

Factors Influencing Students' Application And Enrolment Decisions In Higher Education: A Perception-Based Empirical Study With Reference To Uttar Pradesh, India

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Abstract:

This study examines the complex variables influencing students' admission decisions to tertiary institutions. In a more competitive and diversified academic environment, it is important to identify the determinants of students' choices for institutions that want to attract appropriate candidates and for policymakers who want to promote, access and equity. The study uses a [state methodology, i.e., mixed-methods approach, quantitative survey, qualitative interviews] in order to analyze the relative impact of academic factor, financial factors, career related factors, place and campus environment and personal & social factors on the application and enrollment decisions of the students. Data is gathered from undergraduate students, of Uttar Pradesh. The results are anticipated to gain insight into the intricate dynamics of personal aspirations, socio-economic conditions, and institutional properties underpinning student decisions in higher education and feeding back into informing institutional strategies and policy interventions for informed and equitable access to tertiary education.

Keywords: Student Enrolment Choice, Influencing Factors, Institutional strategies for enrolment

I.0 Introduction:

The decision regarding higher education institution is a critical choice for students, determining their academic, professional, and personal development. With an increasingly complicated and competitive environment for education, it is essential to know what drives these decisions. Potential students have to navigate dozens of alternatives, balancing factors such as reputations in academics, curricula, costs, career opportunities, campus life, and location. This choice-making is also impacted by a network of actors, parents, peers, and counselors who provide advice and influence opinion. Examining student choice dynamics leading to admission to higher education is essential for institutions that wish to select the best candidates, for policymakers wanting equal access, and for students as they set off on their third-level journey.

I.1 Factors responsible for students' application and enrollment decisions in Higher education

When considering higher education, students weigh various factors to make informed

decisions about their academic and professional futures. These factors can be broadly categorized as follows:

Academic Factors:

- **Programmes and Majors:** Availability and quality of certain courses and degree programs related to the interest and career goals of the student are most important. This involves thinking about the curriculum, specializations, research, and reputation of the program.
- **Faculty Expertise and Teaching Quality:** The qualifications, experience, and reputation of the teaching staff significantly influence the learning experience. Students often look for professors who are experts in their fields and effective communicators.
- **Academic Reputation and Rankings:** The general position and reputation of the institution within individual subjects or overall can affect the worth of the degree and subsequent career opportunities. Rankings, although not the only factor, may also have a bearing.
- **Accreditation and Certification:** Making sure that the institution and its courses are accredited by appropriate bodies is vital for the degree's validity and acceptance.
- **Learning Environment and Resources:** Character-driven factors such as class size, student-faculty ratio, library facilities, laboratories, access to technology, and other academic support programs greatly influence the quality of education.
- **Research Opportunities:** For instance, for students who wish to continue their research or advanced studies, access to research centers, funding opportunities, and faculty mentorship is a major factor.
- **Study Abroad and Exchange Programmes:** International exposure is a desirable aspect for students looking to have a wider knowledge-based experience.

Financial Factors:

- **Tuition Fees and Costs:** The cost of tuition fees, living costs, and other related expenses is a concern for the majority of students and their families.
- **Financial Aid and Scholarships:** Access to scholarships, grants, bursaries, and student loans can have a significant impact on the accessibility of higher education.
- **Return on Investment (ROI):** Students are becoming more interested in the future salary and employability aspects of a given degree and institution compared to the price of education.

Career-Related Factors:

- **Job Prospects and Placement Rates:** The institution's history of placing graduates in employment related to their course of study is a key consideration. Placement services, career advice, and industry contacts are relevant.
- **Internship and Co-op Opportunities:** Work experience through internships or cooperative education programs can be beneficial in improving employability.
- **Alumni Network:** An active and dynamic alumni base can offer useful contacts for career prospects and mentorship.
- **Career Services:** Availability of career counseling, resume preparation workshops, job fairs, and other career services is a key consideration.

Location and Campus Environment:

- **Location:** Geographic location of the institution, if in a city, suburban, or rural setting, may affect lifestyle, cost of living, and availability of opportunities. Living close to home might also be a consideration.

