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Cover Page Footnote

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Understanding Chinese Students' College Choice to Increase Chinese Student Recruitment: A Focus on Music Majors

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Introduction and literature background

Recognizing that international education is a major growth industry in the United States (Yang, 2007), U.S. higher education institutions have been increasing their interest in actively recruiting Chinese students over the last decade, thus breaking Australia's hold on the Chinese market (Choudaha, Chang, & Kono, 2013; Wheeler, 2011). In the United States, Chinese students are 31% of the 886,052 international students and contribute \$8.04 billion to the U.S. economy (Institute of International Education, 2014). Progressively, institutions are recruiting from Chinese students due to the increased demand for overseas education from Chinese families and for the perception that Chinese students are self-funded (ICEF Monitor, 2013). Additionally, as more international Chinese students receive bachelor's degrees, institutions are interested in recruiting them for the graduate level (Li & Lu, 2015).

As more institutional types are attempting to recruit international students, maintaining a competitive edge in recruiting them can be difficult as the competition for these students becomes more aggressive (Cubillo, Sánchez, & Cerviño, 2006; Ross, Heaney, & Cooper, 2007). International recruitment research has focused on student preferences, such as institutional image, reputation, resources, location, and friendliness as high indicators of marketing to international students (Becker & Kolster, 2012; Lu & Schulmann, 2015; Mazzarol, 1998; Ross et al., 2007; Shenton, 2004). While research on student mobility has shown numerous factors that influence international students' choice to study abroad or the 'why' they study overseas, the primary focus has been on the decision to study abroad itself and the choice of country. For example, previous studies have demonstrated that the decision to study abroad is impacted by cost, career prospects, and recommendations from family, friends, and faculty, while the decision of which country to study in is influenced by safety, language, proximity to home, and reputation and recognition (Bodycott, 2009; Cubillo et al., 2006; Eder, Smith, & Pitts, 2010; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Mazzarol et al., 2001, Zwart, 2012).

Less is known about how international students make choices regarding which specific college to attend (Hemsley-Brown, & Oplatka, 2015). Additionally, it is not understood what drives Chinese students' institutional choice when the institution chosen is not highly ranked, does not hold the highest research Carnegie classification, or is not considered a top 50 U.S. host institution, such as a state comprehensive university. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative case study was

to explore how Chinese students chose a mid-size, rural, doctoral research university (DRU) in the Western United States that typically has served a regional student population and how these findings could influence recruitment practices at other universities.

Theoretical framework

Researchers interested in explaining macro level student flow patterns often use push-pull theory (e.g., Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), while those involved with institutional level influencers may rely on marketing theories, and researchers observing student behaviors and decision making often use college choice models (e.g., Chapman, 1981). However, we believe that international student choice is more complex than what is traditionally viewed in rational, one-directional terms, such as factors that push students out of their home countries and pull factors that entice students to specific host countries (Altbach, 2004; Chen, 2007; Eder et al., 2010; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011). Much of the research on college choice and consumer behavior in the international higher education marketplace has relied on quantitative data sets (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015) and focuses on either macro or micro influencers for more generalizable findings. These quantitative studies often leave out institutional level decision-making or cannot examine international student college choice as an individual (or family unit) decision. Therefore each of these frameworks alone fails to understand the complexity and nuances of student migration (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Lee, 2008). Yet college choice models are U.S.-centric and may not account for global contexts (Chapman, 1981; Lee, 2008). Consumer behavior theories from the marketing discipline mainly have focused on large industries such as banking with a need to better understand the complexities of higher education and “the relationship between institutional marketing practice and student selection of a particular institution” (Mazzarol, Soutar & Thein, 2001, p. 52). As such, this study used a combined theoretical understanding of all three areas: Chapman’s (1981) U.S. based model of college choice combined with the Australian focus on consumer behavior theories from marketing (Mazzarol, et al., 2001) and push-pull theory (Chen, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) to help frame and analyze data.

Study Significance

While this study was not designed to posit a new theoretical model for understanding international student college choice, it does expand the knowledge about how Chinese students make choices about lesser known U.S. institutions, which may be helpful for higher education administrators working to grow numbers at smaller, less ranked institutions. While literature on U.S. college choice is robust with over 50 years of work, the scholarship on how international students decide which institution to attend is largely unknown and lacks an explanatory theory (Kinzie, et al., 2004; Lee, 2008).

