements in choice of university.

Aamodt (2001) suggests that geographical reasons, such as uninviting locations, a lack of status and extensive travelling distances may discourage many prospective students from selecting a university. Heine (2008) found that study location is influenced by the type of course, the university's status, facilities and the extramural activities offered. Research by Soo and Elliot (2008) indicates that students prefer socially and culturally active locations. Big cities, as well as locations where students have family and friends are also preferred according to Keskinen, Tiuraniemi and Liimola (2008).

Closeness to home is associated with cost and therefore could have a negative association with university choice (Soutar & Turner, 2002; Briggs & Wilson, 2007; Keskinen *et al.*, 2008; Jepsen & Montgomery, 2009). Accommodation and transportation costs could be saved by attending a university close to home.

### **2.3.2 Price**

Economic constraints may affect the future ambitions and aspirations of prospective students from low-income backgrounds. Costs associated with university studies are an important factor stated in literature. Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) state that cost considerations include a variety of short as well as long term commitments which may continue even after the completion of studies. Ebrahim (2009) believes that young South African people from disadvantaged backgrounds are not in a position to obtain a tertiary education, because of a lack of financial resources.

Family income is an important factor in determining access to university, as a range of costs, both upfront and hidden, need to be taken care of (Hunt 2008). Ebrahim (2009) further suggests that students from low-income families face the pressure of leaving school and contributing financially to the family. He alludes that the initial costs associated with applying to a university might stress a family budget and cause prevention of applying to a university by a prospective student. In contrast, Soo and Elliot (2008) indicate that the fees do not influence the choice of university. Briggs and Wilson (2007) also states that cost are ranked low on a scale of factors that influence choice of university.

Hill (2008), however, alleges that students would consider a trade-off between current costs and future expectations of financial and non-financial benefits.

Universities often engage in offering a range of scholarships and discounts in marketing and attracting prospective students. Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) support this notion, and state that low socio-economic status applicants are more likely to apply to an institution where financial assistance is offered. With bursaries a university secures equal opportunities for students to learn, regardless of the financial status, assisting in changing public opinion these organisations are only concerned with financial profits. Bursaries also enhance the university's popularity as it is available for all.

### **2.3.3 Information from media**

Online information includes websites, social networks and forums regarding a particular university. Simões and Soares (2010) found that university websites are highly rated as a source of information and decision-making among students. Johnston (2010) and Ivy (2008) confirm a high degree of influence in terms of selection of a university. Vrontis *et al.* (2007) indicate that technological accessibility, intense marketing communications and increased options for prospective students, resulted that the search for information became more complex, efficient and effective.

Martin (2006) found the primary source of information for prospective students to be university web sites and that it is often the first communication they have a university. O'Connor and Lundstrom (2011) agree to this statement by indicating that students prefer searching for information on the internet. Other internet-related media, such as social networks and virtual tours did not contribute significantly in students' choice according to Hendricks (2006). However, Anderson (2009) found that, according to admissions staff, more students are using Facebook to communicate with universities to conduct business.

Various studies focus on internet or website utilisation of prospective students to inform their choice (Martin, 2006), the search and choice stages of the selection process (Smith, 2006), as well as how previously disadvantaged students utilise a variety of platforms available to them (Olsen, 2007). Smith (2006) found that university websites played a major role during the search stage, and open days or campus visits to be more decisive during the choice stage.

Studies by Pasternak (2005) suggest a highly influential role to an institution's printed information materials. Eckel (2007), on the other hand, suggests that poor promotional material from universities contributes to a general lack of adequate information for students and parents in order to make important comparisons between universities.

In contrast with Eckel, Drummond (2004) argues that institutions can overload a prospective student with too much information, sometimes irrelevant in nature; and this could cause 'consumer confusion', making it more difficult for prospective students to make informed decisions. Adding to Drummond's argument above, Ivy (2002) makes the statement that students find information provided through university information channels, such as the internet, inadequate or misleading; while Bennet (2006) argue that students may not find the sources trustworthy for decision-making.

Nora (2004) underlined the influence of open days or university tours, allowing prospective students to match their perceptions and needs with a campus where they feel welcome. Simões and Soares (2010) as well as Bonnema and van der Walddt (2008) also indicate that campus visits and open days were major information sources in the selection of a university. In a similar study Jennings (2008) stressed the importance of personal interaction and found it dominant to printed, and online marketing content.

Coles (2007) found that newspaper and magazine rankings were more important in the university choice process than the advice of guidance counsellors or teachers. Hazelkorn (2007) confirms this finding by stating that newspapers clearly had an impact on enrolment decisions.

The assumption that the internet is widely available to all may be misleading when considering disadvantaged communities either have limited, unreliable or irregular access to the internet if any (Akar & Topcu, 2011). To facilitate the optimal positioning in this vibrant competitive market, universities need to be informed of current developments and abilities.

#### **2.3.4 Facilities/Accommodation**

According to Urbanski (2000) variables such as college reputation, campus location, campus atmosphere, campus safety, size, cultural uniqueness and costs influence students in the choice of university. Sidin *et al.* (2003) found similarly that students' selection of universities is influenced by academic quality, facilities, campus surroundings, and cultural characteristics, among others. Their results also support that income affects the choice of students.

Facilities, especially accommodation, are one of the aspects a university can offer in attracting prospective students. Accommodation provides a huge advantage in attracting prospective students. Holdsworth and Nind (2005) underline the importance of providing good accommodation in attracting prospective students.

What can be added here is the availability of preferred programmes or programmes offered at a university. According to a study by Bonnema and Van der Waldt (2008), programmes offered which support the prospective students' intention to become employed and thus allowing lifestyle changes were a great decision factor in choosing a university.

#### **2.3.5 Personal influences:**

Decisions are normally made based on various forms of information available, word of mouth, perceptions and reputation of institutions. To gather information, prospective students consult university prospectuses (Connor *et al.*, 2001), careers officers (Moogan & Baron, 2003) and refer to complex social networks such as

family, friends and various media types for advice and support. Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) argue that beliefs and social status of the parents and prospective students both seek recognition from their own peer groups for the decisions made. A combined effect of university communications and social group values may create positive reinforcement while disagreement of the two may generate significant tensions for prospective students.

It is believed that a major source of information influencing choice is an institution's own staff, via direct or through phone enquiries. Friends' advice is also believed to be a major source of information. Foskett (2009) agrees with the above as well as the importance of the role of career advisers in information assimilation.

Pimpa (2005) proposes that students prefer family as a source of information. Donovan and McKelfresh (2008) quoted the influence of parents in the choice of university and elaborated that parents expect to be involved in this experience. Parents, as an influence on university choice, also have institutional characteristics in which they are interested. According to Bodycott and Lai (2012), parents are more interested in safety, job prospects, and opportunities to pursue graduate studies. He also found that students are more interested in what the campus has to offer while on campus. Bohman (2010) found similar evidence to Bodycott and Lai (2012) in that students learned about a particular university through either family or friends who had previously attended or who lived in the community where the university was situated. Prado (2008) indicates that family and peer relationships are influential to students.

Bohman (2010) also noted the importance of peers at universities. They also found that students who have friends attending university are more likely to pursue a university degree. In contrast, Pillay (2010) conducted a study for Rhodes University, finding that only 10% of the respondents were influenced by their parents while the majority of respondents made the choice of university themselves.

Further influences on prospective students are educational negotiators aiding in the university choice process providing support and advice (De Luca, 2010). One must also take into consideration the influence of friends and peers who can encourage or discourage decisions of an individual. According to Bohman (2010) a peer network of students who previously attended a certain university can also influence prospective students to a high degree.

## **2.4 Summary**

Various factors and influences can thus determine the choice of university. This research tries to identify different factors that influence students in selecting a university. Factors that influence students' choice-making decisions includes location, cost, bursaries, personal influences such as peer pressure and pressure from parents, accommodation as well as marketing related factors. Although many similarities could be found throughout, highly opposing variations could also be seen. This is noted in light of the various types of universities assessed and it is realised that each university would have a unique set of criteria that would become prominent in light of factors such of location, target market, cost, marketing and other preferential factors. Maringe (2006) summed it up in stating that in essence the product (i.e. university programme offerings), price, and people appear to be the most critical features that influence decisions of prospective students.

The research is of great significance for both the students and the university. From the university point of view this research could help to understand the needs and demands of the students and increase productivity and profitability by capturing a large share in the higher education market. This could furthermore assist in identifying and understanding which factors students value the most in selecting a university.

The next chapter addresses the research methodology and includes information on the research problem, data collection, sample size and demarcation, analysis, validity, reliability, and ethical considerations.

## **CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the research design by identifying the population and sample of the study and explains the data collection of the questionnaire. The purpose of the study was to examine decision-making influences on prospective students' choice of university. The research questions were based on prior research that has been conducted relating to university choice, but was made relevant to the NWU Mafikeng campus as well as the South African perspective. The researcher engaged variables that have been identified in the literature as factors which prospective students rank prominently in university choice decisions.

#### **3.1.1 The research problem**

Competition in the South African tertiary sector increases year by year. To ensure that universities obtain and retain quality students, some form of control must be established to ensure this. This control will first have to be researched in order to identify the various influences affecting students' decisions on university studies. In light of this, a reflection on the current situation of the NWU Mafikeng campus was attempted. This reflection indicated a significant dropout rate of students during their first year of study that could be observed. This in turn leads to a break in studies for a longer period than stipulated by the university, causing students to return after the approved period had lapsed, in many cases constraining students in obtaining a degree due to curriculum as well as programme changes. Another observation includes many transfers to sister campuses during the students' course of study.

These casual observations at the Mafikeng Campus regarding the variety of students that apply to the university were the motivation for this research. Taking into account the competitiveness in this sector, together with the mounting pressure on the economy and resources it is difficult to ensure an influx of quality students.

Because a synergistic framework does not yet exist at the NWU Mafikeng Campus, admission staff members as well as marketers of the university do not fully understand the underlying values that guide students in their choice of the university. This leads to difficulty in the selection process, and the development of a consistent framework for student selection.

Measurement systems such as the final year Grade 12 results are currently used at this university, but in the framework of internal and external decision factors of the student and the importance of influence factors, the university lags in addressing these issues. Based on this limited understanding of students' decision-making processes and the connection with influencing factors, student recruitment and selection are not consistent or even satisfactory throughout the university.