- **Campus Culture and Student Life:**Overall environment, social events, clubs, organizations, and student support services shape the student experience and personal development.
- **Campus Facilities and Amenities:**Quality of residence halls, food service, recreational facilities, and other services may have an impact on students' comfort and well-being.
- **Safety and Security:**Having a secure and safe campus is a critical issue for families and students.
- **Diversity and Inclusion:**An inclusive and diverse campus community that accords respect and welcome to students from diverse backgrounds is more highly prized.

Personal and Social Factors:

- **Personal Interests and Values:**Students frequently look for institutions where their own values and culture are reflected.
- **Recommendations and Influence:**Parent, family, friend, teacher, and school counselor advice can also make a big difference in the process.
- **Campus Visit and Impression:**Having actually visited the campus and breathed in its environment may also make a difference to how a student thinks about it and picks it.
- **Fit and Comfort:**Lastly, students frequently end up with an institution where they believe they will belong, succeed, and have a good overall experience.

I.Ii Objectives:

The distinct objectives of the research areas follow:

1. To examine the relationship and impact of different determinants on students' application to and enrollment into higher education programs.
2. To recommend the institutional policies and strategies to attract the student's application towards higher education.

Ii.0 Literature Review:

Students' decision-making towards admission to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is an intricate web of competing factors, as noted in the available literature. This review integrates key findings and themes from previous research to present an integrated insight into the influences affecting students' decisions.

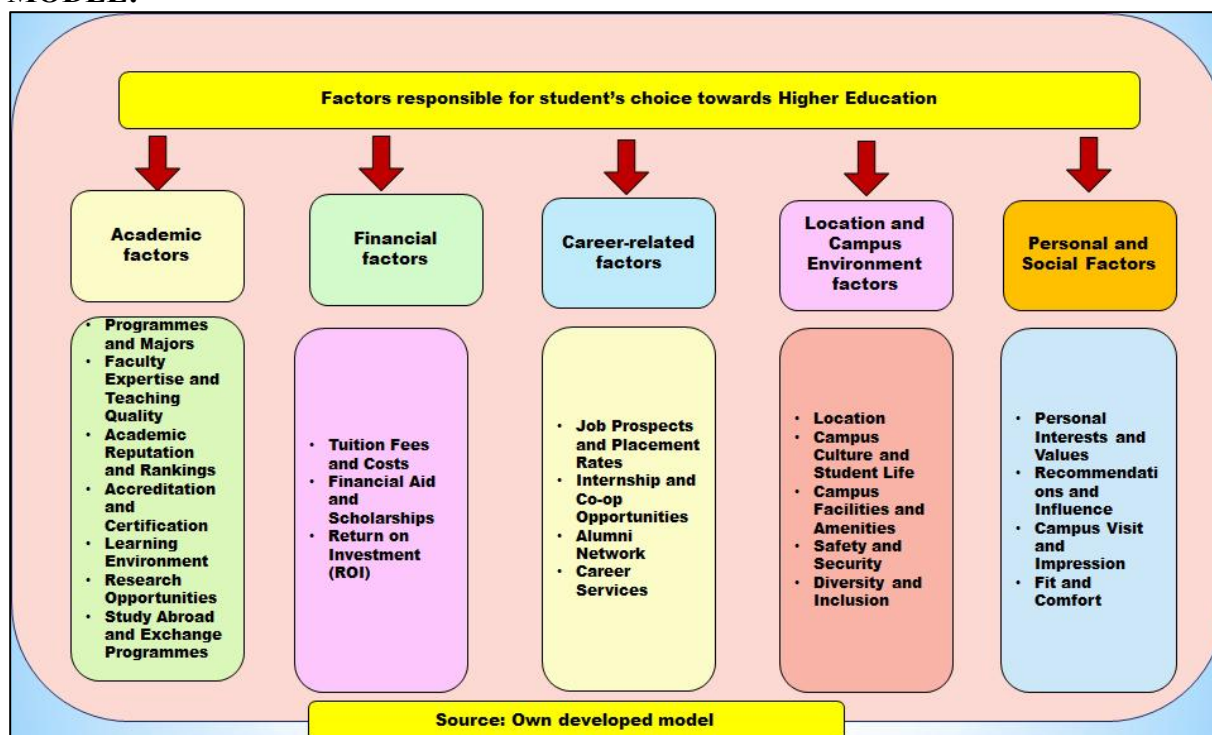
Several studies have found a broad range of factors students look at while selecting a university or college. These can be generally grouped as follows:

The reputation and academic standing of an institution are repeatedly referred to as major drivers (Rajput &Chouhan, 2021; Soutar& Turner, 2002). Faculty quality, research activity, and program format are also factors (Bersola et al., 2014). Availability of particular programs and courses that suit the interest and career goals of students is a key factor (Hiltz, 1997; Soutar& Turner, 2002). Flexibility in program options and the possibility of interdisciplinary studies are also considered (uWaterloo, n.d.). Students increasingly prioritize institutions that offer strong career support services, internships, and demonstrate positive graduate employment outcomes (Soutar& Turner, 2002; College Matchpoint, 2018). Past placement records and alumni feedback also play a role (Rajput &Chouhan, 2021). Tuition, living costs, and total cost of attendance are significant issues for potential students (India Today, 2022; Letawsky et al., 2003). The presence of scholarships, grants, and other types of financial aid has a significant influence on students' decisions, especially for those from lower-income families (Kim, 2004; Sánchez, 2019). The nature and volume of assistance may affect both the institution and the field of study (Stater, 2011). Geographic location may be a major

factor, with most students wanting to study in institutions near them or in urban centers (Franklin, 2013; India Today, 2022). The expense of relocation and staying away from home may act as a hindrance (Montgomery, 2002). The overall environment, infrastructure, security arrangements, and social life on campus are important factors in students' choices (India Today, 2022; Letawsky et al., 2003). A diverse and inclusive campus culture is progressively important (College Matchpoint, 2018). Equipped libraries, learning spaces, ICT facilities, and other infrastructure all add to the attractiveness of an institution. (Rajput & Chouhan, 2021). Parents play a prominent role in influencing the higher education decisions of their children, depending on their expectations, level of education, and economic status (India Today, 2022). Parents may give counsel, financial assistance, and influence students' mindsets (Babson College, n.d.). Friends' and current students' recommendations and views can also contribute to making decisions (Rajput & Chouhan, 2021; Aithor, 2024). Recommendations from secondary school teachers and counselors can also contribute to steering students into appropriate choices (Por, 2024). The decision-making process for a higher institution is normally termed as multi-phased and intricate (Hossler et al., 1999; Jackson, 1982). They find information from many sources, such as university websites, campus tours, contact with current students and alumni, and recommendations from family and counselors (Briggs & Wilson, 2007; uWaterloo, n.d.). They weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each institution against the factors they consider important and make their selection (Hanson & Litten, 1982). Student application and enrollment decisions are based on their assessment. This option seeks to optimize gain and reduce risk (Aydin, 2015). Current trends show more focus on career results, affordability, and campus life in students' decision-making processes (College Matchpoint, 2018). The impact of technology and the internet for information collection and virtual tours has also increased (Babson College, n.d.). In addition, the effect of financial aid on college enrollment differs by racial and socio-economic groups, calling for subsidized financial aid to enhance equity (Kim, 2004).

The literature unequivocally shows that the decisions of students towards admission into higher education are determined by an intricate combination of academic, financial, institutional, and social drivers. It is important for HEIs to come up with effective recruitment strategies and policymakers to design a more accessible and inclusive system of higher education by understanding these dynamics. Future studies should further investigate how the factors interact and change in accordance with shifting societal and economic contexts, with the particular case of Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India.

II.I RESEARCH MODEL:



Iii.0 Research Methodology And Design

Research design is data collection and analysis in a manner which is intended to render relevance, to research purpose and accomplish economy of process. This study employs research design that is exploratory, causal, and descriptive to an extent. It is exploratory because it gathers initial information in order to expose true nature of the problem and suggest possible hypothesis or new ideas. There is some cause and effect relationship, which has been sought to be formulated and it is descriptive because it decides a certain magnitude. It is descriptive because the major aim of this type of research is to describe the state of situation, as it exists currently so that the hypothesis of research can be examined. It is diagnostic because it probes deeply into the causes of event that matter to us for suggesting new ideas.