By using a qualitative design to explore a growing population at a rural research university, the findings offer alternative explanations about how Chinese

students make study abroad college choices. Additionally, a unique feature of this study was the collaboration between faculty and student affairs professionals to use research to advise or guide an institution's burgeoning international student recruitment efforts. This collaboration led to opportunities to share data with senior administrators and key international education staff to assist with international admissions, marketing, and recruitment efforts to support the institutional goals. These efforts may be useful for other institutions that fall below the top tiers who want to develop rationales and unique strategies to improve recruitment and marketing efforts.

This study compares undergraduates to graduate students and music majors to non-majors, as well as variation by gender, level, and field of study. Given the existing literature findings that Asian students, broadly, are more likely to select majors in engineering, medicine, business, or law (Dundes, Cho, & Kwak, 2009; Sue & Okazaki, 1990), this study contributes by exploring Chinese students in performing arts. While student choice models often include environmental and college characteristics, this study reminds scholars that college choice is far more nuanced and personal than generic models like Chapman's (1981) or even Vrontis, Thrassou, and Melanthiou's (2007) attempt at an integrated model for developed countries.

Collaborative Research Design

This study used an interpretive, qualitative methodology designed to elicit Chinese students' decision-making and choices (Creswell, 2007) for 20 students who enrolled in a degree-seeking program during the fall 2014 semester at one DRU. The purpose of the study was to better understand why a small population of Chinese students selected this university and how practitioners could use the data to increase and improve future recruitment and enrollment. This study developed out of a need to evaluate and improve recruiting efforts within the international admissions office because the institution had recently established a new international recruitment plan, yet the international student numbers had remained relatively low yet stable for the past decade. When the study developed, the institution did not have any centralized or formal methods for Chinese student recruitment but relied solely on program or college level connections.

The guiding research questions for this study were:

- (1) What factors influenced Chinese students to choose a rural, regionally focused research university to pursue undergraduate and graduate degrees?
- (2) How can these findings help guide international recruitment and marketing practices?

Collaboration between faculty and student affairs practitioners was built into the design to ensure the research findings were used to inform practice. Scholarship should mean more than only research for knowledge production, and student affairs should involve research-driven practice where research is undertaken to "improve effectiveness of practices" (Kupo, 2014, p. 90). Research-driven practice is needed in today's higher education and student affairs climate of data driven decision-

making and accountability. As such, the research team consisted of one higher education faculty member, a student affairs assessment director, and a doctoral student who is a research assistant for international admissions and is from China. Additionally, two other international admissions professionals met with the research team throughout the process, co-presented a poster session at an institutional assessment conference, and used the findings to support departmental decisions as detailed in the implications and conclusions.

Site and Sources

The University of Northern Colorado is a public Carnegie classified DRU founded in a rural area in the Rocky Mountain region during the late 1800s. In the fall of 2014, the institution's final enrollment was 12,050 with 78.6% at the undergraduate level and 21.4% at the graduate level. Undergraduate students choose from over 100 majors and emphasis areas with approximately one quarter in the field of education; graduate students select from over 100 certificates, masters, specialist, and doctoral degrees. Even though the institution is not highly ranked, as a former teacher's college it is well known for the quality of its undergraduate and graduate programs in education, business, health sciences, and music. Performing arts is one of the most popular fields for the Chinese participants at this institution with 65.0% of the participants in this study pursuing a degree in music. The school of music has been designated a Program of Excellence, the highest honor offered to a state institution of higher education. The school of music provides a comprehensive range of programs and degrees for aspiring musicians including doctoral, masters, and undergraduate degrees in performance, history, business, and education of music.

The research team used key informants through known student contacts, campus services, and snowball sampling from initial participants. Our aim was to interview the majority of Chinese students to allow for the interpretation of international undergraduate and graduate student choice with various regions of origin and majors that have chosen to study at one institution. While the institution enrolled 370 international students in fall 2014, only 22 of them were Chinese students and 20 of them participated in this study. The significance of studying one of the smaller international populations is that the institution aims to significantly increase international students with a focus on recruiting Chinese students.