### **3.1.2 Research questions**



Due to the above-mentioned problem at the NWU Mafikeng Campus, together with literature discussed in Chapter 2, the focus of this research is based on three broad research questions.

1. What are the internal and external factors impacting on a prospective student's consideration in the selection of a university?
2. How do information sources contribute to the selection of a university?
3. How is a prospective student's choice of university influenced?
- 4.

### **3.2 Research design**

Research design is generally a plan of how the research will progress from the introduction to the conclusion and is constructed of a reasonable process of answering the questions of a study. It therefore specifies how the researcher will proceed while attending to the important issue of accurate interpretation.

This research used a survey approach by gathering data from selected respondents, indicated in par 3.3 and par 3.4, due to a limited time frame available to the researcher. Data were gathered from a relatively small number of respondents within a one week time frame. The study method was qualitative; however, in order to gather information, quantitative data from the questionnaire were used to identify key factors and influences regarding the study. The basis of the method attempts to connect the observed data to the research questions and focus on prospective students of the North-West University's Mafikeng Campus. The research was executed by means of a self-administered questionnaire and thereafter the correlations between decisions and influences and choice of university were tested.

In order to recognise factors influencing university choice among prospective students, according to the prevalent cases in literature, five sets of factors were determined namely:

1. financial factors (i.e. tuition fees, bursaries, affordability)
2. facility factors (i.e. accommodation, extramural activities)
3. personal factors (i.e. family and friends)
4. media factors (i.e. social media, newspapers, radio)
5. location factors (i.e. distance from home, rural vs. city)

The purpose of this study was to determine what factors influence prospective graduate students when making the decision to enrol in a university. This chapter defines the design of the study, instrumentation, sample selection, data gathering and the treatment of the data.

### **3.3 Population**

A population represents the whole range of people or themes of interest that researchers wish to investigate. A population normally shares a set of common characteristics. The population was identified as approximately 2000 first-year entrants in 2015 from the approximate total of 11 000 students at the NWU Mafikeng campus. However, the size of the target population was 406 first-year students

enrolled for the four-year degree programmes in the Commerce Faculty at North-West University's Mafikeng Campus. It is necessary to mention here that the research was open to all of the above-mentioned students in the target population, including international students, to participate in this study.

### **3.4 Sampling method**

As Wiid and Diggines (2013) state, sampling refers to the actual list from which a sample is drawn. A convenience sample of first year students was drawn from first time, first year entrants from the approximate total of 11 000 students at the NVVU Mafikeng campus. The sample is the select number of cases in a population and in this study these were chosen by a non-probability sampling technique, namely accidental or convenience sampling. This was applied to all first-year, first-time students from the Commerce four-year degree programmes of the 2015 intake at NWU Mafikeng Campus. In this study, convenience sampling was used as these students formed the population and was readily available and accessible.

### **3.5 Data collection**

#### **3.5.1 Instrument development**

A questionnaire was developed broadly based on research questions and objectives mentioned earlier in this chapter under par 3.1.2 and par 3.1.3. The questionnaire was designed to explore the dimensions of influences on university choice in terms of geographical placement, personal influences, available information, financial ability and availability of preferences in terms of facilities, etc.

Perceptions and preferences of first-year students were investigated using mostly closed-end questions which were appropriate to self-completion questionnaires using rating scales as much as possible. The questionnaire, however, included demographic questions involving personal information such as age and gender to establish a more concise set of characteristics. The basis of the questions was to determine the factors which influenced students to choose NWU Mafikeng Campus. .

A covering letter ensured that the respondents were informed of the nature and purpose of the research. The questionnaire contained a foreword explaining the rights of respondents, contact details of the researcher and completion instructions. One question focuses on determining the respondents' demographics and another question measures the extent to which possible information sources influence respondents' decision-making process when selecting a university. The format of the questionnaire consists of an initial series of questions of concerned factors such as age group, gender, nationality, geographical location and study programme. This was followed by more specific questions related to influences and types of sources that involve a selection of options on a Likert scale.

The questionnaire was designed to cover a number of aspects on the selection of university choice, addressing the research questions and objectives defined in par 1.3 and par 1.4. This was broken down to four practical applications to establish the role and influence of information sources, internal as well as external factors driving decision making and the impact of various identified factors and influences in light of university choice. In order for the questionnaire to be administered individually to students, the questionnaire items were kept to a minimum. Although care has been taken to keep the questionnaire as short as possible to ensure a quick response rate, the response rate could still have been influenced by other difficulties present at the time of completion.

### **3.5.1.1 Rating scale**

Responses to most of the questions in the questionnaire were captured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly disagree" to the highest rating which is "Strongly agree", or similar type selections, with the option to add data in an open field at the end of the question to that the questionnaire then will generate both quantitative and qualitative data. In some cases "yes" or "no" responses were present as well as written data from the respondents.

### **3.5.2 Obtaining respondents**

Through NWU authorities a list of the approximately 2000 first-year students was obtained in Microsoft Excel format. This list was then filtered to only reflect the first-year students who registered for the extended four-year Commerce programmes in the Faculty of Commerce and Administration. This list comprised 406 students meeting the criteria who were contacted to participate in the study.

### **3.5.3 Administering the questionnaire**

Data were collected through the use of the questionnaires which were administered by the researcher to respondents, from 12 October to 16 October 2015. The researcher contacted students through email and cell phone messages the week before, in order to notify students of the intended research. Each student was given an explanation of the research by the researcher and guided on how to complete the questionnaire. Students were able to complete the questionnaire in their own time as long as they were returned on or before 16 October 2015.



## **3.6 Data analysis**

### **3.6.1 Analysis of data in this study**

Data capturing and processing data capturing were done through The Statistical Package for Social Science software (SPSS). Microsoft Excel was used to assist with data preparation. SPSS is an integrated statistical software application, used by NWU, which allows for electronic surveying and statistical analysis. Further analyses were conducted by the researcher in Microsoft Excel to provide tables, graphs and charts as needed. Specific discrete variables such as geographical area of the respondents, age and gender were only examined to determine the representation of the research data obtained and therefore only supplemented the relevance of the core findings in this study. In order to aid in the analysis of the data, findings are presented in terms of influence by information, internal influence factors, external influence factors and the importance of influences.

### **3.6.2 Validity and reliability**

The reliability and validity tests measure the accuracy of measurement and the valid number of responses in a given study. Instrument reliability and validity were done according to Cronbach's alpha in SPSS.

#### **3.6.2.1 Reliability**

Reliability measures the ability of the data-collection instrument and method used for the study to obtain accurate and consistent results. Validation of the research instrument was established through Cronbach's alpha in SPSS.

Cronbach's alpha refers to a function of the number of items in a test, the average covariance between variable-pairs, and the variance of the total score, thus the average correlation of a set of items is an accurate estimate of the average correlation of all items that relate to a specific construct (Nunnally, 1978).

According to George and Mallery (2003) it is accepted that a score of 0,7 or 70% indicates internal consistency as acceptable, 0,8 refers to a good internal consistency, while greater than 0,9 reflects excellent results. Lower scores than 0,7 become questionable, poor and unacceptable. Furthermore, as a rule it is commonly accepted that internal consistency in Cronbach's alpha test for reliability will indicate that a larger number of items or variables in a test may inflate the value of alpha, whilst a narrow range of variables can deflate the alpha score according to George and Mallery (2003) and DeVellis (2012).

### **3.6.2.2 Validity**

Validity tests measure the accuracy of measurement and the valid number of responses in a given study. In this study the following methods were used to determine validity:

Face validity is based on the researcher's assessment of measuring what the study should be measuring. The researcher determined the objectives in the study, asked the questions related to these objectives, in order to determine that respondents fully understood the questions and what was being asked of them.

Substance or construct validity represents the degree to which the questionnaire measures the responses theoretically to the expected concepts of the questionnaire. Thus the extent to which the objectives determined is providing an indication of measurable concepts being asked.

In this study, the literature reviewed provided further direction from previous studies and surveys. The reliability of the research instrument supports the validity of the instrument. The aim was to do an exploratory study at the NWU Mafikeng Campus, which will form the foundation for a more sophisticated research study aimed at developing a more analytical model which will be able to predict the effect of decision-making and influences.

Cronbach's alpha simply offers an overall reliability constant for a set of variables such as questions. In light of the Cronbach's alpha measurement with regards to the questionnaire, an overall score on internal consistency was achieved of 0,931. It therefore constitutes a valid instrument when referring to par 3.6.2.1. Appendix C contains the full Cronbach's alpha report. Where necessary, an explanation in light of these findings following scrutiny of the frequency statistics will be given in Chapter 4.

### **3.6.3 Ethical issues**

Appropriate ethical issues were adhered to. In the questionnaire the purpose of the research and the rights of the participants were outlined. Participation was voluntary and students were able to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Students' participation did not have anything to do with formal or informal assessment of their academic performance. No reference to individual results was made in any reports or publications produced on the basis of the study results. The researcher accessed the students to participate in the research through the University authorities.

### **3.7 Summary**

This chapter mentioned the procedures and method followed in this research study. Research by questionnaire offered the advantages of efficient use of time, standardised questions, as well as anonymity to the students involved. Data were also checked for accuracy, completeness and validity before being analysed.

From the process of data capture through to analysis, the researcher concluded the study with 45 valid questionnaires. Thus, a study with a sample of 45 respondents was used to compare to the population of 406 first-year Extended Commerce students.

In Chapter 4 the results of the analysis are explored, attempting to indicate decision-making factors as well as influences guiding students to select the NWU Mafikeng Campus as venue choice for tertiary studies. In this section results are defined using the aim of the study using the research questions the objectives. These results should provide interesting trends in the data analysed. The 15-question questionnaire is attached at the end of this research as Appendix A.

## CHAPTER 4. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

### 4.1 Introduction

Casual observations at the Mafikeng Campus regarding the variety of students who apply to the university, taking into account the competitiveness in this sector, together with the mounting pressure on the economy and resources, make it difficult to ensure an influx of quality students. However, due to the fact that the decision-making criteria on students' choice of university have not been proven at this campus, this remains a casual observation so far.