Iii.I Sample Design And Data Collection

The current study works on a representative sample of 500 students of Uttar Pradesh. The research works through survey method with the help of self-designed structured non-disguised questionnaires. It includes some questions on 5 point Likert Type Scale on which respondent (students) who were seeking their admission in higher education. Close-ended questionnaires have been used to understand clearly about respondent's perception. Questionnaire was carried out under the guidance of structured personal interview in order to get responden's perspective towards the study.

The present study concerns students seeking admissions to higher education. Sample of 500 approached out of which 446 responded. The structured questionnaire was filled by the students. Secondary data sources were utilized and it includes record files, brochures, dissertations, project reports, research papers, books, handbooks, government reports, newspapers, websites and other published and unpublished material of institutions.

iii.Ii Hypothesis:

μ0-1: There is no significant impact of academic factors on students' application and enrollment decisions .

μ1-1: There is significant impact of academic factors on students' application and enrollment decisions.

μ0-2: There is no significant impact of financial factors on students' application and enrollment decisions.

μ1-2: There is significant impact of financial factors on students' application and enrollment decisions.

μ0-3: There is no significant impact of career related factors on students' application and enrollment decisions.

μ1-3: There is significant impact of career related factors on students' application and enrollment decisions.

μ0-4: There is no significant impact of location and campus environment on students' application and enrollment decisions.

μ1-4: There is significant impact of location and campus environment on students' application and enrollment decisions.

μ0-5: There is no significant impact of personal and social factors on students' application and enrollment decisions.

μ1-5: There is significant impact of personal and social factors on students' application and enrollment decisions.

Iv.0 Data Analysis And Interpretation:

Test of Reliability

Table 1: Test of Reliability of Research Instrument

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.750	27

IV.I DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 2:Analysis of gender levels by frequency

Gender					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	262	58.7	58.7	58.7
	Female	184	41.3	41.3	100.0
	Total	446	100.0	100.0	

Above table shows that overall number of sample size is 446 of which 262 are male respondents and 184 are female respondents. The most participants are male respondents.

Family income of the Respondents

Table 3:Analysis of family income by frequency

Family Income

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 to 3 Lakh	181	40.6	40.6	40.6
	Above 3 to 5 Lakh	192	43.0	43.0	83.6
	Above 5 Lakh	73	16.4	16.4	100.0
	Total	446	100.0	100.0	

Above table shows total sample size is 446 of which 181 respondents are in family income group between 1 to 3 lakh and 192 respondents are between family income group between 3 to 5 lakh and 73 respondents are family income of above 5 lakh.

One sample statistics

It is a statistical method used to determine whether a sample of observations could have been generated by a process with a specific mean.

Table 4: One-Sample statistics

One-Sample Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
AF	446	3.6957	.59256	.02806
FF	446	3.822123	.6768871	.0320515
CRF	446	3.6766	.69312	.03282
LCEF	446	3.790583	.6039578	.0285982
PSF	446	3.7685	.65926	.03122
SE	446	3.5247	.69283	.03281

The tables also indicate that the mean scores of academic factor is 3.69, mean scores of financial factor is 3.82, mean scores of career related factor is 3.67, mean scores of location and campus environment is 3.79, mean scores of personal and social factor is 3.76 and mean scores of students' application and enrollment decisions is 3.52. The standard deviation is between 0.59256 to .69312.

Correlation Analysis

Table 5: Degree of the strength of Relationship between constructs of students' application and enrollment decisions

Correlations						
	AF	FF	CRF	LCEF	PSF	SE
AF	1					
FF	.493	1				
CRF	.036	.048	1			
LCEF	.024	.077	.358	1		
PSF	.090	.257	.243	.600	1	
SE	.235	.187	.343	.395	.226	1

Above table illustrates relative degree of strength of relationship constructs of students' application and enrollment choices. Relative values of constructs/variables indicate that how much they are related with others variable. The current study of correlation illustrates that constructs of students' application and enrollment choices is positively related with academic

factors (0.235), financial factors (0.187), career oriented factor (0.343), location and campus environment (0.395), and personal and social factors (.226).