First, students completed a demographic questionnaire (See Appendix A) with the demographic overview presented in Table 1. Next, we focused on semi-structured interviews as the main method of data collection and engaged participants in one sixty-minute semi-structured interview. All interviews included an informed consent process, were audio recorded, and later transcribed by the researchers. Interview questions (See Appendix B) included topics on students' decision-making process at the national and institutional level versus staying in China for their degree. More evaluation type questions included how and with whom they communicated prior to arriving and recommendations they had for the institution. All interviews were conducted in English with two members of the

research team including the Chinese-speaking member for any translation or context support. All three researchers coded transcripts from interviewees into NVivo10 using the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Table 1
Student demographics

	Major			
	Music		Non-Music	
	n	%	n	%
Level				
Undergraduate	2	10.0	2	10.0
Graduate	11	55.0	5	25.0
Gender				
Male	5	25.0	4	20.0
Female	8	40.0	3	15.0
Funding				
Solely self-funded	4	20.0	2	10.0
Financial support	9	45.0	5	25.0
Applied to other school				
Yes	9	45.0	3	15.0
No	4	20.0	4	20.0
Admitted to other colleges besides UNC				
Yes	6	30.0	3	15.0
No	7	35.0	4	20.0

Trustworthiness

We employed a variety of intentional strategies to increase trustworthiness in congruence with literature pertaining to increased rigor in qualitative research methodology (e.g., Krefting, 1991; Merriam, 1998; Shenton, 2004). To improve trustworthiness, the research team consisted of multiple investigators from three different disciplines as well as different cultural and national backgrounds with various educational and professional experiences. Furthermore, using data collected from different types of students (i.e., undergraduate and graduate) across multiple programs enhanced the consistency of the data (Krefting, 1991). In addition, we intentionally selected theoretical frameworks, literature support, and methodology to align with the proposed research questions, thus contributing to increased trustworthiness throughout the design and implementation processes. Further, the incorporation of ongoing research journals, audit trails, and peer examination increased trustworthiness.

Limitations

Because the majority of the Chinese students at this institution were in the performing arts, this meant a small sample of non-music majors. Also, the music

program had a Chinese-speaking faculty member, which contributed positively to the success of the recruiting efforts of that department. Chinese students were able to speak with the music faculty in their native language during the application process. However, other departments and colleges, specifically in education and business, also have Chinese faculty members and they did not demonstrate the same success in recruiting degree-seeking Chinese students at the time of the study. Therefore, we do not assume that the success of performing arts Chinese recruitment is due to one Chinese-born faculty member, but it is acknowledged that the specific faculty member in music has had a positive impact on Chinese students as demonstrated in the student quotes. While this is a quantitatively small sample size, focused on only one institution and therefore cannot be generalized, we believe it does offer implications for other institutions similar in size or focus who are looking to increase Chinese student numbers.

Themes and Discussion

The data analysis showed that there were more nuanced variations between music majors and non-music majors than when comparing undergraduates to graduate students or men to women; therefore, we focused the findings and discussion around this main comparison. However, for all students choosing this institution, it was important that they had a direct connection to someone who shared their Chinese origin. To make sense of the themes, we wove literature and discussion together with selected participant quotes so as to balance student voice within the broader scholarly context.

Music Majors' Desire to Study a Field in Its Context. While non-music majors considered other countries for increased job opportunities and to improve English, music majors focused on the United States due to a desire or need to study a type of music in its context, for example, jazz in the United States versus in China where they would study Chinese traditional music. As a sophomore music major stated,

One of the most important things is still back to the culture differences. Because piano is not Chinese culture, is not part of Chinese culture so I had to learn something from the better place, the more originated place. So I choose here [the United States] (13, M, U, music).¹

At the graduate level, a student shared this perspective when he said, "Cause this [the United States] is the place for jazz. Like, you are not gonna learn Peking opera in France" (8, M, G, music). However, the rationalization of context was not a purely logical explanation as one female doctoral student explained, "but in America it's more pure, more details, more things that can touch your heart on music. So this is the aspects that I choose to come to America to further study music" (12, F, G, music).

¹ The "reference" listed after each quote refers to the participant number, gender (M, F), level (U, G), and major.