Because a synergistic model does not exist at the Mafikeng Campus, admission staff as well as marketers of the university does not fully understand the rationale of university choices of students. This leads to difficulty in the selection for, and the development of a consistent framework of students' selection criteria.

Measurement systems such as the final-year Grade 12 results are mainly used at the university, but in the framework of external decision factors of the student, the university lags in addressing these issues. Based on this limited understanding of students' decision-making processes and the connection with influencing factors, student selection is not consistent throughout the university.

The results of the study about understanding decision-making criteria in terms of students' choice of university as at the Mafikeng Campus of the NWU are presented in this chapter. The main objectives in this study were to:

1. Determine the internal and external factors impacting on in a prospective student's selection of a university.
2. Determine the importance of information sources contributing to a student's selection of a university.
3. Determine how a prospective student's choice of university is influenced.

The Mafikeng Campus of North-West University was selected for the study and participants were chosen from the first-year students in the Commerce Faculty studying an Extended Bachelor's degree. The total number of participants provided with questionnaires was 200 students in Extended Commerce degrees.

In this chapter, results from the questionnaire are stated and analysed. It was observed that only 45 of the 200 students returned their questionnaires and this was then the contribution that was used to conduct this study.

The nature of this research is mostly qualitative. Quantitative data were collected through the self-administered questionnaire attached as Appendix A. After collecting data from students the researcher entered it into MS excel worksheets. There were a total of fifteen questions in the questionnaire and every question's responses were analysed using the SPSS software available at the campus.

## **4.2 Quantitative research findings**

The total number of respondents who participated in this study amounted to 45. The discussions of quantitative findings are reflected first then the qualitative findings are discussed. . The research was executed to achieve the objectives mentioned in par 3.1.3. As only students from the four-year degree programmes in the Commerce faculty were targeted, and no other indications, such as field of study or specialisation, were scrutinised, only an oversight in decision-making criteria was required and would be used for this study.

Responses would therefore only focus on application criteria and not on types of programmes admitted to; or quality of studies at this time. International students were invited to participate; however, it came to light that only South African students participated in this research. Therefore the element of nationality can be omitted from this study.

Data obtained from the Extended programmes' students of the Commerce Faculty at the NWU Mafikeng Campus were discussed under the following headings. It firstly provides a socio-demographic profile of the respondents, followed by the descriptive analysis of the data. The research objectives presented are also addressed.

The data were drawn from the responses given by respondents and analysed to establish the respondents' influences regarding the choice of university and also the factors that contributed or were influential in their choice to register at the NWU Mafikeng Campus.

The respondents' demographics allowed the researcher to establish whether the factors influencing students to choose NWU Mafikeng Campus were related to age, location, and gender. The analyses of the rest of the results are broken into sections along the outlines of the questionnaire.

Based on the nature of the questions, the responses were regarded as key segments as per the objectives of influences based on media and other related mediums of information, internal and external influential factors, the importance of influences in registering at the NWU Mafikeng Campus as well as financial capacity.

The last three questions only serve as an indication of the priority of choice of university and the consideration to pursue studies at alternative universities or campuses, with the option to disclose reasons for this change if considered. This is to understand why students often change campus or enrol at another university once admitted and registered at Mafikeng Campus.

As the results were nominal data, a frequency count was used to determine how often certain responses occurred. The first six questions were asked to provide a demographic and geographic representation and there after more pertinent questions on decision making were asked as stipulated above. The results are herewith discussed in this manner.

Descriptive variables that showed the most positive results are indicated below:

**Table 1 Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic
NWU Website visited	45	0	6	1.31	.130	.874	.765
Information from family or friends	45	0	4	1.38	.140	.936	.877
Influenced by myself	45	1	5	1.22	.105	.704	.495
Choice due to family income	45	1	2	1.51	.075	.506	.256
Tuition payment	45	1	3	1.53	.098	.661	.436

The full descriptive statistics report is attached as Appendix B.

It is necessary to note that the higher variances reflected in the full report indicate a high concern with regards to activity (this means a negative influence or importance) and could therefore be seen as a negative contribution, as will be clear from the frequency statistic findings. It therefore indicates a matter of addressing these findings due to a lesser influence on prospective students. Taking into account the higher variances, together with the frequency statistic data into consideration, this could be seen as a control measure to justify findings in this study on two separate processes.

Reliability statistics from Cronbach's alpha were obtained and presented as follows (as mentioned in par 3.6.2.2)

**Table 2 Reliability statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha based on standardized items	N of Items
.931	.907	37

The above figure of 0, 931 thus reflects an excellent internal consistency in terms of reliability. The full report on reliability is attached as Appendix C.

#### **4.2.1 Demographic and geographical representation**

Although the questions in this section were asked in the questionnaire to gain an insight on representivity, it contributes little to the research questions and objectives addressed in this study. This data might, however, support or disprove pertinent questions asked later in the study. The information gathered herewith could, however, be utilised from a marketing point of view to address certain areas identified in relation to the other findings which are applicable to the study.

##### **4.2.1.1 Age**



The demographic variable of age was broken into three groups, namely, 18 to 20, 21 to 30 and "older than 30". The largest group of respondents (29) fell into the 18 to 20 age group (64,4%), with the 21 to 30 age group amounting to 16 (35.6%). No respondents in the age group of 30 and above were present and were thus omitted from the study (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 72, 18).

Table 4.3 shows these statistics as a percentage.

**Table 3 Age group**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 18-20	29	64.4	64.4	64.4
21-30	16	35.6	35.6	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### **4.2.1.2 Gender**

Of the total respondents, 55.6% were males and 44.4% were females.

The profile of the study was thus made up of 25 male and 20 female respondents illustrated in Table 4.4 as a percentage. This could be seen as a fairly even contribution and representation by gender (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 72, 09)

**Table 4 Gender**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid Male	25	55.6	55.6	55.6
Female	20	44.4	44.4	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.2.1.3 Nationality

As indicated before, the survey was open to all first-year students in the Extended Programmes of the Commerce Faculty. As seen in the Table 4.5 below regarding nationality, no international students participated in this study, therefore this could be regarded as an omitted result in this study and finding will only be reflected on account of South African citizens.

**Table 5 Nationality**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid RSA	45	100.0	100.0	100.0

#### 4.2.1.4 Province of origin representation

In this study, the largest representation was from the North West Province. The second largest representation was tied to a 4,4% percentage for each of the Northern Cape, Mpumalanga and Limpopo Provinces, with the lowest representation by the Gauteng province as shown in Table 4.6 statistically represented in percentages.

**Table 6 Province**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid Gauteng	1	2.2	2.2	2.2
d Limpopo	2	4.4	4.4	6.7
Mpumalanga	2	4.4	4.4	11.1
Northern Cape	2	4.4	4.4	15.6
North West	38	84.4	84.4	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.2.2 NWU Website visited

This was a pertinent question asked to obtain an idea of internet usage by prospective students and the effectiveness thereof, relating to the second research question on what the sources of information for considering a university are and how it contributes in the selection process. Indicating the access of the NWU website as seen in Table 4.7, 68, 9% of respondents indicated that they did consult the website for information, 24.4% indicated that they did not access the website, while 6.6% did not answer the question (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 72, 29).

**Table 7 NWU Website visited**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	3	6.6	6.6	6.6
Yes	31	68.9	68.9	73.3
No	11	24.4	24.4	97.8
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.3 Decision influences based on media and other related mediums

A variety of media-based influences were selected to identify the most significant attribution with regards to decision influence based on information. The selection was done in terms of relevant material or information channels available to students in the South African context. Two impacts that were considered as advertising and marketing related "media-based" sources were information from family or friends as well as teachers. These information sources contribute to the second research question as well as the second research objective.

### 4.3.1 Information from newspapers

Relating to the question on information sources, respondents based the information from newspapers as a non-contributing factor as 55,6% stated that newspapers did not play a role in the choice of university. 15,6% of respondents indicated an average influence and the same percentage did not comment on the question. It is therefore portrayed that newspapers do not play a major part in decision-making about universities as illustrated in Table 4.8.

Cronbach's alpha = 69, 87 indicates a questionable number, but could be rounded to 70, 00. With reference to par 3.6.2.1 and par 3.6.2.2 this phenomenon could be attributed to the rule according to George and Mallery (2003), and DeVellis (2012) stating that a smaller variable allocation may result in lower values of alpha. It is therefore noted that the small sample size and responding students amounting to 45 could have contributed to this finding.

**Table 8 Information from newspapers**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	7	15.6	15.6	15.6
Very much	1	2.2	2.2	17.8
Above average	1	2.2	2.2	20.0
Average	7	15.6	15.6	35.6
Below average	4	8.9	8.9	44.4
Not at all	25	55.6	55.6	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

### 4.3.2 Information from magazines

The majority of responses (62,2%) reflected that magazines do not aid in the selection of a university. The next largest percentage (15,6%) did not answer the question at all. Only 2.2% indicated that some form of influence existed as illustrated in Table 4.9. Cronbach's alpha = 69,69 questionable, could be rounded to 70,00. This could possibly be attributed with reference to par 3.6.2.1 and par 3.6.2.2 referring to George and Mallery (2003), and DeVellis (2012) stating that a smaller variable allocation may result in lower values of alpha, mainly due to the smaller number of responses from students.

**Table 9 Information from magazines**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	7	15.6	15.6	15.6
Very much	1	2.2	2.2	17.8
Average	4	8.9	8.9	26.7
Below average	5	11.1	11.1	37.8
Not at all	28	62.2	62.2	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

### 4.3.3 Information from Open Days

Of the total respondents, 11,1% did not answer the question while 35,6% indicated a very high score of influence in the choice of university. Table 4.10 illustrates the findings which indicate a contradiction of influence indicated by the 15,6% scores obtained (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 71, 38).

**Table 10 Information from open days**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	5	11.1	11.1	11.1
Very much	16	35.6	35.6	46.7
Above average	7	15.6	15.6	62.2
Average	8	17.8	17.8	80.0
Below average	2	4.4	4.4	84.4
Not at all	7	15.6	15.6	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.3.4 Information from radio

According to the responses obtained the majority indicated that no influence was evident from radio. The 17,8 % who did not respond would aid, however, in obtaining a better idea as the relative "average scores" are very close to each other as shown in Table.4.11. Overall, it appears that prospective students do not rely on radio as a key influence on university orientation and decision-making (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 70, 69).



