Executive Summary

A study of admitted students was undertaken to meet the following objectives:

- To increase campus understanding of the place UC Davis holds in the undergraduate education market.
- To maximize campus strengths through development of consistent messages and focused marketing approaches.
- To maximize campus recruitment outcomes.

Findings are based on responses from freshmen admitted to UC Davis for Fall Quarter, 1998. Separate mailed questionnaires were sent to 1,672 admits who subsequently enrolled at UC Davis (72% response rate) and 2,075 admit who chose to attend another institution (45% response rate).

Findings

Respondents most often ranked the following characteristics as very important to their choice of college: the availability of majors of interest to them; graduates get jobs in their chosen fields; quality of their intended major; graduates get into good graduate and professional schools; a comfortable friendly campus community; and campus is safe for all students. These rankings are remarkably stable when disaggregated by enrolling/non-enrolling status, gender, ethnic/racial groups, and colleges/divisions.

Most admitted students were able to rank UC Davis on the availability of majors and the friendliness and safeness of the campus. They also give UC Davis high mean ratings on these characteristics.

Although admits gave UC Davis high ratings on the other characteristics that they ranked very important to their college choice decision, disturbingly-large proportions indicated that they were unable to rate the campus on these characteristics. Thirty percent of respondents were unable to rank the quality of their intended major; over forty percent were unable to rank whether Davis graduates get into graduate and professional schools, and fifty percent could not rank the ability of graduates to get jobs in their fields (or the availability of internships and practical career experiences).

The primary competitors to UC Davis are other University of California campuses: UC Berkeley, UCLA, UC San Diego, UC Santa Barbara and UC Irvine, in that order. Almost all UC Davis admits that go to a California State University campus enroll at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, which is a significant competitor for the College of Engineering and the College of Agriculture & Environmental Sciences.

When asked to identify the most widely held images of UC Davis, admitted students most often named rural, comfortable, friendly, intellectual, large, challenging, and a back-up school, in that order.

Compared to our major competitors, UC Davis is perceived as less intellectual, challenging, prestigious, academically pressured, and selective than all chief competitors except UC Santa Barbara.

UC Davis is perceived as more personal, comfortable, friendly and supportive than UC Berkeley and UCLA. However, it is not a clear leader on these characteristics when compared to UC San Diego, UC Santa Barbara, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo or UC Irvine.

Conclusions

Recruitment messages in the future should stress the academic excellence of UC Davis and the educational and employment successes of graduates, rather than emphasizing attributes of lesser importance to potential students (e.g., surroundings, “college town”) or attributes about which they are already knowledgeable (e.g., reputation).

Admits want information specific to their intended majors, rather than generalized messages about the university as a whole. The campus needs to “narrowcast” messages specific to the interests of admitted students rather than “broadcast” generalized messages about the campus as a whole.