Part of the cultural context for music students was their belief that U.S. higher education institutions were known for having better music resources, technology, and research capabilities than other countries. For example, one doctoral student shared how “a lot research in music done in English, the other big part is in German. And really little in China” (17, F, G, music).

Choosing to study music in its original context can be seen as a variation on Mazzarol and Soutar’s (2002) finding that Chinese students were most influenced by knowledge that an overseas degree was better than any local options and that Chinese students hoped to increase their understanding of Western culture. In their study, they found that Chinese students ranked course availability at home as a less influential factor; however, given the importance of Western music’s context, this study’s findings contradict their more generalized ones.

The Importance of Relationships and Direct Connections. Current literature and best practices on international student recruitment support the use of social media and websites to provide information to prospective students (Alexa, Alexa, & Stoica, 2012; Belanger, Bali, & Longden, 2014; Gomes & Murphy, 2003; Klassen, 2002). However, this study found that direct connections triumphed over technological information and other forms of college driven communication, especially for the music students. According to Chapman’s (1981) model of college choice, a significant influencer is a college’s efforts at communication through campus visits, recruiters, and written information. Chapman’s model may have limited application to international students as they are less likely to visit campuses and mid-range U.S. institutions are not likely to have funding for hiring Chinese-based agents or for sending over institutional recruiters. While Chinese-based recruiters, or agents, are a growing field in China (Hagedorn & Zhang, 2011), only four of the participants (two being music students) used a study abroad agency to help them select institutions and apply. Institutional choice may rely upon personal or direct connections that are not always controlled or driven by the institution itself. For example, music majors relied on or were more persuaded to choose the institution when they had a personal connection with a faculty member or master’s class (a performance or audition in China) but non-music majors were more likely to choose it if they had a friend or alum connection.

Connections to Faculty for Music Majors. Both undergraduate and graduate level music majors all had some form of direct connection or communication with a faculty member for the college of music. While a couple of these students also discussed knowing an alum of the university, the connection to a music faculty member was more prevalent. One undergraduate student said, “Because there is a good teacher. I know him before I came here. And I wanted to study with him” (18, F, U, music). Other music students also discussed specific faculty members whom they had contacted prior to accepting admissions. One student pointed out that since the music program had a Chinese faculty, this eased his inquiry and transition into the program.

The role of master’s classes is specific to music or performing arts fields, which unlike a regular classroom is set up to allow the master, or faculty, to perform

and then take students one at a time and work with them or the student performs and the master or faculty offers advice. Five of the participants specifically discussed the importance of the master's classes that had taken place in China and the resulting direct faculty connection. As one participant explained,

[Program music faculty member] went to China and he gave my high school a few master classes. So I met him. We talked about study abroad. He also recommended to me to come to University of Northern Colorado or just choose the United States, I can recommend you some great conservatories. So you can make your own decision. (13, M, U, music)

In addition to master's classes, music faculty and students performed publicly or at invited concerts in China where some of the students attended or met them. This was the way a few of the Chinese undergraduate and graduate students met a U.S. faculty member and other music students from this institution. As one shared,

In 2012, the jazz big band of University of Northern Colorado went to China and had a show in my university. That was the way that I discovered University of Northern Colorado. (18, F, U, music)

Non-Music Majors Relationships to Chinese Alum. For one business undergraduate student, personal connections were important to counter the lack of high rankings of the institution. The student was told by his friend, "searching by Internet it is not the way to find it. They said, the Internet will show up [this institution] is not really good university" (7, M, U, business). Additionally, this was the only participant to discuss the role that his parents played in selecting an institution, which is counter to much of the other literature on Chinese culture and family (Lee & Morrish, 2012). This student placed more importance on his friend's advice because the Chinese friend was living and working in the United States already.

Reputation and Ranking Mattered for Music Majors. Specifically, numerical ranking and program reputation mattered more to music majors, which aligns with its being one of the few programs at this institution that has a high national/international ranking. Nine of the music participants discussed this importance. One graduate student explained,

[This] music program is quite strong actually. Between other states or other universities, we have top five [music sub-genre] program and for the piano, we still have the top fifty so that is good for me actually. (1, M, G, music)

For the music students, other factors influenced their perceptions about program reputation, such as student awards and the number of student bands available. Related to the number of bands is the number of different types of programs within one college, which also increased opportunities and exposure. One student shared, "I got to work with other musicians like opera singers. We have different opportunities to perform, we have different studios, people can learn from each other" (17, F, G, music). In the end, the current music students believed they were in a quality program and were having a good experience and therefore were more likely to recommend the institution.