Table 11 Information from radio

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	8	17.8	17.8	17.8
Very much	4	8.9	8.9	26.7
Above average	8	17.8	17.8	44.4
Average	5	11.1	11.1	55.6
Below average	7	15.6	15.6	71.1
Not at all	13	28.9	28.9	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.3.5 Information from internet-related sources

Table 4.12 presents a highly influential contribution (44,4%) by internet related material overall. Fewer than 10 % answered the question (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 71, 51).

**Table 12 Information from internet related**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	4	8.9	8.9	8.9
Very much	20	44.4	44.4	53.3
Above average	5	11.1	11.1	64.4
Average	8	17.8	17.8	82.2
Below average	3	6.7	6.7	88.9
Not at all	5	11.1	11.1	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.3.6 Information from family or friends

Of the total respondents, 62,2% found the influence of family or friends a major contribution in the selection of a university. The second highest percentage also indicates a large influence as illustrated in Table 4.13 (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 72, 16).

**Table 13 Information from family or friends**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	4	8.9	8.9	8.9
Very much	28	62.2	62.2	71.1
Above average	7	15.6	15.6	86.7
Average	4	8.9	8.9	95.6
Below average	2	4.4	4.4	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.3.7 Information from teachers

Table 4.14 shows the majority of responses do reflect a high degree of influence from teachers, although 17,8 % indicated no influence and a significant percentage did not respond to the question (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 71, 60).

**Table 14 Information from teachers**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	7	15.6	15.6	15.6
Very much	18	40.0	40.0	55.6
Above average	8	17.8	17.8	73.3
Average	3	6.7	6.7	80.0
Below average	1	2.2	2.2	82.2
Not at all	8	17.8	17.8	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.3.8 Information from others

Respondents could have utilised this open-ended question to indicate other significant influences from sources not mentioned in the questionnaire. Illustrated in Table 4.15 a very large portion did not make any suggestions about the influence of others. Where the questionnaire allowed for the adding of additional sources, none of the respondents filled in any information (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = .73, 16).

**Table 15 Information from other**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	40	88.9	88.9	88.9
Very much	2	4.4	4.4	93.3
Not at all	3	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.4 Internal influence factors on decisions

The researcher tried to explore the degree of decision making being influenced by certain criteria of internal sources. Findings regarding these sources are herewith discussed in relation to the first research question and objective focussing on internal factors.

##### 4.4.1 Influenced by myself

Of the total respondents, 86,7% indicated that they made the final choice in the decision regarding the university they intended to study on their own as illustrated in Table 4.16. The question was aimed at identifying a prospective student's own ability to select a university in spite of other influences (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = .72, 31).

**Table 16 Influenced by myself**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid Very much	39	86.7	86.7	86.7
Above average	4	8.9	8.9	95.6
Average	1	2.2	2.2	97.8
Not at all	1	2.2	2.2	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	



**4.4.2 Influenced by family**

As seen in Table 4.17, family contributed significantly in the final decision where to study if seen in combination of figures ranging from "Average" to "Very much". Only three students indicated a below average influence by family and six students did not answer the question (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 71, 98).

**Table 17 Influenced by family**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	6	13.3	13.3	13.3
Very much	19	42.2	42.2	55.6
Above average	12	26.7	26.7	82.2
Average	5	11.1	11.1	93.3
Below average	3	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.4.3 Influenced by friends

Friends contributed moderately in the choice of university even though 20% of respondents did not answer the question as illustrated in Table 4.18. A further nine students (20%) were significantly influenced by friends, while only eight students indicated that friends did not influence their decision to study at the Mafikeng Campus (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 71, 27).

**Table 18 Influenced by friends**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	9	20.0	20.0	20.0
Very much	9	20.0	20.0	40.0
Above average	8	17.8	17.8	57.8
Average	7	15.6	15.6	73.3
Below average	4	8.9	8.9	82.2
Not at all	8	17.8	17.8	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.4.4 Influenced by NWU staff

Table 4.19 displays a significant low influence in terms of staff contribution as a decision influence by respondents. 22,2% of students did not respond to this question while more than half of the responses indicated no influence at all (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 70, 33).

**Table 19 Influenced by NWU staff**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	10	22.2	22.2	22.2
Very much	2	4.4	4.4	26.7
Above average	3	6.7	6.7	33.3
Average	7	15.6	15.6	48.9
Not at all	23	51.1	51.1	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.4.5 Influenced by other elements

This again was an open-ended question for respondents to indicate influences not mentioned before. Once again, no indications were made to identify other influences by the four students who did respond, while 91,1 % did not answer the question as seen in Table 4.20 (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 73, 18).

**Table 20 Influenced by other elements**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	41	91.1	91.1	91.1
Very much	1	2.2	2.2	93.3
Not at all	3	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.5 External influence factors on decisions

These factors focus specifically on the respondents' decision-making criteria that contributed to their the choice of the NWU Mafikeng Campus by looking at various external scenarios such as marketing factors, geographical orientation, financial as well as academic factors in the attempt to answer the first research question, focussing on external factors.

#### 4.5.1 External contribution by prior knowledge of the University

As illustrated in Table 4.21 the overall response was that prior knowledge plays a large part in the decision-making process (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 71, 91).

**Table 21 External contribution by prior knowledge**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	5	11.1	11.1	11.1
Very much	21	46.7	46.7	57.8
Above average	7	15.6	15.6	73.3
Average	10	22.2	22.2	95.6
Below average	2	4.4	4.4	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

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#### 4.5.2 External contribution by recommendations by other institutions

Although 20 % did not respond, as illustrated in Table 4.22, the majority of responses were that recommendations did not affect the decision-making process. Only 17,8 % of responses reflected an above average contribution of other institutions (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 70, 33).

**Table 22 External contribution by recommendations**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	9	20.0	20.0	20.0
Above average	8	17.8	17.8	37.8
Average	3	6.7	6.7	44.4
Below average	6	13.3	13.3	57.8
Not at all	19	42.2	42.2	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.5.3 External contribution by location of Campus

In selecting the NWU Mafikeng Campus, the location of the Campus in relation to the respondents' hometown as illustrated in Table 4.23 contributed very much according to 48,9% of respondents (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 71, 62).

**Table 23 External contribution by location**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	4	8.9	8.9	8.9
Very much	22	48.9	48.9	57.8
Above average	3	6.7	6.7	64.4
Average	9	20.0	20.0	84.4
Below average	4	8.9	8.9	93.3
Not at all	3	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.5.4 External contribution by cost implications

Table 4.24 indicates that the majority of respondents do base the choice of university on cost implications. While 15,6% did not answer the question, the same percentage indicated that it was not a contributing factor in decision-making (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 71, 40).

**Table 24 External contribution by cost**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	7	15.6	15.6	15.6
Very much	17	37.8	37.8	53.3
Above average	3	6.7	6.7	60.0
Average	6	13.3	13.3	73.3
Below average	5	11.1	11.1	84.4
Not at all	7	15.6	15.6	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.5.5 External contribution by courses offered

From Table 4.25 it is clear that respondents' choice of university is largely influenced and based on the courses offered by the university (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 71, 82).

**Table 25 External contribution by courses**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	5	11.1	11.1	11.1
Very much	24	53.3	53.3	64.4
Above average	3	6.7	6.7	71.1
Average	8	17.8	17.8	88.9
Below average	2	4.4	4.4	93.3
Not at all	3	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.5.6 External Contribution by Criteria of 1<sup>st</sup> Choice University Already Full

Of the total respondents, 20% did not answer this question and the results tend to indicate that decisions are not based on the fact that the respondents' first choice of university indicated that the university was full or not available as illustrated in Table 4.26. The larger percentage of responses indicate that they did not enrol at NWU due to this factor, which leads to the conclusion that the NWU Mafikeng Campus was the first choice considered (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 70, 76).

**Table 26 External contribution by 1st choice full**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	9	20.0	20.0	20.0
Very much	6	13.3	13.3	33.3
Above average	5	11.1	11.1	44.4
Average	7	15.6	15.6	60.0
Below average	2	4.4	4.4	64.4
Not at all	16	35.6	35.6	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.5.7 External contribution by financial support available

Looking at available bursaries or other means of financial support available as illustrated in Table 4.27, the bulk of the responses indicate that this is not a deciding factor in choice of university. However, 17,8% of respondents did not answer the question which could have influenced the outcome of this (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 70, 71).

**Table 27 External contribution by financial support**

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	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	8	17.8	17.8	17.8
Very much	7	15.6	15.6	33.3
Above average	4	8.9	8.9	42.2
Average	8	17.8	17.8	60.0
Below average	2	4.4	4.4	64.4
Not at all	16	35.6	35.6	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.5.8 External contribution by available space at University

With 22,2 % of respondents not answering the question, together with fairly average responses to this question as in Table 4.28, it appears that in terms of available space only 24,4% of respondents allege that available space played a role in decision-making about the university (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 71, 51).

**Table 28 External contribution by available space**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	10	22.2	22.2	22.2
Very much	11	24.4	24.4	46.7
Above average	6	13.3	13.3	60.0
Average	9	20.0	20.0	80.0
Below average	4	8.9	8.9	88.9
Not at all	5	11.1	11.1	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.6 Importance of factors that influence enrolment

The general influence of the following factors that play a role in terms of importance to the respondents' choice are dealt with in this section. The question asked was to rate the importance of the following factors in choosing the NWU Mafikeng campus according to a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1-"Very important" to 5-"Not important". This section tries to answer the third research question and objective.

#### 4.6.1 Location

Of the total respondents, 53,3% indicated that location is very important in deciding to register at the NWU Mafikeng Campus as illustrated in Table 4.29. A fairly large percentage of respondents (17,8%) also indicated that location is important to them (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 71, 93).

**Table 29 Factors of location**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	4	8.9	8.9	8.9
Very important	24	53.3	53.3	62.2
Important	8	17.8	17.8	80.0
Neutral	6	13.3	13.3	93.3
Less important	1	2.2	2.2	95.6
Not important	2	4.4	4.4	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.6.2 Price or affordability

Price or affordability was seen as very important to the majority of respondents, whereas 20% indicated a neutral importance as seen in Table 4.30 (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = .71, .64).