Table 6:ANOVA for students' application and enrollment decisions (SE) as dependent variable

Variables Entered/Removed ^a			
Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	PSF, AF, CRF, FF, LCEF ^b	.	Enter
a. Dependent Variable: SE (students' application and enrollment decisions)			
b. All requested variables entered.			

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.713 ^a	.663	.650	.39806
a. Predictors: (Constant), PSF, AF, CRF, FF, LCEF				

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	56.229	5	11.246	31.442	.000 ^b
	Residual	157.375	440	.358		
	Total	213.604	445			
a. Dependent Variable: SE (students' application and enrollment decisions)						
b. Predictors: (Constant), PSF, AF, CRF, FF, LCEF						

As shown in above table, the value of r is 0.713. It shows the basic correlation between constructs of students' application and enrollment decisions.

The "r²" symbolizes variability in the result. The r² value is 0.663. This means that variable used in the current research can explain 66.3% of the variability in the dependent variable i.e. students' application and enrollment decisions and 33.7% of the variability in students' application and enrollment decisions cannot be explained by these variables.

Adjusted "r²" is the generalization of model in the current study. Here, r² and adjusted r² differ by 1.3% (0.663 – 0.650 = 0.013). This is 1.3% variance of outcome if model had to be from population rather than sample.

Table 7: Beta values and significance level for students' application and enrollment decisions as dependent variable

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.277	.279		.991	.002
	AF	.246	.055	.211	4.463	.000
	FF	.066	.050	.064	1.316	.004
	CRF	.243	.044	.243	5.530	.001
	LCEF	.393	.061	.342	6.401	.002

	PSF	.078	.056	.075	1.405	.001
a. Dependent Variable: SE (students' application and enrollment decisions)						

In above table indicates positive b-values which means the positive relationships between the variables.

The Regression Equation derived from regression analysis is as:

Students' application and enrollment decisions = .277+ 0.211 (Academic factor) + 0.064(Financial factor)+ 0.243 (Career related factor) + 0.342 (Location and campus environment) + 0.075 (Personal and social factor)

Iv.Ii Inferential Statistics

Test Of Hypothesis

There searcher considered the following hypothesis.

μ_0-1 : There is no significant impact of academic factors on students' application and enrollment decisions .

μ_1-1 : There is significant impact of academic factors on students' application and enrollment decisions.

Table 8:Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
SE			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1.406	19	422	.119

ANOVA					
SE					
	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	26.845	23	1.167	2.637	.000
Within Groups	186.759	422	.443		
Total	213.604	445			

In ANOVA test, researcher considered academic factors as independent and students' application and enrollment decisions as dependent variable.

In above table, we can see the significance value is less than the value 0.05. Therefore researcher rejected Null hypothesis and researcher found that there is significant impact of academic factors on students' application and enrollment decisions.

μ_0-2 : There is no significant impact of financial factors on students' application and enrollment decisions.

μ_1-2 : There is significant impact of financial factors on students' application and enrollment decisions.

Table 9: Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
SE			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.

.655	9	434	.749
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ANOVA					
SE					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	16.705	11	1.519	3.347	.001
Within Groups	196.898	434	.454		
Total	213.604	445			

In ANOVA test, researcher considered financial factors as independent and students' application and enrollment decisions as dependent variable.

In above table, we can see the significance value is less than the value 0.05. Therefore researcher rejected Null hypothesis and researcher found that there is significant impact of financial factors on students' application and enrollment decisions.

$\mu 0$ -3: There is no significant impact of career related factors on students' application and enrollment decisions.

$\mu 1$ -3: There is significant impact of career related factors on students' application and enrollment decisions.