The Chinese students in Mazzarol & Soutar's (2002) study ranked the reputation of the institution as more influential than parents' or agents' recommendations. This mirrors the recent report by World Education Services (Lu & Schulmann, 2015) that confirmed that 47% of Chinese master's students view school reputation as most important followed by program ranking, because these are both connected to improving career prospects.

Studies have cited that East Asian students are more likely to select majors and careers that will be socially and financially lucrative for their families in order to achieve greater prestige and security (Dundes et al., 2009; Song & Glick, 2004; Sue & Okazaki, 1990). At first glance, performing arts or music careers may not seem to offer social or financial security, but the students' selection of a top program within music does confer some level of prestige. Prestige could be assumed when admissions to a highly ranked program was combined with financial support from the U.S. institution in the form of scholarships or graduate assistantships. In this study, 45% of the music student participants received some type of institutional financial support either as scholarships, tuition waivers, or graduate assistantships. As Bodycott (2009) found with a study on Chinese mainland parents, "The requests from parents for scholarships to help fund study abroad were made for some on the basis of genuine financial need, but also because it raised the social status of the child and family" (p. 366).

Preference of Lower Numbers of Chinese Students for Non-Music Majors. Undergraduates and female graduate students were more interested in attending an institution without high Chinese student population numbers – possibly connected to desire to improve English. The perception was that lower numbers of Chinese students would offer more interaction with U.S. students. At least six (30%) of the participants talked about the importance of the institution not having a large Chinese population.

One undergraduate student expressed the desire to be forced into using her English:

And another good thing to study here is that we do not have too many Chinese. I do not have any chance to speak Chinese on campus. So I have to speak English I have to go out if I want to make friends I want to have company. I have to speak English. So when I look back it's really helpful. It's good for me. (19, F, U, interdisciplinary)

This finding contradicts larger quantitative research, such as Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) study, where one of the most influential factors for college choice at a national level was that Chinese students wanted an established population of other Chinese students already on campus.

Implications and Recommendations

Higher education institutions' "most important characteristics are those which place a university in a position of high esteem, high regard or prestige, rather than those relating to specific facilities or physical characteristic" (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015, p. 264). Essentially, this quote presents the argument that the most

important information potential students seek relates to “reputation, courses, and campus” (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015, p. 264). As such, this study offers some considerations for higher education administrators who want to increase Chinese student recruiting efforts, yet may not be at an institution that is well-known in the area of international student recruitment. Given that the music majors in this study selected a highly ranked program within an institution that has an overall lower ranking suggests institutional ranking can be overlooked if an institution promotes some of its top achieving academic programs or majors. However, administrators may be able to redirect Chinese students to other indicators of quality instead of just rankings, such as quality of experience or quality faculty.

These students were also focused on quality faculty and meaningful interactions they had with institutional Chinese faculty either in the United States or in China, which suggests the importance of funding faculty for overseas recruiting and performance trips. Faculty members will need administrative support to understand the boundaries of the memorandum of understanding (MOU), be provided details about the admission process if it is centralized outside of the academic program, and, possibly most importantly, must have a desire to recruit students when on these trips in addition to sharing discipline expertise. For example, when asked what the institution could do to promote itself among Chinese students, one music doctoral student suggested,

Share program information and teachers' background. I think that's really important for music area. The teachers sometimes are more important than schools. If the school is not that big but they have good teachers, students will still go (17, F, G, music).

Communication with administrative offices was not influential for the music students in this study, but the Chinese faculty connection remained important. This may be due to the fact that the music program requires applicants to audition and meet the program standards before admission. Communication with faculty was high for music majors and graduate students, which could also be the result of Chinese music faculty traveling to China for master's classes, the music faculty member's ability to speak Chinese to prospective students, as well as the nature of graduate education where students connect more with faculty. In this study, students reported low communication with international admissions or the graduate school across the board. Communication with the international office was higher for non-music majors (57%) and low for music majors. Institutions can develop programs to intentionally use their Chinese faculty members' home country networks for setting up long term pipelines between higher education institutions or secondary schools in China and their U.S. institutional employer. In addition, the international office can make their website and application process more user-friendly for Chinese prospective students by providing a dedicated, translated webpage and connecting to program pages for ease of access.