**Table 30 Factors of affordability**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	3	6.7	6.7	6.7
Very important	23	51.1	51.1	57.8
Important	4	8.9	8.9	66.7
Neutral	9	20.0	20.0	86.7
Less important	3	6.7	6.7	93.3
Not important	3	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

### 4.6.3 Academic standard of University

With regards to the academic standard of the NWU Mafikeng campus as in Table 4.31, the largest percentage of respondents rated this as an important factor to be considered. Neutral and not answered questions contributed to the bulk of the remaining figures (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 71, 89).

**Table 31 Factors of academic standard**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid 0	7	15.6	15.6	15.6
Very important	16	35.6	35.6	51.1
Important	12	26.7	26.7	77.8
Neutral	7	15.6	15.6	93.3
Less important	2	4.4	4.4	97.8
Not important	1	2.2	2.2	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.6.4 Bursary availability

More than 50 % of the total respondents indicated that bursary availability is seen as an important factor in the choice of NWU Mafikeng Campus as illustrated in Table 4.32. Respondents who did not answer this question together with respondents who indicated no importance attached to it made up the second largest percentage for bursary availability (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 71, 44).

**Table 32 Factors of bursary availability**

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	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	6	13.3	13.3	13.3
Very important	14	31.1	31.1	44.4
Important	9	20.0	20.0	64.4
Neutral	8	17.8	17.8	82.2
Less important	2	4.4	4.4	86.7
Not important	6	13.3	13.3	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.6.5 Available courses

Of the total respondents, 51,1% of respondents indicated a very high importance with regards to courses available as illustrated in Table 4.33 (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 71, 84).

**Table 33 Factors of courses available**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	5	11.1	11.1	11.1
Very important	23	51.1	51.1	62.2
Important	6	13.3	13.3	75.6
Neutral	6	13.3	13.3	88.9
Less important	2	4.4	4.4	93.3
Not important	3	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.6.6 Friends and/or family at the University

In having friends or family at the NWU Mafikeng campus, the results as illustrated in Table 4.34 show a relative neutral influence (on both sides of the scale) in the choice of university (Acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 70, 80).

**Table 34 Factors of family or friends at NWU**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	5	11.1	11.1	11.1
Very important	4	8.9	8.9	20.0
Important	10	22.2	22.2	42.2
Neutral	11	24.4	24.4	66.7
Less important	9	20.0	20.0	86.7
Not important	6	13.3	13.3	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.6.7 Employment opportunities

The overall importance of obtaining decent employment opportunities as seen in Table 4.35 was mostly rated high in importance. (Acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 71, 29)

**Table 35 Factors of employment opportunities**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	6	13.3	13.3	13.3
Very important	8	17.8	17.8	31.1
Important	13	28.9	28.9	60.0
Neutral	9	20.0	20.0	80.0
Less important	5	11.1	11.1	91.1
Not important	4	8.9	8.9	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.6.8 Residence availability

Residence availability, seen in Table 4.36, was considered quite important if seen combined in the fields of "very important" and "important", 13,3% gave a neutral answer, while 15,6% rated this as not important, and the same percentage did not answer the question (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 71, 56).

**Table 36 Factors of residence availability**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	7	15.6	15.6	15.6
Very important	16	35.6	35.6	51.1
Important	8	17.8	17.8	68.9
Neutral	6	13.3	13.3	82.2
Less important	1	2.2	2.2	84.4
Not important	7	15.6	15.6	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.6.9 Extramural activities offered

The importance of extramural (including sports) activities was mostly neutral in importance although, 24, 4% rated some importance combined, while 17,8% did not answer the question as in Table 4.37 (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 71, 11).

**Table 37 Factors of extramural activities offered**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 0	8	17.8	17.8	17.8
Very important	6	13.3	13.3	31.1
Important	5	11.1	11.1	42.2
Neutral	16	35.6	35.6	77.8
Less important	5	11.1	11.1	88.9
Not important	5	11.1	11.1	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

## 4.7 Financial capacity

### 4.7.1 Family income as influence in choice of University

The question was asked to determine the role of family income as an influence on the choice of university, mainly seen in the light of closeness to home, payment of tuition fees, as well as other implications of financial ability. This question could be utilised to answer both research questions 1 and 3 while also addressing objectives 1 and 3.

According to Table 4.38, the relevance of family income did not contribute significantly to the indication of university choice as more than half of the respondents indicated that this was not a consideration in the choice of university (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 72, 02).

**Table 38 Choice due to family income**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid Yes	22	48.9	48.9	48.9
No	23	51.1	51.1	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.7.2 Payment of tuition and school fees

Where previous studies indicated a significant reliance on bursaries and financial aid as noted by Cabrera and La Nasa (2000), Table 4.39 shows a larger percentage of self- or family sponsored tuition payment as well as study loans being utilised. Only 8,9% of respondents indicated the utilisation of bursaries or related financial aid would be a consideration in the choice of university. In the light of research question 3 and objective 3, this finding could be a contributing element to section 4.7 (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 72, 00).

**Table 39 Tuition payment**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid Self (or family sponsored)	25	55.6	55.6	55.6
Study Loan	16	35.6	35.6	91.1
Bursary	4	8.9	8.9	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

## 4.8 Exploratory factors in the choice of university made

### 4.8.1 NWU as first choice of university

Table 4.40 gives an indication of the NWU Mafikeng Campus as being the first choice of respondents contacted. It is surprisingly noted that the majority of respondents confirmed that the campus was indeed the first choice of selection. This is also in line with the findings in 4.6.6 regarding the question on 1<sup>st</sup> choice of university being full at the time of enrolment. Contributing to research objective 3, this question attempts an overall perception of students' preference in choice of university (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 72, 11).

**Table 40 First choice is NWU MC**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid Yes	26	57.8	57.8	57.8
No	19	42.2	42.2	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.9 Consideration in change of Campus or University

Keeping in mind the previous question on NWU Mafikeng Campus being the first choice of tertiary study, this question related to the opportunity to change a university or campus in order to pursue other courses not available at the time of registration. Only 28,9 % of the students had considered changing campus, while 71,1% perceived the campus as adequate. Table 4.41 indicates a high level of satisfaction in the choice of the NWU Mafikeng Campus, while less than a third of responses indicate that a change of university or campus would be considered.

For control purposes this question challenges students' choice of university, after their decisions were made and reflecting back on the effectiveness of their choices, taking into consideration all the research questions and objectives (acceptable Cronbach's alpha = 71, 82).

**Table 41 Considered change of university**

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid Yes	13	28.9	28.9	28.9
No	32	71.1	71.1	100.0
Total	45	100.0	100.0	

#### 4.10 Qualitative findings

As the questionnaire mostly focussed on quantitative data and responses; very few qualitative responses were obtained. As indicated in par 4.3.8 and par 4.4.5, respondents did not indicate additional influences. However, in answering with “yes” in par 4.9, respondents had the option to indicate reasons for change in campus or university.

One respondent said he had considered changing the campus but her reason showed a contrast to a question answered as less important in relation to affordability when he wrote: *“I cannot afford my university tuition; another university would be affordable for me”*. Also regarding affordability in relation to change of university, one student commented: *“the university is too high in cost, in such a way that it frustrated the fact of being a university student”*; and another response stating: *“because I don’t have enough money to pay for tuition fee”*

Another student commented: *“I wanted to study engineering, but my parents refused to let me study at another university”*.

Another reason for changing university or campus is seen in this response for a student stating that *“registration fees are too high and the NWU has less accommodation for its students”*.

From the other responses received regarding the decision to change campus was influenced by various other aspects. Therefore, some respondents commented:

*“Unable to get hold of a bursary”; “unable to get hold of accommodation on school premises”; “I am too lonely around here”; “because the course I wanted to do is not offered”; and lastly: “I felt that this is not the university for me, it doesn’t challenge me as much as high school did and I heard Potch campus has the best Accounting faculty. People here are not responsive and the university is Setswana based which is a downfall. This is not what I expected in a campus in terms of structure and everything is always broken i.e. service delivery is beyond slow”*

Factors on tuition cost seem to make up the bulk of the responses although many of these are in contrast to the earlier responses to the question on affordability. Other factors such as accommodation and available programmes (together with influence from parents/ family) also seem to play a role.

#### **4.11 Summary**



Findings were to a greater extent in line with previous findings in literature. However, some contrasting results in aspects regarding the university choice as experienced at the NWU Mafikeng campus were reflected. The unique results obtained could thus be effectively used for the NWU Mafikeng Campus to plan and allocate resource allocation as well as proper strategies in terms of marketing and communications to ensure that the most appropriate prospective students are targeted to aid the proper influx of quality students to this unique campus. In Chapter 5 the discussion of results obtained and the implications thereof are considered.

## **CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This study set out to assess prospective students' decision-making criteria underlying their decision to enrol at the NWU Mafikeng Campus. In this chapter the conclusions from the analysis are presented, together with an interpretation of these results. The degree to which the objectives of this study were met is discussed in light of areas that support or differ from studies mentioned in literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Students throughout history, due to a variety of factors such as location, affordability, available accommodation and bursary options, make decisions in different ways and therefore each university campus would be unique due to various influential factors.

### **5.2 Discussions about the research problem**

The problem identified was a need for a better understanding of the decision-making influences of prospective students at the NWU Mafikeng Campus. Conclusions of the study are addressed in this section in accordance with the objectives identified. Findings are discussed under the following headings while reflecting on the research questions:

1. What are the internal and external factors impacting on a prospective student's consideration in the selection of a university?
2. How do information sources contribute to the selection of a university?
3. How is a prospective student's choice of university influenced?

and objectives:

1. Determine the internal and external factors impacting on a prospective student's selection of a university.
2. Determine the importance of information sources contributing to a student's selection of a university.
3. Determine how a prospective student's choice of university is influenced as mentioned in Chapter 1.

This discussion is therefore categorised under the following headings to reflect the structure of the questionnaire by the following headings.