Table 10: Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
SE			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1.360	14	431	.169

ANOVA					
SE					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	33.611	14	2.401	5.749	.002
Within Groups	179.993	431	.418		
Total	213.604	445			

In ANOVA test, researcher considered career related factors as independent and students' application and enrollment decisions as dependent variable.

In above table, we can see the significance value is less than the value 0.05. Therefore researcher rejected Null hypothesis and researcher found that there is significant impact of career related factors on students' application and enrollment decisions.

$\mu 0$ -4: There is no significant impact of location and campus environment on students' application and enrollment decisions.

$\mu 1$ -4: There is significant impact of location and campus environment on students' application and enrollment decisions.

Table 11: Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
SE			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
.955	13	430	.496

ANOVA					
SE					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	45.998	15	3.067	7.867	.001
Within Groups	167.606	430	.390		
Total	213.604	445			

In ANOVA test, researcher considered location and campus environment as independent and students' application and enrollment decisions as dependent variable.

In above table, we can see the significance value is less than the value 0.05. Therefore researcher rejected Null hypothesis and researcher found that there is significant impact of location and campus environment on students' application and enrollment decisions.

μ0-5: There is no significant impact of personal and social factors on students' application and enrollment decisions.

μ1-5: There is significant impact of personal and social factors on students' application and enrollment decisions.

Table 12: Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
SE			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1.449	13	431	.134

ANOVA					
SE					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	26.583	14	1.899	4.376	.001
Within Groups	187.021	431	.434		
Total	213.604	445			

In ANOVA

0.05. Therefore researcher rejected Null hypothesis and researcher found that there is significant impact of personal and social factors on students' application and enrollment decisions.

V.0 Finding And Conclusion

In correlation analysis, relative values of constructs/variables reveal to what extent they are related with others variable. The current correlation study in this research reveals that students' application and enrollment decisions constructs are positively correlated with academic reasons (0.235), financial reasons (0.187), career related factor (0.343), location and campus environment (0.395), and personal and social reasons (.226). in regression analysis, value of $r = 0.713$. This figure depicts the crude correlation between constructs of student application and enrollment choices. The " r^2 " is the variation in the outcome. The r^2 value is 0.663. This value suggests that variable included in the current study can explain 66.3% of the variation in the dependent variable i.e. students' application and enrollment decisions and only 33.7% of the variation in students' application and enrollment decisions

cannot be predicted by these variables. Adjusted "r²" is the measure of generalization of the model included in the current study. Here, difference between r² and adjusted r² is 1.3% (0.663 – 0.650= 0.013). This represents 1.3% variance in the outcome had model been required to be drawn from population rather than sample.

In hypothesis testing, researcher had hypothesized in the primitive frame work of study. The findings revealed that all the five original hypotheses have been rejected providing the acceptance of alternate hypothesis. The researcher also checked this result of hypothesis through carrying out discussions with respondent and supervisor and obtained same responses.

In light of second objective of the study, institution must follow different strategies to invite greater student's applications and enrolments towards higher education. To invite students' applications towards higher education, institutions can follow different strategies, while interacting with the respondent it has come to know that besides different factors covered in the study viz. academic variables, financial variables, career-related variables, location and campus life, personal and social variables, other variables were mentioned by respondents such as digital marketing, effective institutional policies, and outreach activities. A summary of proposed variables is as below.

Digital marketing can be used to target prospective students via social media, websites, and online advertising. Further, providing guided campus tours can highlight facilities and learning environments, enabling students to experience the institution in person.

Institutions can also initiate policy measures like flexible admission, scholarship programs, and student exchange programs. All these measures can make the institution more viable for students. Additionally, career development services, such as internship and job placement assistance, can also be a huge attraction for students.

Outreach programs, for example, partnerships with schools and outreach into the communities, can assist institutions in reaching potential students. Also, providing online courses and career counseling services can reach more people. Institutions can promote their programs and create relationships by engaging with local communities and schools.

Strong branding and marketing are important in recruiting students. Institutions can build a strong brand image and post success stories of their alumni and students. Social media use and the use of testimonials can also be used to market the institution and its programs. By emphasizing its distinct strengths and opportunities, an institution can differentiate itself from others and recruit more students.

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