The participants also suggested that U.S. institutions, such as the one in this case study, could improve their reputation in China by developing more

collaborations between United States and Chinese faculty and programs. For example, specific to performing arts fields, one undergraduate suggested that the institution “can go to China more often and do more performances, and also bring some introduction booklet. Not just doing performance, but [the institution] can also introduce itself to Chinese students” (18, F, U, music). Essentially, institutions could send faculty and students to both perform and recruit. While this is unique to performing arts, perhaps there are extensions for other disciplines where faculty, students, and even alumni travel for conferences or workshops but are encouraged or rewarded to also recruit and work on developing relationships with Chinese faculty and staff. As one participant suggested,

You can do some collaborations with Chinese universities to let them know. First, they have to know there is [this university], then they could come. It just basically makes [this institution] a little bit more well-known with Chinese students. Then they have more interests, some of them will come (10, M, G, music).

Even though most of the participants in this study made personal connections to the campus that encouraged them to apply, they also saw a benefit in providing more information on the university website that was targeted to Chinese students about the reputation and types of courses offered on campus. For example, a music student offered specific ideas for attracting more Chinese students by presenting more Chinese student content on the website:

[The institution] needs to put more Chinese students’ performance video or international students’ activities video. I mean video not photo, because video is more persuasive (12, F, G, music).

For the undergraduate and non-music participants in this study, the meaningful and influential college characteristics were the composition of international student demographics, specifically desiring fewer Chinese students, but they wanted more services and support in Chinese than graduate students did. Some students wanted a Chinese version of the website rather than just a button for Google translate. Two participants believed this would make the application process quicker and easier but also make them feel more comfortable with the institution. This request may also aid the student’s parents who might lack the English language ability of their child. Students also wished there had been Chinese speakers in admissions and in the international education support office. At first, this appears to contradict the desire for an institution with fewer Chinese students, but the desire for a small Chinese population was related to wanting increased opportunities to interact with U.S. students once on campus. Whereas the desire for Chinese support staff was to ease their admissions process and transition to campus before arriving. As one education doctoral student shared,

The students may have high score on TOEFL but just because they trained and so they know how to take the test. But it does not necessary mean they have the ability to communicate in English very efficiently. So if they can talk to somebody who can speak Chinese and you have Chinese information or information in Chinese that will be helpful for them. At least it will save

them a lot of time. Because I can scan in Chinese, but not English (2, F, G, education).

Ultimately, higher education institutions must be aware of cultural variations in how students select a U.S. institution for their degree.

Research to Practice Updates

One of the goals of this study was to conduct research that could guide practice around international admissions, marketing, and recruitment to support new institutional goals. The research revealed the unique aspects of this institution that can be used in marketing materials, such as small Chinese population to offer an integrated American campus college experience. Using an institution's niche and promoting high ranked programs may be a helpful counter to the absence of top tier ranking. By highlighting the uniqueness, it also presents an honest assessment and portrayal of the university that over time should build trust between Chinese partner institutions and families.

Additionally, the research findings reinforce the importance of direct connections between Chinese families and institutions and Chinese speaking representative from the U.S. institution. Since the beginning of this research study, the institution has hired a Chinese-speaking Coordinator for Southeast Asian Educational Partnerships and Support Services to centrally develop relationships with Chinese universities and coordinate recruitment efforts while work continues within various colleges and programs around the university. This position was created to serve as the primary point of contact, liaison, and manager for the university's educational partnerships with institutions in China and other Southeast Asian countries.

In addition, the international admissions office revised marketing and improved the admissions process for Chinese students. For example, the international admissions office is undergoing a website redesign to provide a separate international site with simplified text to ensure translation programs are more accurate and easier to use. Staff modified the international applications at both the undergraduate and graduate levels to reduce confusion and made them easier to complete without support from the U.S. based international admissions staff. Yet when prospective students do need to communicate, the admissions staff now uses a WeChat account to communicate more easily with Chinese students. Finally, marketing materials and business cards are now in Chinese and are provided to faculty and staff who travel to China on institutional business. Ultimately, increasing and improving Chinese student recruitment to a rural, research university will likely take the continued top-down efforts and resources that administration is putting forth combined with the program level faculty face-to-face connections with prospective students.