### **5.2.1 Decisions related to media and other information sources**

Briggs (2006) suggests that prospective students are becoming well-informed, more mobile and are in a position to make more informed judgements about where to study. This research supports this notion and recommends to universities to acknowledge available and preferred sources of media. It can be deduced that the majority of students do make use of the online information available to assist in decision making as seen by the 68,9% of students who indicated that they did visit the NWU website before enrolling at the campus. This is in line with the findings of Simões and Soares (2010) as well as Johnston (2010) and Ivy (2008).

Besides the contribution of family and friends, teachers (giving career advice to students) were a relatively high influence factor as can be seen by the 40% of students indicating this tendency through findings conducted in this research.

This again confirms findings of Corwin and Tierney (2007), Roderick *et al.* (2008), and Muller (2009), highlighting the role of teachers as an influence.

It also appears that open days do play a major role in the choice of university, but it was also found that other types of media and information channels were not effective, such as radio, newspapers and magazines. One could only speculate that due to increased printing and advertising costs, universities try to make use of

cheaper alternative channels to reach prospective students. However, in the ever-increasing competition experienced at university level, it could be advantageous to engage prospective students through these channels and therefore gain a competitive advantage in the field, together with the more popular media platforms currently available to South African citizens.

### **5.2.2 Choice influenced from internal sources**

In making the final choice of university, 86,7% of students (Table 4.16) indicated that they made the choice themselves. The researcher believes that this is consistent with the study conducted for Rhodes University, where it was determined that 82% of the respondents from the study made the choice themselves and only 10% of the respondents were influenced by their parents (Pillay 2010).

Confirming the literature findings of Bodycott and Lai (2012) as well as Prado (2008) and Bohman (2010), the responses to the question about whether respondents were influenced by friends and family indicated that 62,2% (Table 4.13) of the respondents were liable to base their decision on this factor. This suggests that they have an affinity to or preference for people of their own background to associate with regarding tertiary level studies. This forms the basis that informed their choice of which university to enrol at. NWU staff had the least influence on the decision about which university to study with. This is the opposite of what Foskett (2009) found regarding an institution's own staff influence.

### **5.2.3 Choice influence from external factors**

The findings show that the availability of courses (48,9% of respondents) is the major factor in choice as also seen in research done by Ming (2010). Location (Table 4.23) as indicated by the study influenced students very much. According to the findings, the influence of choice was also based on prior knowledge about the campus. As found by Niu and Tienda (2008) location does constrain university choice, normally due to closeness to family homes.

In light of the geographical composition based on the reality of the province in the study, it could be deduced that these findings are in accord with previous literature such as Simões and Soares (2010), Heine (2008), Moogan and Baron (2003), as well as Soo and Elliot (2008).

Prior knowledge of the university was ranked as the third most influential factor for the Mafikeng Campus. Bohman (2010) as well as Bodycott and Lai (2012) found similar evidence to acknowledge this finding.

Cost considerations and implications (Table 4.24) were regarded by 37, 8% as a significant influence. Whereas Soo and Elliot (2008) allege that cost does not influence choice on university and Briggs and Wilson (2007) state that cost is ranked low as an influence, findings in this study rate cost at the fourth most important influence. On a scale of eight influences, cost then could then be seen as a quite relevant influence of choice. This would then rather support statements of Ebrahim (2009), indicating that young disadvantaged South African people struggle to obtain tertiary education due to a lack of resources. In the light of Ebrahim's statement, one would understand why costs would play a larger role in developing countries such as South Africa. What is, however, evident is that most students came to NWU Mafikeng based on course availability, location and because it was affordable as based on the findings of this study.

#### **5.2.4 Importance of influences**

The most significant factor regarding importance of influence was given as location (53,3%), followed by affordability and courses available (51,1% each) and thirdly accommodation and academic standards of the university (35,6% each). The importance of location remains a factor as stated by Foskett *et al.* (2006), especially when students are faced with economic and financial difficulty. This could then be understood as most of the students at Mafikeng campus do face these conditions.

Price, or affordability, together with courses available at the campus was also of great importance. Similar findings were seen in research from Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) as well as Ebrahim (2009).

The third factor was found to be the level of academic standard of the university, together with the availability of accommodation. Soutar and Turner (2002) also found academic reputation to be an important factor, while Shahid *et al*, (2012) together with Mudholkar (2012) commented in similar terms regarding the reputation of an institute as important. The rating on accommodation can be confirmed through findings on importance by Holdsworth and Nind (2005).

A noteworthy observation from the findings was the indication by 31,1% of respondents that bursary availability is a very important consideration in the choice of university. Findings by Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) support this response received.

Whereas Simpson and Tan (2009) as well as Verbik and Lasanowski (2007) found that employment opportunities were an important factor impacting on decisions, the findings from this research suggest that it is only a moderate consideration. Extramural activities were one of the lowest rated importance factors found in this study, whereas Sidin *et al*. (2003) and Urbanski (2000) found the contrary. In light of influence factors where family and friends played a prominent role in the decision-making process, the importance of having friends or family at university was not important according to the respondents.

### **5.2.5 Choice due to family income**

Family income displayed a slight difference in responses where the majority of students totalling 23 (51,1%) indicated that it did not play a role in decision-making; however, the remaining 22 students (48, 9%) did place emphasis on this factor. With this small margin in percentage, it is therefore open for discussion as no prominent differentiation was indicated and could not be gauged according to previous findings by Hunt (2008).



### **5.2.6 Tuition payment**

Taking into account the economic constraints in South Africa as well as the large population represented by previously disadvantaged communities, it is surprising to find that tuition payments are mainly self- or family sponsored (55,6%). A fairly large response was received in terms of study loan utility, while only 8,9% of respondents indicated that they use bursaries. Due to numerous bursaries available at the NWU, it seems to be in contrast with Cabrera and La Nasa (2000).

### **5.2.7 NWU as first choice**

It is indicated that 26 out of the 45 choices by the respondents were made in favour of NWU being the first choice of university. However, 19 respondents indicated that this was not their first choice of university. It could then contribute to the high fall-out and change of campus rate experienced at the Mafikeng Campus.

### **5.2.8 Change of university considered**

The majority of responses (71,1%) indicated that students were satisfied with the campus and did not consider a change in university or campus. This then leaves 28,9 % of students who indicated that they would change university or campus. The findings are then totally in agreement with the findings of Light and Strayer (2000) stating that roughly one-third of students transferred to other universities due to improper fits.

## **5.3 Research limitations**

The study was limited to a static view of respondents' perceptions of who and what influenced their decision to enrol at the NWU Mafikeng Campus. Factors and decision-making criteria were explored as to what impacted on the choice of a university to enrol at. Due to time constraints a longitudinal view of possible changing

perceptions over time was not possible. Indicators of age, gender, nationality and geographic location were present in the study; however, and these indicators were only for informative reasons. Although nationality indicators were present, no responses outside the South African borders were received and were thus omitted. Race was also omitted in this study.

The research was conducted with first-year students enrolled for the four-year degree programmes in the Commerce Faculty at the NWU Mafikeng Campus. Due to this small sample and the relatively small number of respondents (45 in total) in this study, it is suggested that more than one faculty, campus or even university should be targeted to determine differences pertaining to choice decisions and influences on a larger scale.

The study may have produced different results had the population been representative of all the faculties at the NWU Mafikeng campus. The fact that it was conducted in only one faculty, with one designation of programme type, led to a rather exclusive selection to be represented.

It is thus noted that the sample consisted of a small proportion of students from the NWU Mafikeng Campus. Although it remains representative of the particular university under this research, this picture will most probably look different if a larger population, including international students, were included in the study. This research therefore only identifies areas of concern, which future researchers may be able to correct, further explore and investigate and thereby more effectively attain relevant objectives as seen through their findings.

### **5.3.1 Questionnaire**

During each hand-out the researcher explained the purpose of the study and invited the respondents to ask questions if they had any concerns. This allowed respondents to get clarity on those questions which were unclear. The way the questionnaire was worded may actually have skewed the answers of the respondents.

A total of fifteen questions were asked in order to identify key influences of decisions. The questionnaire limited the demographic and geographical aspects. Biographical and other related information was not included.

### **5.3.2 Representation population**

In this study, the faculty representation had respondents from only the Commerce Faculty consisting only of the four-year degree programme students enrolled for 2015 at the NWU Mafikeng Campus. Although the study was open to all the above-mentioned students it emerged that only South African students responded to this investigation, thus international students were not represented.

The sample size of 406 is considered small compared to the approximate 2000 first-year students and a total of approximately 11 000 students currently enrolled at the Mafikeng Campus, thus it may not be representative of the student population at the campus as a whole.



### **5.4 Summary**

The aforementioned findings highlight the main factors that influenced students' choice of university; and more particularly the choice on the NWU Mafikeng Campus. Tables 4.7 to 4.41 display the findings in relation to the questionnaire. Ranking the results of this study in answering research question 2 as well as objective 2, it is indicated that students, in light of this research, are mostly influenced by information they obtain from:

1. family or friends
2. internet related sources
3. teachers
4. open days
5. radio
6. newspapers and magazines.

Internal influence factors (research question 1 and objective 1) are ranked as

1. Self
2. family
3. friends
4. NWU staff.

External influence factors in sequence of influence (research question 1 and objective 1) are indicated as

1. course availability
2. location
3. prior knowledge of the NWU
4. cost
5. available space
6. recommendations from other institutions
7. financial support
8. 1<sup>st</sup> choice of university was fully occupied.

The importance of influences (reflecting on the third research question and objective) was established in terms of students' view of impact as

1. location
2. course availability and affordability
3. academic standard and accommodation
4. bursary availability
5. employment opportunities
6. extramural activities
7. family or friends at NWU.

More than half of the respondents indicated that family income did not play a role in the choice of studying at NWU Mafikeng Campus; while tuition was self or family sponsored. Study loans account for 35,6% of respondents and less than 10% were bursary or financial aid holders.

Almost 60% of students indicated that the NWU Mafikeng Campus was their first choice in deciding to pursue tertiary education and two-thirds of students did not want to change to other institutions. This reflects a quite satisfied student population with regards to their choice of university.

The research also indicated what students actually value in selecting a university to enrol with. In particular, the courses offered, accommodation, and academic standard are of great importance.

## **5.5 Managerial recommendations**

The nature of this study focused on the decision-making influences of prospective students at the NWU Mafikeng Campus. The broad range of information sources related to media, together with the internal as well as external influence factors subjected to economical as well as political tendencies, all determined a regular revisiting of this research topic.

A further issue of note is the importance of influences and the effect that this has on a prospective student's decision-making in the choice of university. The results herewith represent a brief overview of the situation at the NWU Mafikeng Campus in the current tertiary education climate of South Africa which could change in the blink of an eye.

The research indicated that students value the courses offered, accommodation, and academic standard of a university. These must all be considered and improved by management to effectively attract quality students. Supplying what students require is the first step in applying marketing concepts to the university sector. By concentrating on these key factors that attract students, the NWU Mafikeng Campus could gain a competitive advantage in the sector of tertiary education.

Hence, a greater effort needs to be put in place regarding the availability of external influence factors, such as course or programme availability, accommodation as well as lower or more affordable fees. It is suggested that management ensures and also markets accordingly, with emphasis on the available programme offerings and if need be expanding programmes where gaps may occur.

The most challenging factor that is quite prominent through this research is the relative closeness to students' home towns. As universities cannot pick-up and move to more desired areas to satisfy students' needs in this regard, this remains a challenge that reflects not only on geographical positioning, but also reflects on prospective students' financial capabilities or the lack of it. As found in this study, most students who register at the Campus are close to home (North West Province vicinity), thus more intensified marketing could be done in this region.

This could also be related to other findings in this study regarding affordability, where it was found that the majority of students either pay tuition fees themselves or through family-sponsored sources. A closer proximity to home would incur lower costs and thus place a lesser burden on budgets available for tertiary studies.

What became obvious in the study is that greater effort could be exercised in terms of the type of media through which information is distributed, i.e. radio, NWU staff, as well as other information sources available to this unique population of students. It appears that marketing through more conventional media channels, such as magazines, newspapers and radio is in decline due to the popularity and availability of internet and social media. It is also highly suggested that key information sources other than media, such as family and friends, as well as teachers or schools be included in marketing strategies to ensure that sufficient and accurate information is conveyed through these sources to prospective students. This is said in light of the findings of this study where these sources contributed significantly to students' choices.

An interesting finding is the relatively strong emphasis of open-days or university visits as indicated by this study. Management could therefore take note of the importance of this “inexpensive” marketing effort (due to on-campus visits to promote the university); and improve the utilisation of time and resources to influence prospective students even more. Going hand-in-hand with this endeavour, a greater effort on the side of the NWU staff would also be recommended in order to influence prospective students positively in their choice of university. Personnel are after all the first direct line of contact for prospective students at a university.

The results of the study should be beneficial to NWU Mafikeng Campus if management could implement recommendations to improve available information and marketing strategies, including facilities and resources, such as programmes. This should therefore ensure a more focused approach towards attracting prospective students, leading to higher student enrolment numbers and a lower rate of cancellation while minimising campus or university transfers at a later stage.

As this research was meant for exploratory purposes, it is believed that a wealth of follow-up studies can and should be carried out in greater detail. In particular, more studies in this field need to be conducted before a distinct picture of the NWU Mafikeng Campus’s unique potential can emerge.

## **5.6 Recommendations for further research**

A more comprehensive study on the decision-making criteria used by prospective students is suggested. This could be established through a better understanding of the current media platforms used in conjunction with internet and messaging-related services. Keeping in mind that most prospective students nowadays own cell phones, a variety of communication channels such as Facebook and Twitter could be utilised to target required prospective students. From the findings on the low influence of printed media, an in-depth view of these factors’ lack of influence could also be considered.

A longitudinal study across the NWU Mafikeng Campus is needed to determine whether any further economic and political situations affect students' choices on university selection. Moreover, the current study omits the issue of race and nationality. It would be interesting to repeat a similar experiment with race-balanced populations as well as an in-depth view on the issues of financial and geographical orientations and limitations, not only on South African influences as demarcated, but also including international student influences. This would then constitute a whole new study with regards to decision-making influences of prospective students at the NWU Mafikeng campus.

In conclusion, it is suggested that a number of areas require further investigation and more detailed research. As a result of the NWU Mafikeng Campus' limited marketing and communication budget, it is imperative that the marketing strategy be investigated in order to refine and address issues identified in this study.

This will best promote the campus by making prospective students aware of the benefits of studying at this campus, using appropriate media platforms utilised by prospective students, while taking into account the strict deadlines to be adhered to within the year of application.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

Prospective students' decision-making remains a difficult process and they are exposed to different choices (Briggs & Wilson 2007). These days, prospective students are better informed and thus better able to make judgements about numerous options available to them and tend to be more critical and analytical when choosing their university (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003).

As confirmed key influencers, family and friends are suggested to be considered valuable and important regarding the decision-making process. It is vital these days that universities should acquire an understanding of the prospective student market as a whole, taking into consideration the various information sources and decisions that influence students' choice of university.

Therefore, universities should provide assistance to prospective students and other role players in making the best possible decision with regards to tertiary education studies (Briggs, 2006; Brown *et al.*, 2009).

Although this research found a lower influence on availability of financial aid limitations, more restraints due to the current economic environment will force universities to refine their initiatives and strategies to achieve the most effective distribution of these limited resource options available to prospective students in future.

The research indicates that the prior knowledge students had about the NWU and Mafikeng Campus was one of the three main reasons they chose the campus, thus marketing endeavours such as open-days should be utilised more to attract prospective students. The highest external influence was the available courses on campus, followed by the location of the campus and should therefore be crucial in marketing strategies. Once again, marketing to the right population should yield a more appropriate student population. Cost implications also received a high rating as influential factor.

By knowing which factors influence prospective students' university choice and who the main influences on these students are, NWU Mafikeng Campus could utilise well-designed, updated brochures as well as easy to navigate websites to provide on the spot information to prospective students.

As prospective students are influenced by family, friends, as well as other availability factors such as accommodation and closeness to their hometown, the NWU Mafikeng Campus can now start targeting students more prominently and supply the facilities and services identified with improved effort.

In conclusion, this study is a first attempt to explore the arena of the NWU Mafikeng Campus scene, particularly from the viewpoint of its primary customers, the students. It is hoped that follow-up or similar studies would provide more coverage related to the findings of this research.



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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A



### RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

My name is Stephan van Zyl from the North West University, Mafikeng Campus and I am conducting a study for MBA purposes. The title of the research project is "Understanding decision making criteria on students' choice of university: The case of the North West University (Mafikeng campus)". In order to collect representative data, I would like you to complete the following questionnaire.

The data provided will be treated confidentially and your cooperation is highly appreciated to make the NWU Mafikeng Campus even better. The information provided will remain anonymous and your identification is not recorded in this study. Note that your participation is voluntary. If there are items you do not feel comfortable answering, you may withdraw at any time. In this case indicate "WITHDRAW" on the first page and hand in as per instructions below.

Please be advised that the whole questionnaire must be completed to achieve accurate results. The submission date for this questionnaire is on 16 October 2015, no later than 12h00 to window 5 at the Admissions Office.

Remember, you have the chance to make this university better by completing this questionnaire. Please submit this questionnaire. We value your participation in this research.

Note: the abbreviation NWU MC means North West University – Mafikeng Campus

Contact me at 018 389 2804 for queries or information.

**Questions**

**1 Age group**

18 - 20	21 - 30	Older than 30
---------	---------	---------------

**2 Gender**

Male	Female
------	--------

**3 Nationality**

RSA	Non RSA
-----	---------

**4 Home town and Province/country**

**5 Programme currently registered at NWU MC**

**6 Did you visit the NWU website and/or NWU MC Facebook page before enrolling at this campus?**

Yes	No
-----	----

**7 Which medium (advertising/marketing/information channels) informed your decision to enrol with the NWU MC?**

... influenced me...	Very much	Above average	Average	Below average	Not at all
Newspapers					
Magazines					
Open days/university visits at schools					
Radio					
Internet or related social media					
Family and friends					
Teachers					
Other (please specify):					

8 Who influenced you to make the final choice about NWU MC?

... influenced me...	Very much	Above average	Average	Below average	Not at all
<i>Myself</i>					
<i>Family</i>					
<i>Friends</i>					
<i>NWU MC Staff</i>					
<i>Other (please specify):</i>					

9 Which external factors contributed in your selection of the NWU MC?

... contributed ...	Very much	Above average	Average	Below average	Not at all
<i>Prior knowledge of university/campus</i>					
<i>Recommended by other institutions, i.e. UNISA</i>					
<i>Location of the campus</i>					
<i>Cost implications (transport, tuition fees, etc)</i>					
<i>Courses offered</i>					
<i>1<sup>st</sup> choice of university/campus were full</i>					
<i>Available bursaries / financial support</i>					
<i>Space available</i>					

10 What is the influence of the following factors in enrolling with NWU MC?

... is to me...	Very important	Important	Neutral	Less important	Not important
<i>Location</i>					
<i>Price/Affordability</i>					
<i>Level of Academic Standard</i>					
<i>Bursary availability</i>					
<i>Courses available</i>					
<i>Family/friends at NWU MC</i>					
<i>Employment opportunities</i>					
<i>Residence availability</i>					
<i>Sport/extramural activities offered</i>					

11 Is family-income an influence on choice of enrolment to NWU MC?

Yes	No
-----	----

12 Payment for tuition

Self (or family sponsored)	Study Loan	Bursary
----------------------------	------------	---------