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Appendix A Demographic Questions

City in China you live in? _____

Did your family come with you to the United States? ____ yes, who _____
 ____no

How many and what other schools did you apply to? _____

How many were you admitted to? _____

Did you attend other universities abroad before UNC? ____yes ____no

How do you fund/ pay for your education?

- ____ Scholarships
- ____ Assistantships
- ____ Self
- ____ Family
- ____ Other, please describe

On a scale from 1 to 10 (with 1 being extremely unhappy and 10 being extremely happy, how happy are you that you chose UNC? _____

Please explain _____

What do you want to do after you receive a degree from UNC? _____

What is your family income?

- ____ Less than ¥ 50K ____ ¥ 50K-100K ____ ¥ 100K-500K
- ____ ¥ 500K-1 Million ____ Over ¥ 1 Million

Appendix B

Interview Questions

This study is conducted to obtain an understanding of the factors that influence international students' decision for higher education abroad.

Opening question

1. Please tell us a little bit about yourself.

Decision Making Process (Study Abroad)

2. What factors influenced your decision to study abroad?
 - a. *[Probing Question]* What are the benefits of studying abroad compared to a Chinese education?

Decision Making Process (USA)

3. What countries did you consider for studying abroad?
 - a. *[Probing Question]* Why did you choose the United States [over the other countries]?
 - b. *[Probing Question]* What were the most important factors for you in selecting the United States?
 - c. *[Probing Question]* What was the influence of your family/friends in your decision to come to the United States? Other family living or studying in the USA? In CO?
 - d. *[Probing Question]* What are the advantages of studying in the United States?
 - e. *[Probing Question]* What are the disadvantages of studying in the United States?

Institutional Questions (UNC)

4. How did you discover UNC?
 - a. *[Probing Question]* Did you know anyone before moving here?
 - b. *[Probing Question]* Did you know of anybody who went to UNC?
 - c. *[Probing Question]* Did you go to a study abroad agency or use a recruiter?
5. What other universities did you consider?
6. Was UNC your first choice?
 - a. *[Probing Question]* If yes, why? What were UNC's competitive advantages as a study destination?
 - b. *[Probing Question]* If not, which university was your first choice, and why? Why did you not go there?
7. What were the most important factors for you in selecting UNC? If it would be a person who would that be? (City University is located in, cost of attendance and living, university ranking, safety, etc.)
 - a. Did UNC being small or rural influence your decision-making process?

Institutional Question (Program)

8. How did you choose your current program?

Experiences in the Classroom

9. In your current program, please explain how you interact with faculty and students. (Ask for examples)
 - a. What challenges have you experienced while interacting with faculty?
 - b. What challenges have you experienced while interacting with other students?

Suggestions to the University

10. What information sources played a role in your decision to select a university?
 - a. *[Probing Question]* Did you use any social media when looking at schools?
 - i. *[Probing Question]* If yes, what social media do you use for looking at schools?
 - ii. *[Probing Question]* If no, what social media do you use at a regular basis? To communicate with friends, etc.?
 - b. *[Probing Question]* What social media sites do you utilize on a regular basis?

Communication

11. Did you communicate with UNC before you applied?
 - a. *[Probing Question]* Describe your experiences with the communication with UNC.
 - b. *[Probing Question]* Whom did you communicate with? (CIE, Graduate School, Faculty?)
 - c. *[Probing Question]* Did you contact faculty before arriving?
 - i. *[Probing Question]* What were your interactions like with faculty?
 - ii. *[Probing Question]* What did you talk about?
 - d. *[Probing Question]* Do you have any suggestions to improve communication?
12. *What types of information do you think are important to be available on UNC's website for prospective students?*
13. *Would you recommend or promote UNC to your friends, family, or anyone? Why or why not?*
14. *What suggestions do you have for attracting more Chinese students to come to UNC to study?*
15. *Is there anything else that we have not talked about that would help us understand this topic?*