13 Was the NWU MC your first university of choice?

Yes	No
-----	----

14 Have you ever considered changing of campus or university?

Yes	No
-----	----

15 Reasons for the answer given in Q.14 - If answer was YES


*Thank you for your participation!*

## APPENDIX B

### Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic
Age group	45	1	2	1.36	.072	.484	.234
Gender	45	1	2	1.44	.075	.503	.253
Nationality	45	1	1	1.00	.000	.000	.000
NWU Website visited	45	0	6	1.31	.130	.874	.765
Information from newspapers	45	0	5	3.67	.277	1.859	3.455
Information from magazines	45	0	5	3.84	.277	1.858	3.453
Information from open days	45	0	5	2.16	.240	1.609	2.589
Information from radio	45	0	5	2.84	.279	1.870	3.498
Information from internet related	45	0	5	2.02	.226	1.515	2.295
Information from family or friends	45	0	4	1.38	.140	.936	.877
Information from teachers	45	0	5	1.93	.251	1.684	2.836
Information from other	45	0	5	.38	.189	1.267	1.604
Influenced by myself	45	1	5	1.22	.105	.704	.495
Influenced by Family	45	0	4	1.56	.161	1.078	1.162
Influenced by Friends	45	0	5	2.27	.263	1.763	3.109
Influenced by NWU Staff	45	0	5	3.20	.311	2.085	4.345
Influenced by other	45	0	5	.36	.188	1.264	1.598
External contribution by prior knowledge	45	0	4	1.62	.163	1.093	1.195
External contribution by recommendations	45	0	5	3.20	.292	1.961	3.845
External contribution by location	45	0	5	1.91	.213	1.427	2.037
External contribution by cost	45	0	5	2.13	.259	1.740	3.027
External contribution by courses	45	0	5	1.71	.205	1.375	1.892
External contribution by 1st choice full	45	0	5	2.78	.296	1.987	3.949
External contribution by financial support	45	0	5	2.82	.292	1.957	3.831

External contribution by available space	45	0	5	2.02	.247	1.658	2.749
Factors of location	45	0	5	1.60	.175	1.176	1.382
Factors of affordability	45	0	5	1.89	.204	1.369	1.874
Factors of academic standard	45	0	5	1.64	.177	1.190	1.416
Factors of bursary availability	45	0	5	2.09	.233	1.564	2.446
Factors of courses available	45	0	5	1.69	.201	1.345	1.810
Factors of family or friends at NWU	45	0	5	2.73	.226	1.514	2.291
Factors of employment opportunities	45	0	5	2.24	.218	1.464	2.143
Factors of residence availability	45	0	5	1.98	.243	1.631	2.659
Factors of extramural activities offered	45	0	5	2.42	.237	1.588	2.522
Choice due to family income	45	1	2	1.51	.075	.506	.256
Tuition payment	45	1	3	1.53	.098	.661	.436
First choice is NWU MC	45	1	2	1.42	.074	.499	.249
Considered change of university	45	1	2	1.71	.068	.458	.210
Valid N (listwise)	45						

## APPENDIX C

<b>Reliability Statistics</b>			
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items	
.931	.907	37	
<b>Item Statistics</b>			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Age group	1.36	.484	45
Gender	1.44	.503	45
NWU Website visited	1.24	.570	45
Information from newspapers	3.67	1.859	45
Information from magazines	3.84	1.858	45
Information from open days	2.16	1.609	45
Information from radio	2.84	1.870	45
Information from internet related	2.02	1.515	45
Information from family or friends	1.38	.936	45
Information from teachers	1.93	1.684	45
Information from other	.38	1.267	45
Influenced by myself	1.22	.704	45
Influenced by Family	1.56	1.078	45
Influenced by Friends	2.27	1.763	45
Influenced by NWU Staff	3.20	2.085	45
Influenced by other	.36	1.264	45
External contribution by prior knowledge	1.62	1.093	45
External contribution by recommendations	3.20	1.961	45

External contribution by location	1.91	1.427	45
External contribution by cost	2.13	1.740	45
External contribution by courses	1.71	1.375	45
External contribution by 1st choice full	2.78	1.987	45
External contribution by financial support	2.82	1.957	45
External contribution by available space	2.02	1.658	45
Factors of location	1.60	1.176	45
Factors of affordability	1.89	1.369	45
Factors of academic standard	1.64	1.190	45
Factors of bursary availability	2.09	1.564	45
Factors of courses available	1.69	1.345	45
Factors of family or friends at NWU	2.73	1.514	45
Factors of employment opportunities	2.24	1.464	45
Factors of residence availability	1.98	1.631	45
Factors of extramural activities offered	2.42	1.588	45
Choice due to family income	1.51	.506	45
Tuition payment	1.53	.661	45
First choice is NWU MC	1.42	.499	45
Considered change of university	1.71	.458	45

Item-Total Statistics					
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach 's Alpha if Item Deleted
Age group	72.18	800.059	-.245		.933
Gender	72.09	794.856	-.054		.933
NWU Website visited	72.29	788.256	.156		.932
Information from newspapers	69.87	723.891	.662		.928
Information from magazines	69.69	725.128	.649		.928
Information from open days	71.38	746.513	.506		.930
Information from radio	70.69	724.401	.652		.928
Information from internet related	71.51	744.801	.562		.929
Information from family or friends	72.16	765.543	.524		.930
Information from teachers	71.60	745.155	.496		.930
Information from other	73.16	783.725	.116		.933
Influenced by myself	72.31	778.537	.370		.931
Influenced by Family	71.98	753.749	.653		.929
Influenced by Friends	71.27	721.109	.732		.927
Influenced by NWU Staff	70.33	713.227	.683		.928
Influenced by other	73.18	779.331	.179		.933
External contribution by prior knowledge	71.91	760.219	.533		.930
External contribution by recommendations	70.33	718.091	.682		.928
External contribution by location	71.62	750.968	.519		.930

External contribution by cost	71.40	730.836	.635		.928
External contribution by courses	71.82	752.877	.514		.930
External contribution by 1st choice full	70.76	714.098	.711		.927
External contribution by financial support	70.71	707.165	.793		.926
External contribution by available space	71.51	731.256	.664		.928
Factors of location	71.93	761.882	.467		.930
Factors of affordability	71.64	753.643	.506		.930
Factors of academic standard	71.89	745.601	.716		.928
Factors of bursary availability	71.44	731.571	.704		.927
Factors of courses available	71.84	753.043	.524		.929
Factors of family or friends at NWU	70.80	744.482	.567		.929
Factors of employment opportunities	71.29	746.710	.559		.929
Factors of residence availability	71.56	734.071	.643		.928
Factors of extramural activities offered	71.11	735.419	.646		.928
Choice due to family income	72.02	798.613	-.185		.933
Tuition payment	72.00	796.182	-.082		.933
First choice is NWU MC	72.11	785.965	.263		.932
Considered change of university	71.82	808.422	-.578		.934

<b>Scale Statistics</b>					
Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items		
73.53	793.573	28.170	37		

## APPENDIX D



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY  
YUNIBESITHI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA  
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT

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### ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE OF PROJECT

Based on approval by the Human Resource Research Ethics Committee, Mafikeng Campus, the North-West University Institutional Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (NWU-IRERC) hereby approves your project as indicated below. This implies that the NWU-IRERC grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the project may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

<b>Project title:</b> Understanding decision making criteria on students' choice of university: The case of the North West University (Mafikeng Campus).																																														
<b>Project Leader:</b>	Prof J Meyer																																													
<b>Student:</b>	Si van Zyl																																													
<b>Ethics number:</b>	<table border="1"><tr><td>N</td><td>W</td><td>U</td><td>-</td><td>0</td><td>0</td><td>4</td><td>3</td><td>3</td><td>-</td><td>1</td><td>5</td><td>-</td><td>A</td><td>9</td></tr><tr><td colspan="3">Institution</td><td colspan="5">Project Number</td><td colspan="2">Year</td><td colspan="5">Status</td></tr><tr><td colspan="15">State: S = Submission, R = Re-Submission, P = Provisional Authorisation, A = Authorisation</td></tr></table>	N	W	U	-	0	0	4	3	3	-	1	5	-	A	9	Institution			Project Number					Year		Status					State: S = Submission, R = Re-Submission, P = Provisional Authorisation, A = Authorisation														
N	W	U	-	0	0	4	3	3	-	1	5	-	A	9																																
Institution			Project Number					Year		Status																																				
State: S = Submission, R = Re-Submission, P = Provisional Authorisation, A = Authorisation																																														
<b>Approval date:</b> 2015-10-20	<b>Expiry date:</b> 2018-10-20	<b>Category:</b>																																												

Special conditions of the approval (if any): None

#### General conditions:

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, please note the following:

- The project leader (principle investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the NWU-IRERC:
  - annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project,
  - without any delay in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the project.
- The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course of the project, the project leader must apply for approval of these changes at the NWU-IRERC. Would there be deviated from the project protocol without the necessary approval of such changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date, a new application must be made to the NWU-IRERC and new approval received before or on the expiry date.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility the NWU-IRERC retains the right to:
  - request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project;
  - withdraw or postpone approval if:
    - any unethical principles or practices of the project are revealed or suspected,
    - it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the NWU-IRERC or that information has been false or misrepresented,
    - the required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done timely and accurately,
    - new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.

The IRERC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your project. Please do not hesitate to contact the IRERC for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely

Linda du  
Plessis

Digitally signed by Linda du Plessis  
DN: cn=Linda du Plessis, o=NWU,  
ou=Vaal Triangle Campus,  
email=linda.duplessis@nwu.ac.za,  
c=ZA  
Date: 2015.11.20 09:44:27 +0200

Prof Linda du Plessis

Chair NWU Institutional Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (IRERC)

APPENDIX E



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY  
YUNIBESITHI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA  
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT  
MAFIKENG CAMPUS

Admissions

Private Bag X2046, Mmabatho  
South Africa, 2735

Tel: 018-389 2171

Fax: 018-389 2485

23 October 2014

To whom it may concern

**Permission to study and conduct research at NWU Mafikeng Campus**

Herewith I acknowledge the intention of S.I. van Zyl (10933468) to conduct research on university related matters at the NWU Mafikeng campus. I herewith grant permission to conduct research in this regard as it could be beneficial to the university.



Your sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Mouton'.

Dr. N. Mouton

APPENDIX F

*Declaration*

*This is to declare that I, Annette L Combrink, accredited  
language editor and translator of the South African  
Translators' Institute, have language-edited the dissertation  
by*

**Stephanus Ignatius van Zyl**

*With the title*

**UNDERSTANDING DECISION MAKING CRITERIA ON STUDENTS'  
CHOICE OF UNIVERSITY: THE CASE OF THE NORTH-WEST  
UNIVERSITY, MAFIKENG CAMPUS**



*Prof Annette L Combrink*

*Accredited translator and language editor*

*South African Translators' Institute*

*Membership No. 1000356*

*Date: 25 November 2015*